

Sacred Place Produces Holy Cows, Wholesome Milk

Guided by their motto "ora et labora" meaning "pray and work", the St. Benedict's Dairy farm has evolved into one of the vibrant local milk processors in Southern Mindanao. The divine blessings and hard work radiates in this pious place run by monks.

The farm, owned and managed by the Benedictine Monks, is located at Cogon, Digos City, just along the national highway, accessible by travelers on their route to General Santos City.

*To earn their livelihood and serve the people in the neighborhood, St. Benedict's Monastery of Digos has engaged in three agricultural productions in the monastery's 35-hectare farm lot: **Crops** where they grow various vegetables and fruits, mangoes and coconuts in particular; **Animal Husbandry** focusing mainly on dairy cattle and swine; and **Horticulture** where they have two Orchidaria, one of which is located in Davao City.*

The dairy farm started in 1984 when they acquired five (5) milking cows from a dairy farm in Calinan, Davao City. Farm Manager Brother Bernard Pasacas ensures to maintain a number of dairy cattle in the farm and dispersed some of their stocks to the outreach communities that they serve while some of the male stocks are offered for sale. The farm employs a few cowboys and accepts animal husbandry students as on-the-job trainees. Bro. Bernard is a hands-on farm manager who spearheads the project for almost 30 years and has mastered the ups and downs in dairy production. He makes sure that ample supply of feed stuff is available and maintains a forage pasture enough to feed the animals all year round. A full supply of chopped corn and concentrates are always in store. Never did any of his herd felt any hunger pangs, they just grow old from all the years of producing milk. At present, the farm has 80



dairy stocks, 27 are milking, producing an average of 9.8 liters of milk per cow per day. The average milk production is quite high for animals which have been consistently producing milk for a number of lactation cycles already. The performance of the animals at St. Benedict's dairy farm may have been attributed to the well managed nutritional program and overall herd management employed. A current evaluation made by NDA staff recommended for the farm to replace the old cows and avail of new dairy stocks in order to dramatically increase herd and milk production.

After several years of backyard milk processing, the farm finally set-up a mini processing plant in August 2011 with locally fabricated milk processing equipment consisting of two (2) 100 liters capacity batch pasteurizer and chilling tank. Milk is processed twice a day, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. This development has greatly enhanced and efficiently addressed the rising demand of milk in the area.

All milk processed for the day is sold out before the day ends. The milk is processed into pasteurized fresh milk, chocolate flavored milk and milk bars. These are sold at the Monastery Store along the highway, well positioned for any passersby to notice and try the taste of the nutritious fresh milk which they labeled as **Benedictine Fresh Milk**. They also supply milk to their regular customers including religious schools in Davao City, Digos City, General Santos City, and in the surrounding area. Many visitors who are either on field trip or on retreat at the monastery always pay a visit at the mini processing plant, get a dose of milk; while others explore deeper to get a peek at the animals on the farm. Everyone who visits the monastery never goes home without getting a taste of the refreshing milk. A portion of the milk produced at the plant supplies the requirements at the monastery where the resident monks and workers get a taste of the fruit of their labor.

