



FARMBOX: TAKING FARMING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

A social enterprise encourages agri-investing to uplift the lives of Filipino farming families.

A community farmer knocked on the door of Lester Mendoza, who also hails from a farming family. The farmer asked for financing, which is a usual need every season. Lester asked his friends and officemates then to crowdsource funds for the local farmers in Calaca, Batangas, and it was then that the idea of Farm Box was born.

Farm Box is a social enterprise that helps uplift the lives of small-scale farmers in the Philippines. Its mission is to provide grassroots solutions to improve the productivity and well-being of these farmers for a better agri-community and a food-secure future. It supports small-scale farmers and backyard hog raisers in jump-starting their businesses with the aid of funders.

Financing farmers is no longer the exclusive territory of lenders and formal institutions. Farm Box demonstrates that anyone can be an investor and help farmers, one box at a time. For PHP 4,500–PHP 6,000 per box, the farmer can start planting crops or raising livestock.

The box consists of the entire package of farming supplies, training, and insurance, all for increasing the likelihood of a successful season. At the end of a cycle, the investor takes a 15–18% share in the net profit

From a few farmers and a contribution of 60,000 pesos, Farm Box grew to more than 122 farmers in just six months. Now, it has more than 700 registered users and has expanded to poultry, hog, and hydroponic farming.



In photo: Women farmers tending to their crops in Calaca, Batangas (Source: Farm Box)



TACKLING ISSUES: THE FARM BOX WAY

With an array of issues in the agri-sector, Farm Box innovates to solve systemic problems such as low-income farming, aging farmers, and receding family farming succession through an inclusive agri-technology and financial mechanism. This resolution has garnered Farm Box many recognitions, including the grand award in the Agri-Boost Camp 2021, funded by the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) and organized by the Batangas State University (BatStateU). The camp was one of the components under Project SICAT: Support for Innovative and Commercially Viable Agricultural Technology funded by SEARCA.



In photo: A partner farmer was granted a "piggy box" which contains starter essentials for raising hogs and technical assistance on any hog-related concerns (Source: Farm Box)

Farm Box, through its rising platform, is openly encouraging the youth sector to invest in agriculture and to re-shift their view toward farming. Its CEO and one of the co-founders, Lester Mendoza, expressed that the connotation of youth in agriculture is rooted in the image of farmers in the country.

"In Farm Box, we want to change the narratives of these farmers. That is why we include polo shirts in our boxes because we want them to look decent. After all, farming is a noble job and we want them to look like one," said Lester.

Moreover, Farm Box intends to transform the way private enterprises and institutions do their corporate social responsibility (CSR). Instead of traditional CSR practices, Farm Box offers more sustainable investing options by purchasing their "boxes." These boxes provide everything that the farmers need, including farming supplies, education, and access to the marketplace. For every box, the investor gets a tailored impact report, farming community visits, positive branding of the company, and growth of their money.

On the other hand, the partner farmers receive training on the latest agri-innovations and state-of-the-art information. Farm Box also assists its partner farmers in the harvesting, selling, and marketing of their produce. The net profit is fairly shared between the partner farmers and the investors. Their progress is regularly assessed by Farm Box using the set evaluation criteria.



MEET FARM BOX'S PARTNER FARMERS



Ledesma “Ledie” Penaperes is a hog raiser and a partner farmer of Farm Box. Her everyday routine includes cleaning pig pens and feeding the pigs twice a day. After four months, she sells the pigs at a reasonable price. According to Nanay Ledie, her partner [Farm Box] in hog raising brings her what she needs, whether they are supplements, medicines, or feeds. Her partner regularly conducts farm visits. Nanay Ledie appreciates Farm Box, which has been supporting her in sustaining and expanding her small business.

Another beneficiary of Farm Box is Anastasia Endoso a tomato farmer in Brgy. Makina, Balete, Batangas. As a small-scale farmer, she constantly worries about natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions and typhoons hitting their area. Frequent disasters severely affect crop productivity, which inevitably leads to huge farm losses. For Anastasia, any form of farming assistance can save the entire livelihood of a low-income farmer like her. She is also keen to pass down farming to her children. Anastasia wants to encourage them to take up farming because it is an essential and fulfilling job as many people, from all walks of life, depend on agriculture.



On similar occasions, many Filipino farmers are facing a lot of challenges—young successors, outdated practices, climate change, and a weak value chain, among others. Hence, the development of inclusive agri-technology, more business infrastructures, and sustainable financial mechanisms are needed more than ever.

In photos: Nanay Ledie and Anastasia are Farm Box's partner farmers from Calaca, Batangas (Source: Farm Box)

NEXT-LEVEL FARMING THROUGH DIGITAL AGRICULTURE

The modernization and digital transformation of the Philippine agricultural sector may be the solution to reduce poverty and recover from the recent pandemic, based on a World Bank report. According to Farm Box, having significant private-public investment with strong government support is integral in continuously developing the many aspects of agriculture, including its digitalization. For one, Farm Box has an online platform (www.farmboxonline.com) that offers products and services to both farmers and potential funders. This online platform makes investing easier and more accessible to a wide range of stakeholders. Meanwhile, farming supplies are posted in the e-marketplace with complete product descriptions, user guides, and prices; farmers who are well-versed in online shopping can find this e-marketplace convenient.

Farm Box recognizes the potential of the Philippine agri-sector in contributing to food security in the foreseeable future. For Farm Box, once a vibrant agricultural phase has been achieved, as well as agri-tech advances have been solidified and upscaled, more global and domestic opportunities will naturally land to local farmers —updating their skills and empowering them to compete on the international market, build strong social and economic impact, improve and sustain food production systems, and make farming an inclusive and honorable profession.



In photo: Farm Box members planting tomatoes as their source of livelihood (Source: Farm Box)

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 FARMERS, ONE BOX
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Farm Box

