



**DR. VIOLETA B. SALDA**  
Assistant Professor V  
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*Presidential Lingkod Bayan Awardee, 2005*  
*Individual Category*

**N**oodles made from squash. Siomai from *singkamas*. Impossible?

Not anymore, if you ask the diligent team behind the successful Benguet Vegetable processing Center (BVPC) at the Benguet State University (BSU). This first-of-its-kind facility produces nutritious yet affordable food such as canton noodles, siomai, cookies, and breads enriched with different sorts of vegetables – a treat for both the young and old who tend to shy away from a healthy diet.

As early as 1999, Dr. Violeta B. Salda of the BSU's Northern Philippines Root Crops Research and Training Center (NPRCRTC) started submitting proposals for a vegetable processing center that would help poor farmers in Benguet to improve their meager income.

"Being a farmer's daughter, I experienced carrying food crops (vegetables and root crops) to far-flung markets which no one would buy or if they would, at very low prices. I felt sad every time I saw old folks unable to market their produce," recalls Dr. Salda, who won the Presidential *Lingkod Bayan* award in 2005 for her postharvest and processing technologies on yam that led to the development and marketing of yam-based bakery goods.

Dr. Salda's studies on the chemical content and functional properties of food crops show the versatile uses of farm produce in food and non-food industries. Backed only by confidence, she started processing vegetables in the laboratory. Back then, it was difficult to pursue large-scale production and technology refinement due to lack of funds.

It took her not months, but years of revising and following up proposals and coping with changing school administrators before the project was finally underway. The processing center was first housed at the NPRCRTC, but a more modern facility was later on constructed through a P10-million grant given by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

The squash-enriched canton noodles became the BVPC's first commercial-scale product. "Noodles are one of the favorite foods of most Asians, including Filipinos. They are easy to make once you have the right ingredients and facilities. You can play with a variety of vegetables depending on what nutrients and taste you want, and avoid the use of toxic additives. Noodles are also very easy to prepare, which is good for busy people," Dr. Salda notes.

She adds that almost all kinds of vegetables are feasible for making noodles – from root

vegetables such as spinach, pechay, ampalaya leaves, and *saluyot*; to fruit vegetables such as Baguio beans and bell pepper; and root crops like sweet potato, *ubi* or yam, and mushrooms.

RFM Corporation is initially distributing the vegetable noodles under the "Proud Harvest" brand to *Tindahan Natin* outlets in the Cordillera Region, Regions 1 and 2, and Metro Manila. The product is also available at the BSU Marketing Center and in selected groceries around La Trinidad and Baguio.

Now, many farmers and entrepreneurs are benefiting from vegetable processing. From July to December 2008, the center has purchased 7,215 kilos of assorted vegetables worth more than P100,000.00 from farmer suppliers in Benguet, Nueva Vizcaya, Nueva Ecija, Cagayan, Pangasinan, and La Union.

"Before the project began, we sold our surplus at very, very low prices and sometimes we just gave them away. Now, the Center buys our unsold vegetables, therefore assuring us of an alternative market. Since it started operations last year, we have been able to cut losses by about 5 to 15 percent," says Tania Taag, marketing coordinator of Cordillera Agriculture Research and Extension Organization (CAREO) Marketing Inc., a company that consolidates vegetables from different farmer suppliers and sells them to institutional buyers.

Aside from producing healthy food variants, the BVPC accommodates educational visits for students, researchers and local government representatives who are interested to learn more about vegetable processing. The first floor of the BVPC building has already been completed and now houses the processing and laboratory rooms, cold storage, quality analytical room, training and demonstration areas, loading and unloading areas, and several other production facilities.

Dr. Salda admits that a lot of hard work and dedication was poured in for the project, not only hers but also of people from various public and private agencies. Those who assisted in terms of additional funding, technical, packaging and marketing assistance include the BSU, Department of Science and Technology through the Food and Nutrition Research Institute, Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Trade and Industry, Local Government of Benguet, Philippine Center for Entrepreneurship, and Philippine Information Agency.

"The DA, for instance, donated P5 million for the purchase of analytical equipment and additional processing and office equipment, wages, and other operational expenses. The Bureau of Postharvest Research and Extension also committed to give stationary reefer vans, rotary dehydrator, and other postharvest facilities," she says.

So far, the BVPC has been gaining much in the business, agricultural and scientific communities. So what's next for Dr. Salda and her team?

She says they are looking forward to expansion, starting with the completion of the Food Quality Analytical Laboratory and Food Safety Unit, and the Postharvest Laboratory. "We will also apply for BFAD [Bureau of Food and Drugs] and *halal* accreditation, acquire more advanced processing equipment, and train additional staff," she quickly adds.

With seeds of courage and perseverance, Dr. Salda has turned her simple dream for Benguet vegetable farmers into a fast growing venture in the food industry. •