Contextualizing the *Gatasang Kalabaw* Festival in Support to the Carabao-based Enterprise in Nueva Ecija, Philippines

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**ABSTRACT**

Festivals are part of people and community culture. They define the existence and development of communities especially on the physical landscape, activities and events. The carabao dairy, locally termed as *Gatasang Kalabaw* Festival (GKF) conducted annually in the province of Nueva Ecija is an interesting dimension of dynamism and agricultural development especially the carabao-based enterprise. Its evolution is an interesting social scientific inquiry that combines culture, community development and economic activity. The study described the process of evolution and development of GKF; identified and assessed the dairy stakeholders’ involvement; and extent of contribution to the Carabao-based Dairy Enterprise to the overall community development through quantitative and qualitative methodologies using purposive sampling procedure supported by key informant interview, document analysis using historical interpretation and participants observation. The research participants are composed of the NEFEDCCO and 11 primary cooperatives from Rizal, Llanera, Science City of Munoz, San Jose City, and Talavera including the primary stakeholders and representatives from PCC, DTI, CDA, NEPG, and LGU’s. The GKF was evaluated over a period of five-year implementation from 2007 to 2011 as a mechanism to improve the process of implementing local development programs anchored on people and community capacity particularly in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation activities. It also provides an avenue to capture the interactions and relationships of government organizations and non-government organizations, the dairy convergence system aiming to sustain the proliferation of dairy enterprises as a way of improving farmers lives better including generation of additional employment and income. Furthermore, it provided an avenue for partnership that intensify and enhance the carabao-based enterprise in the province as the Dairy Capital of the Philippines and strengthening of partnerships of the different stakeholders through knowledge sharing on knowledge on cooperative management, promotion of the dairy product, enterprise and business development, community and cooperative camaraderie and employment generation.

**Keywords:** *Gatasang Kalabaw* Festival, community development, carabao-based enterprise

**INTRODUCTION**

The Philippine Carabao Center (PCC), an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture is mandated to promote the development of the carabao not just for draft but as source of meat, milk and hide (Republic Act 7307, 1992). Through the Carabao Development Program (CDP), PCC is continuously organizing its efforts to increase the genetic potential of the native carabao results to development of the buffalo and buffalo-based and related enterprises aimed to increase income and improve the nutritional status of the farming communities. PCC identified Nueva Ecija as its National Dairy Capital of the Philippines. The establishment of the festival was to consolidate, expand and add new dimension to the dairy activities and promote the dairy and other related activities.
Impact Zones (NIZ) which serves as the frontline in implementing national carabao development program, making carabao-based dairy enterprise productive, profitable and sustainable.

Inspired by the One-Town-One-Product (OTOP) development strategy, local chief executives of the province took the lead and transformed the carabao-dairy enterprise in Nueva Ecija as its OTOP. The carabao dairy became the commodity associated with the province creating a ripple effect and drumbeat the efforts of PCC and the local government to make Nueva Ecija the hub of carabao dairying. Nueva Ecija Dairy Convergence System collectively worked together and prioritize the dairy industry development as one of the major projects; conceptualize promotional activities for the industry which resulted to the evolution of the First Gatas ng Kalabaw Festival (GKF) in 2007. GKF expressed several developments, showed improvements and innovations which triggered significant and relevant aspect in the lives of the carabao-based farmers, the efforts of the stakeholders and to the Carabao-based Dairy Enterprise.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research participants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in the implementation of GKF; as active recipients of the program; and their active contribution and collaborative effort in the dairy convergence system. Pertinent data were collected using interview schedule to the member of the Dairy Convergence System, the primary cooperatives and the different government agencies; document analysis through historical interpretation and secondary report analysis on GKF reports and accomplishments from different stakeholders. In support to this, participant observations and documentation from various GKF and related activities were further analyzed and presented in order to have a more comprehensive presentation and discussions. Also, the researcher observed phenomenon of interests in the study area to draw information which was not obtainable from other methods. What had been observed in the whole environment was related to the physical setting and landscape within which the event took place and gained close and intimate familiarity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Gatas ng Kalabaw Festival was a collaborative effort from the different cooperating agencies supporting and promoting the dairy industry in the province such as Philippine Carabao Center (PCC), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), Nueva Ecija Provincial Government (NEPG), Local Government Units of Llanera, San Jose City, Science City of Muñoz and Talavera, Cooperative Development Authority (CDA), Nueva Ecija Federation of Dairy Carabao Cooperative (NEFEDCCO) and its primary cooperative members, Nueva Ecija Small and Medium Enterprise Development Council (NESMEDC) and Likhang Novo Ecijano Marketing Association (LINEMA) and private sectors. This festival started in 2007, initiative of the Department of Trade and Industry(DTI) under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) support services and the One Town One Product marketing program.GKF strongly supports the direction of the provincial government to promote and support dairy development in the province because of the success of dairy farmers in dairying enterprise who attribute improvements not only in carabao production but also to augment dairy farmers status of economics condition. The objective of the festival is to promote the province as the dairy capital and first of its kind recognizing the role of the dairy industry in the economy of the province (MO Manzano 2009) and served as promotional activities to highlight the best dairy processed products in the province and the launching of the milk feeding program, celebrated in consonance with Nutrition Month Celebration.

