

SRI Presented at National Organic Agriculture Congress in Bacolod City

Joby Arandela and farmers from Zarraga municipality in Iloilo, Philippines, who have successfully grown indigenous rice varieties with System of Rice Intensification (SRI) methods this season, manned an SRI booth (right) at the National Organic Agriculture Congress in Bacolod City, Negros Occidental. This event, which included an exhibition and trade fair, was held November 25-29, 2015. For visual aids, they had three SRI rice plants grown just 30 km from the event brought and put on display. The seed reduction possible with SRI crop management was dramatically and visibly demonstrated by showing the very different amounts of rice seed needed to plant one acre with SRI methods or with conventional practice.



Visitors to the booth were so impressed by the differential that many begged to buy ‘SRI seed’ for themselves, Joby reports. This gave him and the Iloilo farmers at the event an opportunity to explain that the difference was not due to the seed used, but to the management methods employed. Still, the clamor from attendees to buy seeds was so strong that the exhibitors agreed to sell them seed, and by noon the first day, all had been sold, and two more sacks of seed had to be brought from Iloilo to replace in the booth what had been sold.



The profusely-tillering SRI plant specimens (left) with ~45 tillers attracted a lot of attention and also gave opportunity to explain that that the growth was due not to the variety or to organic inputs as such but to the methods of crop management. Several attendees from Mindanao who were already practicing SRI joined the Iloilo farmers at the booth to help explain SRI to curious attendees. One of the four rotary weeders on display was bought by the Vice Governor of Surigao Province since he was intending to introduce SRI to farmers there.

There was interest from organic businesses as well as organic farms and individuals, for buying SRI rice produced by the Iloilo participants. There were also a lot of requests to provide SRI training to farmer groups in other regions. There was so much demand for the 8-page SRI primer prepared by SRI-Pilipinas that batches of this had to be reproduced three times.

There were also a number of discussions with officials from the Department of Agriculture who attended the exposition, including Ms. Elsa Parot, National Coordinator of the National Organic Agriculture Program, and Mr. Carlos Magnaye, Director for Program Monitoring for the Department, who gave helpful feedback and suggestions.

Participation in the Congress elicited a flurry of invitations to link with other programs and initiatives. The Department of Agriculture invited Joby to participate in a National Exhibition on Agricultural Mechanization, December 1-3, to interact with officials and technicians on motorized rotary weeders and other mechanization opportunities. The Zarraga contingent was invited by the Marketing Department of the Department of Agriculture to participate in a Regional Agri-Aqua Trade Fair and Exhibit in the province of Antique, December 6-12, and to make a presentation on their SRI experience. The group was also invited to be an exhibitor at the Central Philippine University Climate Smart Agriculture and Organic Trade Fair the second week of December.

Joby Arandela
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