

SM FOUNDATION



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Table of Contents



02

Public-Private Partnership for Sustainable Agriculture



06

From passion to prosperity



10

Iloilo farmer sees new tomorrow in agribusiness



14

From adversity to abundance: The triumph of mothers in urban gardening



18

From training to livelihood

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Sr. Vice President and SM Cares Program Director for Disability Affairs Engr. Bien Mateo and SM Foundation AVP for Livelihood and Outreach Cristie Angeles join the harvest festival in Zambales.



Public-Private Partnership for Sustainable Agriculture

By CRISTIE ANGELES

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy. It provides the raw materials for about two-thirds of our manufacturing output and half of this ratio, are food manufacturers. But for far too long, marginalized

farmers have struggled with outdated methods and limited resource access.

This is an area where SM Foundation's Kabalik sa Kabuhayan on Sustainable

Agriculture program (KSK-SAP) hopes to plant seeds of hope.

Founded in 2007 by Tatang Henry Sy Sr., KSK-SAP embodies a transformative approach aimed at uplifting



Iloilo City KSK Farmer Rita Soltis



KSK Urban Farmers in Quezon City put their plant care knowledge into practice by conducting a visual inspection of their crops

communities. Moving beyond traditional philanthropy, it empowers Filipino farmers nationwide with modern agricultural practices, encompassing meticulous land preparation to efficient post-harvesting methods. Through a comprehensive 14-week technical training, the program instills a culture of self-reliance and sustainable livelihoods, equipping participants with invaluable agripreneurship skills and facilitating access to essential resources.



Rizal-based KSK Farmers gear up to present their harvest at a graduation ceremony.

In collaboration with key partners such as DSWD, DA, DTI, TESDA, DOST, DOLE, SM Markets, SM Supermalls, and

Local Government Units, SM Foundation's impact extends far beyond the farm. Beyond technical skills, the program

also focuses on fostering basic business principles, teaching farmers how to effectively manage their income and



Soltis in her garden

explore market opportunities, thus ensuring long-term success and resilience within local communities.

(Article written with Jhen Lizardo, Shiela Bahoy, Arlou Dalisay, Celestine Coste)



A KSK Farmer from Zambales carefully tends to his fields in preparation for the harvest festival, a culminating activity before graduation from the KSK program.



KSK Farmer Rita Soltis spreads social good and fosters a sense of shared success by employing members of her community.



KSK farmers from Zambales with some of their produce



Angeles delivers an inspirational message to the graduates of KSK

From passion to prosperity

SM Foundation farmer-beneficiary now an agripreneur, draws inspiration from Henry Sy, Sr.



KSK alumna Virgie with some of her mushroom chicharon products

Gone are the days when farming was viewed as a backbreaking profession with limited growth potential. With the advent of modern practices, agriculture is emerging as a field ripe with profitability and positive impact.

This was also the hope of visionary and SM Group

founder Henry “Tatang” Sy Sr., when he established SM Foundation’s Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan (KSK) on Sustainable Agriculture program.

Since 2007, the program has been empowering low-income farmers by providing training in modern farming techniques.

It has now trained nearly 30,000 individuals across the Philippines with the tools and knowledge to improve their livelihoods and foster food security in their communities.

One of the successful farmers is Virgie Gonda, a KSK Batch 221 alumna from Tarlac City.



Virgie joins the bazaar of a Sustainability Summit in Makati City to showcase her products.

Virgie grew up immersed in the challenges of farming: “Bata pa lang ako ay mulat na ako sa buhay ng magsasaka dahil dakilang magsasaka ang aking ama. Nakita ko sa Tatay ko ang hirap ng old farming style. Mangungutang siya ng pangsaka... napunta lang halos sa pambayad sa utang.”

After years of meager harvests, earning only P10,000 despite hard work, Virgie sought change. Learning modern farming techniques from KSK with SM Foundation’s partner school, she found hope at St. Isidore ‘the FARMer’ Learning Center, Inc. This decision transformed her life, as she gained knowledge in the 14-week training period, from farming techniques to business basics.



Inside Virgie’s mushroom farm



Virgie utilizes entrepreneurial ventures to strategically position her product for success.

