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PIY (Pick It Yourself) Fruit Buffet

OCTOBER 3, 2014 By Chit U. Juan

Fruits can be very expensive in a modern place like Tokyo. But once you get to visit the source of these fruits, you will feel blessed picking your own peaches, pears, grapes and cherries depending on the time of your visit. Cherries are ready for picking in June while the other fruits are ready from the month of September.



Kuo Keake-san

I had the fortune of joining a study mission in Japan where part of our destinations is a fruit orchard in Hirosaki of Kuo Keake-san, who has been doing this business for more than 30 years now.



During harvest time, he allows guests to enter his farm, gives them a briefing and then lets them loose in his orchard.



The store also has juices and fruits at farm direct prices

Pick either the pears and peaches lane or the grapes path. You may stay for an hour, eat as much as you want, and then if you wish to take some home, the prices are unbelievably low.



Have a knife and peel away

The men in our group armed with fruit knives and small pails (to catch the pits and peels) graciously peeled one fruit after another for the ladies to taste. “I do this in my mango farm,” says Muhammad of Bangladesh. The other men pared pears and peaches for all of us, as we checked which tree had the sweeter fruit.



The men peeled fruits for us

The farmer knows his business well. He has many different kinds of fruits on his five hectare property. "This way, I manage my risks," he says. "If one fruit is hit by disease, I do not lose all my income," he continues.

And if a fruit's price is lower than expected, he has other fruits to balance the total income. He grows cherries, peaches, pears, plums, grapes, bell peppers, and apricots.



Pears

We all felt like we were in a fruit buffet. Take a peach here. Get a pear there.



Peaches for the picking

And then two more varieties of pears: a Western one that looked like a Bartlett variety, and a Japanese variety too. The others went for the grapes, which were of different varieties that grew in clusters. There were green grapes and purple or red ones, too.



Grapes

Here in the Philippines, we often find villages growing the same crop- lanzones in Paete, Laguna, durian and marang in Cotabato, and bananas and pineapples in Amadeo, Cavite. To be sustainable, a farmer has to sell his produce to traders, who arranges for a price a farmer cannot refuse. Other than that, a farmer or his family has to make value-added products like banana chips or pineapple jam. If he or she is lucky, these jams and jellies, chips, and other snacks may be sold at weekend markets or trade fairs and fiestas.

If they are exceptionally good like a guava jelly recipe we came across in Bacolod made from a secret handed down through generations, we may carry them at ECHOstore. Or, like our camote chips that are really good, we send them all the way to Davao City.

If they are not value added, they remain as fresh produce and are perishable once picked. I will get frustrated if I even start discussing why we do not have cold storage for our fruits. Japan, however, has mastered and perfected how to keep fruits at their peak of freshness, even way after they are picked. I saw garlic, apples being kept in storage for as long as 6-8 months. But then again, that is Japan—ever the biotech experts and technologically-advanced scientists—from picking to storage of fresh produce.



Fruit buffet

So what does one do then in a third world country? We eat by the season—the way Nature intended for us to do. Because we do not have cold storage, we eat fruits when they are ripe and at the peak of sweetness. We discourage growing fruits “off season” or harvesting fruits all year round.

And this is why I choose local fruits. Bananas, papaya, pineapple are best when freshly-pricked. Try lanzones, pomelo, and rambutan only when they are in season.

For sustainability, we should eat local fruits and not the imported ones which travel long distances and are really treated so they survive the long journey to our shores. When we eat local, we help the farmers find markets for their produce so they will continue farming them. Or maybe, some farmers can replicate what this Japanese farmer has done—allow a fruit buffet tour in your farm then charge by the bucket, bunch, or kilo.



Eat while learning

Children will enjoy seeing where pineapples come from, rather than seeing just the juice in a tetrapack or similar container. By the way, pineapples, bananas and papayas grow well beside coffee trees. If you want to see how they grow, join our Cavite Farm Tour on Oct 25. Email admin.pcbi@gmail.com or text 0908-8831218.

Photos by Chit Juan