



Home > Headline > New at Winter...

Headline

New at Winter Fancy Food: Pinoy food consolidator, 'Americanized' sisig, sashimi-quality tuna & Cordillera rice

By Editorial Staff - January 25, 2016

962 0



Food Philippines and consulate staff (Photos by Gary De Guzman)

By Harvey I. Barkin

January 25, 2016

<http://filamstar.com/new-at-winter-fancy-food-pinoy-food-consolidator-americanized-sisig-sashimi-quality-tuna-cordillera-rice/>

SAN FRANCISCO – On its third year at the recent Winter Fancy Food show at the Moscone Center, Food Philippines and other independent Filipino-majority food traders served the fruits of home-grown social enterprise.

A couple of years back, it was piping hot when start-up entrepreneurs first mixed it up with cottage industries and indigent man power. Now the yields of that effort are being reaped. But this time, its more food for thought. Philippine coconut, mango, banana and all their extracts continue to be best-sellers in the world market. But when the small to medium enterprises that produce these best-sellers fail to deliver Costco-size orders, the issue stops being about quality. It's about quantity. Now it's about processing and sustainability.

This is why Trade Commissioner Nicanor Bautista said Brandexports President and CEO Tom Medina was among the Philippine contingent this year. Aside from being a food exporter, Medina is also a chain store buying agent, ingredients broker and manufacturer's rep – job titles that sound like something out of a 21st century resume.

Branding the small time

Bautista calls Medina a "consolidator." In essence, Medina "gets the small guys from the provinces and lends them his experience, capital and resources to penetrate the U.S., European, Japanese and Middle-eastern markets."

The not-too-modest success of social enterprise in the Philippines grew not only small businesses but also home industries that evolved into self-sufficient communities that used its own resources. So the next big thing is to go global. But many home industries need help for the big push.

Enter Medina and his Brandexports. The trade and export consolidator enables small scale producers to be self-sufficient by enhancing their enterprise through quality, design and cost training and orienting them also for the international market. Brandexports also gives rural households sustainable income, tools and basic social services.

Medina says for 16 years, Brandexports has been consolidating for the food industry in the Philippines. He also said, "Brandexports is the only trader/consolidator in the Philippines with a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points certificate (issued by Societe Generale de Surveillance, the world's leading inspection, verification, testing and certification company in Geneva, Switzerland)."

He aims for the highest trade certificate. "We hope to get the British Retail Consortium certificate before the end of the year."

He continues to source products from different manufacturers, puts the mix in a container bound to wholesalers in 43 countries, including Africa.

His support to small scale industries include lending them his own brand, giving them access to buyers, at times pre-paying for them and providing the necessary accreditations. Medina's support can spell the difference between selling at the sari-sari store or Costco.

Americanizing the sisig

Elsewhere at Winter Fancy Food, there are Filipino food traders outside the Food Philippines (the

Philippine Department of Trade and Industry's unified promotional effort under its Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions) independently trying to penetrate the global market. Ramar Foods (brand owners of, among others, Magnolia, Orientex and Manila Gold) in particular, is re-thinking traditional marketing strategy. Vice-president PJ Quesada is literally re-defining Filipino food on microwavable food package labels.

He explained, "There's a general misconception about Filipino food as not healthy. Also, most Filipinos value authentic flavor but in the US, many consumers are more adventurous."

"If you're thinking of packaging kare-kare, for example, the cost of packaging authentic ox tail will set you back. Also, many Filipinos are not ready to eat food that is not cooked at home." But on ordinary days, almost everybody in the U.S. reaches out for the convenient microwavable food.

"That's why we settled on a middle-of-the-road kind of approach."

Under their Kusina brand, Ramar sells these microwavable food at many Safeways, Wholefoods and Lunardi's: Rice noodle stir-fry (translation: pansit bihon), chicken or vegetable spring rolls (lumpia), chicken sauté (chicken sisig) and tangy chicken & rice (chicken adobo).

Thinking outside the net

For Philfresh Corporation's Richard Friend, it's not about re-packaging tuna. Their Yellow Fin tuna is admittedly more expensive than your Walmart variety chicken of the sea. After all, Yellow Fin is the Japanese choice for making sashimi because of its natural red coloring.

Philfresh's take on the whole eco consciousness is the way they catch tuna. He said, "Philfresh guarantees sashimi-quality tuna products caught with one line."

Unlike other canned tuna packers, Philfresh's Yellow Fin tuna are not caught in nets. "We throw back (into the sea) tuna under 25 kilograms. We protect the species this way. And we don't endanger others like dolphins that sometimes gets entangled."

Plus, Philfresh does not treat its tuna with carbon monoxide gas to keep it red – a process that contributes to global warming.

Rice and shine

Still, there are food that can only be found in the Philippines and they continue to carve their own niche. Eighth Wonder Heirloom Rice's Mary Claire Hensley was with the Peace Corps in Kalinga Apayao back in 1976. Although she was assigned there for two years, she ate rice varieties from the area for 30 years. She came back to Kalinga Apayao with market research and a business plan. She identified 17 varieties of rice and chose seven varieties to sell in the global market. She organized the Rice Terraces Farmers Coop in Banawe. Since 2008, Eighth Wonder has brought Philippine rice varieties to North America. This year, 278 farm families exported 27 tons to the U.S. and Canada.

Eighth Wonder's magnificent seven are said to have superb texture, unique aroma and cook under 25 minutes. Some Filipinos may remember specific rice varieties that they can only get from the province. Now that Eighth Wonder brought Philippine rice varieties to the world, the lowly kakanin base has been elevated by a number of chefs to accompany their creations.

The fat and sticky Ifugao Diket goes well with paella and casseroles and pairs perfectly with lamb. The chewy salmon-red colored Kalinga Jekot works with porridges and soup and can be used with Medi food. The fragrant and purple Mountain Violet is good with curries and mango. The larger, pinkish-white Tinawon Fancy is great as yang chow fried rice or pilaf. The firm and rich Kalinga Unoy should be served with barbecue or bibimbap. Like Arborio, Tinawon White is simply steamed with ginger and garlic or for stews and soups. The long grain, thicker and earthy Ulikan Red will do well with chorizo or seafood. While some reports say that brown basmati rice grown in California, India and Pakistan contain less arsenic than those grown in other areas, Hensley said, "All of the rice in the Philippines have been tested and have been found with no traceable levels of arsenic."

Small wonder that most of Eighth Wonder's bulk buyers include Wegmans food stores in the East Coast, a restaurant and high profile chefs in Manila. They also distribute in New England, New York and elsewhere. In Vancouver, Canada, they distribute to 37 stores.

<http://filamstar.com/new-at-winter-fancy-food-pinoy-food-consolidator-americanized-sisig-sashimi-quality-tuna-cordillera-rice/>