Through KSK, she learned the potential beyond farm-to-market sales, processing the mushrooms she grew in her farm to extend its shelf life and expand her product offerings.

From cultivating a small patch of mushrooms, Virgie's business thrived, earning P30,000 monthly. Farmer's Market Day in SM City Tarlac propelled her mushroom chicharon. Her entrepreneurial spirit expanded,

offering banana and kamote chips, and fruit vinegars.

Inspired by Henry "Tatang" Sy's Life Principles, she embraced hard work and passion: "Work hard and have a great



Virgie showcases her products at a Women's Month fair in Angeles City, Pampanga

passion to achieve.' Lagi kong isinasapuso na kung hindi mo trabahung maigi ang nasimulan mo, 'di ka magtatagumpay."

With optimism, she plans to strengthen her business, aiming to uplift fellow farmers.

PP Gusto ko rin tumulong sa kapwa naming farmers... 'yun mga tinuruan ko sa pagtanim ng mushroom ay nagsu-supply na rin sa amin," she shared, reflecting her commitment to community empowerment."

- Virgie Gonda



Virgie and her fellow KSK alumni join the SM Foundation Sunday Market in SM City Tarlac.



Virgie and her family now sells mushroom chicharon, kamote chips, banana chips, and other products.

Iloilo City farmer
and KSK alumna
rita soltis

Iloilo farmer sees new tomorrow in agribusiness



Many passionate and devoted farmers continue to explore ways to address the age-old challenge of making agriculture a viable livelihood. They continue to seek ways to improve efficiency and yield as they play a key role not only in the country's economy but also in securing access to fresh, nutritious produce for all Filipinos.

Putting focus on empowering farmers through education, SM Foundation, the social good arm of the SM Group, conducts its Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan

program, reaching out to low-income farmers across the country.

Since its inception in 2007, it has introduced modern farming techniques to roughly 30,000 farmers, including Rita Soltis of Iloilo City.

Eager to learn and earn

Soltis, a long-time crops farmer, has always strived to hone her agricultural expertise. Through years of experience, she's struggled to navigate the intricacies

of the agricultural business and mitigate the impact of unforeseen challenges—from weather to pests—by planting watermelon and vegetables during off-season for their family's consumption.

Palay lang po 'yung una kong tinatanim... Dati po ay hindi kami masyadong nagtatanim ng gulay, sapat lang para sa amin."

- Rita Soltis



Rita now harvests various vegetables in her garden—from chilis to eggplants.



Aside from palay, Rita plants vegetables, which she sells in local markets and SM's weekend market.



Soltis successfully sold 50 kilos of eggplants after applying her learnings from KSK.



Expanding her business further, she founded “Dorime Garden,” cultivating various vegetables for sale, and creating a livelihood opportunity for a community member.

Seeking new opportunities, she completed KSK’s 14-week training: “Gusto ko pong magkaroon ng bagong oportunidad para matuto sa farming at lalo na sa marketing kaya nagkainteres po akong sumali sa programang KSK ng SM Foundation.”

Through KSK, she learned modern farming techniques, mechanization, and wise investment strategies.

Natuto kami ng tamang budgeting, pag-iipon ng kita, pagpa-plano kung saan-saan ilalaan ang kita, at pagbasa ng demand ng market... Sabi nga ni Tatang, ‘Recognize the opportunity.’

- Rita Soltis



SM farmer-beneficiary Rita Soltis reaps the fruits of the Kabalik at sa Kabuhayan training program with a bountiful harvest.

Expanding her business, she founded “Dorime Garden,” offering various vegetables for sale and creating job opportunities.

Since completing KSK in 2023, Soltis’s efforts have borne fruit. This year, she successfully harvested 50 kilograms of eggplants, marketed effectively through local and weekend

markets at SM Supermalls. Establishing her garden has not only expanded her business

but also provided community members with livelihood opportunities.

Ngayon, may kaakibat nang kaalaman ang bawat desisyon na aming gagawin... Sa tulong din po ng Weekend Market ng SM, kami po ay nakakapagbenta ng harvest sa bigger market, kung saan maraming tao.”

- Rita Soltis



Rita carefully cultivates sections of her garden, creating more space for future crops.



Rita meticulously inspects her garden.