Another highlight of GKF was the first Dairy Stakeholder Forum entitled “Onwards Stronger Convergence for Nueva Ecija’s Dairy Buffalo Entrepreneurship Program” participated with all the member of the convergence system, that harmonize efforts of various stakeholders collaboratively, intensify commitment support and identify the needs of the industry in the value chain and make strategies to address such needs. Dairy Development Plan 2009-2010 was realized for better programs
implementations were work and resource complementation strategy is best used and proven to be effective ways of implementing programs and projects, incorporated in the Medium Term Development Plan of the Dairy Industry in Nueva Ecija.

The fourth and fifth year (2010, 2011) festival create remarkable to the dairy industry because it was the first localization of the Gatas ng Kalabaw Festival, a member of the second level stakeholder, LGU Llanera and LGU Talavera sponsored the GKF and symbolized the start of a more broaden celebration and localization. Local government take the lead, recognized that they have to take an active role in securing the economic well-being of their constituents and provide an environment that is conducive to growth and to fulfill their alternative function as an economic entity that play a crucial role in the national economic strategy through the dairy industry as their municipal OTOP. The hosts provide their full manpower and resources in tandem with cooperating agencies as they also poured their financial and manpower to make this festival a big success, making it extravagant most expensive GKF having the most numbered of guests and participants.

Activities in the five years celebration of Gatas ng Kalabaw Festival increases on its fourth and fifth year implementation due to increase of budget, dairy farmers and local government unit participated in the festival tremendously improved. This signifies full cooperation and support to the dairy industry because they strongly agree that GKF support to the Carabao Based Dairy Enterprise, increase of farmers’ income, nutrition of the community, employment generation, creation of market outlet, promotion of the product, community camaraderie, promotion of Nueva Ecija as dairy capital of the Philippines, promote tourism in the province and promote dairy being the one town one product.

**RECOMMENDATION**

1. Continue the localization of the festival and active involvement of the dairy cooperative, to implies the attitude of assertiveness, self-reliance, and confidence that the local government and the local community of the dairy farmers knows better where its interest lie and how to best pursue them. This will allow them to administer their own affairs freely and pursue the development of their selected industry.

2. Ensure the participation and empowerment all primary and second level stakeholders of the dairy industry in development decision-making and processes. There should be overall management and coordination among stakeholders to harmonize dairy development. Exercise institutional viability, recognizing that sustainable development of GKF festival is shared; collective responsibility calls institutional structures that build the spirit of solidarity, partnership and convergence among the different stakeholders.

3. Additional funds are also in advantage, to suffice adequate funds needed for effective and efficient promotion of the event and the dairy industry. Provincial and local government must see to it that they are the one patronizing first their local industry. If the whole province supported this industry, it is possible to gain support from the national level, through policy formulation that will not only support and development the dairy industry but also protect the local economy of the province.

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