

EMMA CHAVEZ  
Member, PALCON  
Sariaya, Quezon

Who says beauty and brawn don't mix? Not true for this petite lass from Sariaya, Quezon. Gemma works at the Provincial Assessors' Office in Lucena City. At the same time, she is an associate member of PALCON dairy cooperative. That was in April 1998.

Gemma joined the cooperative because she was living in the community with dairy animals, so she thought, why not? During spare time on weekends, she really spent time observing the dairy animals in their barangay. She really thought a million times over if she wanted to go full time.

#### Decision Time

After five long years, she made a decision and resigned from being a government employee. Since she will start a dairy business, she pulled out her savings to buy the things she will be needing in the process. These included cleaning utensils, hoes and arrows for tilling the soil and the farm where she intends to plant forage for her dairy animals, milking chutes, loafing area, feeding and water troughs.

By July 1, 2003, she started learning the ropes on hand milking at Jun and Ellen Carriaga's farm nearby, in preparation for the upcoming calving of her crossbred Brahman Holstein cow. Her cow was really wild and one time she was milking it, she was kicked and her three fingers were pressed in the milking chute. This did not deter nor dampen her determination. She continued milking the animal. Most of the time, the milking pail gets kicked and the milk spills over. In spite of all these mishap, Gemma persisted, patiently and ultimately winning over this wily cow.

#### Adjusting to Time

As a novice dairy farmer, she had to adjust to the time. That means waking up earlier than her previous routine. She wakes up around 4 am. To prepare her milking paraphernalia like: towel, zonrox (disinfectant) hot water, etc. She also takes a bath before milking. To be able to get the 7 liters a day milk production, she has to start milking the cow from 5 am and then after milking, she herself delivers the milk to the PALCON collection center using her mountain bike. By 6 am, she needs to go back to her place to let the cow and the calf in the loafing area. Simultaneously, she does the cutting of forage and other grasses for her cows' needs. This will be needed later when she does the 5 pm. milking as a way to restrain the cows while milking.

#### More Stocks coming

On August 2004, she bought another pregnant heifer and this gave a better production at 12 liters per day. This time, Gemma is earning Php 150/day. She figures the income is still not sufficient for their daily needs, she being the bread winner in the family. So she continued her day time job in Lucena City from Monday to Friday 9 am up to 3 p.m. as she needs to be back in the farm by 5 pm for the afternoon milking.

#### Going the Extra Mile

To augment her daily take home pay, she engaged in buy and sell business by bringing in imported blouses, pants, glassware, gift items and most of all hand towels, (an essential item for wiping the udders and as back cover of farmers doing early and afternoon milking) farmers which she thought would be a hit with farmers as everyone is milking in their cooperative.

Once a month, she goes to Liliw, another town famous for shoe craft industry, Check for new designs and arrivals. These are addition to her other goods for sale at home. She really tries to go the extra mile to earn a little bit more just so to earn extra money for their daily needs and also to sustain other expenses for her animals. That is how tenacity worked for Gemma's favor. Her family is her driving force to go the extra mile.

Fortunately for Gemma, her animals kept multiplying, even though most are male calves. She fattens them and resell these to buy a pregnant heifer. To her, this would be the surest way to having more dairy animals producing more milk. And her two dams simultaneously gave birth and gave a 30 liters production/ day. Now she has more than doubled her earning from Php 150 to Php 420/day. Indeed a very big boost to sustain his youngest brother to school. The ultimate reward was when his brother graduated with a degree of Bachelor of Science in Agriculture major in Animal Science last 2005. It was also responsible for sending her nieces and nephews to school.

#### New Acquisitions

With money pouring in, Gemma was able to purchase a new Honda wave Motorcycle to replace her mountain bike, as her milk for delivery is getting higher and higher and the bike could not take the heavy load anymore. She was also able to buy a residential lot near PALCON cooperative in case I get married.

With stocks growing, she was able to give 6 dairy animals his youngest brother as start up. From these dairy animals, two dams produces 18 liters a day. With it, Gemma feels, if in case she decides to get married, her brother could now provide and take care of her mother and some nephews living with them.

#### Tender Loving care

All the blessings she have for now , she attributes to her milking cows. She insists that for one to enjoy these, one needs to be dedicated to ones ' craft, be persistent and industrious.

To the cows from which the milk flows, one has to give her Tender loving care so that she will give more milk in return.

Proud to be Pinay and a dairy farmer

In all these, Gemma is proud and happy that she despite her being a woman , braved the difficulties, the initial birth pains of becoming a farmer. Now she can say there are sweet things that money can buy!

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