Rita with her fellow farmers from KSK Farmers



From adversity to abundance: The triumph of mothers in urban gardening

Mheryll with a fellow KSK famer in SM City San Lazaro's Urban Garden

The world is steadily redefining how cities are deemed. Through the transformative power of urban gardening, cities are no longer concrete jungles but vibrant oases, teeming with life greenery.

As urban gardening takes root, it allows people to rediscover the bountiful benefits of connecting with greenery, even in the heart

of urban environments. Two homemakers, Mheryll Ignacio and Jennie Fernandez proved just this as they completed SM Foundation's Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan's urban gardening program.

Nourishing the community, one harvest at a time

Mheryll, a KSK graduate from SM City San Lazaro, found

newfound empowerment after completing the program.

Gusto ko po talagang matuto ng iba't ibang paraan para kumita."

- Mheryll Ignacio



Mheryll (fourth from left) and her KSK batchmates share their harvests from SM City San Lazaro's Urban Garden

Confident in her ability to provide healthy meals despite rising food prices, Mheryll relied on the urban garden she cultivated with her community.

Katulad ngayon, napaka mahal ng bilihin... Pag tumataas ang bilihin, hindi ka masyadong mag aalala dahil kampante ka't alam mong meron kang pananim na masasandalan."

- Mheryll Ignacio

"Maganda pa dahil masustansya ang maipapakain mo para sa pamilya mo," she added.



Mheryll aims to share her urban gardening knowledge with other mothers in their community.

The training served as the foundation of her goals, empowering her to embrace entrepreneurship and become an additional provider for her family.

Higit sa lahat, puwedeng pwede mo rin ibenta 'yung mga inani mo... Dahil dito, nagkaroon ako ng power na tumayo sa sarili ko dahil meron akong alam na alternatibong pangkabuhayan ng aming pamilya."

- Mheryll Ignacio



Jennie, an SM Foundation KSK urban farmer, joins the market tour in SM East Ortigas to learn about marketing and supplying fresh produce.

As she reaps the benefits of KSK, Mheryll aims to share her urban gardening knowledge with other mothers in their community: "Gusto ko rin pong yakagin sila at sabihin na masayang magtanim lalo na

pag nalaman niyo kung paano ito gawing pangkabuhayan."

Cultivating hope

Another KSK urban farmer, Jennie from East Ortigas faced



KSK Urban Farmers bring the plants they grew on SM City San Lazaro's rooftop to showcase during their graduation ceremony.

the challenging aftermath of her online business closure due to the pandemic.

"Gusto ko po talagang bumalik sa pagne-negosyo na malapit sa puso ko," she said, seeking a sustainable and personally fulfilling venture. Through KSK's urban gardening initiative, she acquired the skills needed for cultivating vegetables in their urban

community and rediscovered her entrepreneurial spirit as an urban farmer.

Together with her batchmates from the program, they envisioned establishing a cooperative to formalize their business, opening doors to new entrepreneurial opportunities and creating a sense of empowerment among the participants.

In the next two years, gusto po naming i-institutionalize ang urban gardening sa aming subdivision para rin po makatulong sa mga kapitbahay namin—those na wala o nawalan ng trabaho."

- Jennie Fernandez

As the homeowner's association president, she also looks forward to sharing her new skills so that houses in their village would be filled with produce they can always rely on.

Both Lisa and Jennie shared how they see gardening in a whole new light. For them, it goes beyond putting food on the table but also serves as a catalyst for empowerment and community collaboration.



Some of the KSK farmers tend their urban garden in Sto. Cristo Elementary School, another urban garden cultivated by KSK beneficiaries.



Former homemakers in Quezon City channel their passion for planting into a new venture, cultivating vegetables in a local community garden.

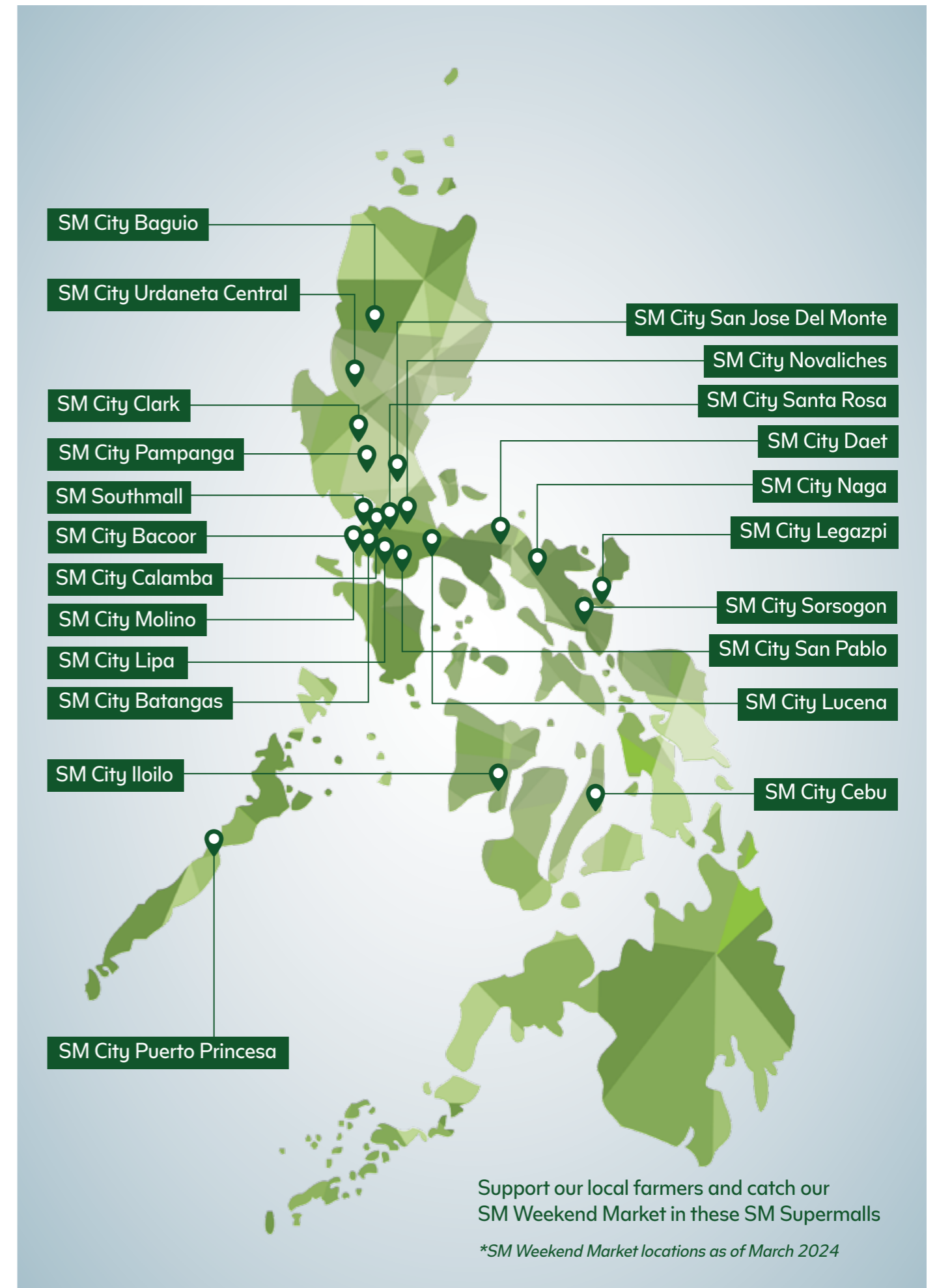
From training to livelihood

The SM Foundation's **Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan (KSK)** program is making a lasting impact on the lives of its farmer beneficiaries, extending far beyond the 14-week hands-on training.

Through the convergence of the SM Group's various business units, including SM Foundation and SM Supermalls, graduates of the KSK program are given the opportunity to apply their newfound skills and knowledge in a real-world setting.

The SM Group has established weekend markets* across its network of SM Supermalls throughout the Philippines. These vibrant marketplaces provide KSK graduates with a platform to showcase and sell their products, putting their entrepreneurial talents to the test.

By converging, the KSK program is able to create a holistic ecosystem that supports the long-term success of its beneficiaries. As they open one weekend at a time, the group will continue to aim to create lasting impact that extends far beyond the classroom and into the communities they serve.



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