



Hurdling the Tests of Time

Kablon Farm Foods Corporation

A family's farming business in the South has survived for over five decades to evolve into a manufacturing haven, which now serves the processed food requirements of today's consumers.

AN ISLAND OF CROPS
The coconut is one of the many crops in the Pantua family's 56-hectare Kablon Farms. They also grow cacao, mangosteen, and other various crops.



A 12-hectare farm, developed by a family at the foot of Mount Matutum in South Cotabato more than half a century ago, has evolved from a spate of challenges to become a 56-hectare enterprise catering to the demands of time.

The pioneering spirit of Ernesto Pantua Sr. of Laguna and his wife Leonor of Pangasinan brought them to this upland town of Tupi in 1956, a decade before the government turned South Cotabato into a separate province on June 18, 1966.

Tupi's cool climate, year-round rainfall, and fertile volcanic soil make the Pantuas' choice of location perfect for their agribusiness pursuit—the Kablon Farm Food Corporation.

Now, the Kablon Farms supplies the country with processed foods—tablea and dark chocolates, fruit jellies and jams, flavored juices and mixes, spiced sinamakan vinegar and virgin coconut oil. Its market reach extends all the way to Hong Kong.

Still, the Kablon Farms has remained multi-crop and organic in its practices, now with two other plantations of seven hectares in Barangays Bunao and Sta. Lucia, all visited by students and researchers.

The farm's operations have been taken over by the couple's children since 1980. The third in the brood and operations director, Ernesto "Jun" Pantua Jr. saw how trade liberalization benefited the consumers but hurt local agriculture. Abaca was overtaken by plastic bags; coffee by imports from Central America; and black pepper and cacao by those from neighboring countries like Malaysia.

But with supermarkets then cropping up, Kablon Farms diversified into processing its produce into fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs). The family also studied how the commodities in the supermarkets were attractively packaged, priced, and presented through effective merchandising.

Kablon Farms invested in packaging equipment, and began commercial production in the mid-1990s. Its brands now carry the tagline "Bring home the best" and ranks its spices and processed cacao as among the world's finest.



DID YOU KNOW?

Mangosteen is often called "super fruit" because of its high nutritional value. A cluster of banana is called a "hand," while each piece of banana is called "finger." Due to its hair-like spikes, the rambutan derived its name from the Malaysian word "rambut" which means "hair."

DTI AT THE HUB

"DTI is the partner of our farm for a very long time. They introduced [us to] the national trade fairs," Jun says.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) links micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) to all the agencies that can provide them with the appropriate professional help for specific requirements.

Thus, the Kablon Farms gained the help of the Department of Science and Technology for product development, and the Department of Tourism for its accreditation as a specialty shop since 2014.

The Kablon Farms is also the country's first to get certified as an organic farm by the Organic Certification Center of the Philippines (OCCP).

With DTI's help, the company reaped awards—the *Best Pasalubong Award* from the Province of South Cotabato (1999), *Natatanging Magsasaka-Processor ng Gawad Saka* (1990-2000), and the *Best Regional Adaptor of the DOST's Setup* (2012), among others.

The company also tapped the Internet in 2011 for its product development research on chocolates and subsequent market testing. A comment posted online by chocolatier Dr. Thomas Avery of South Australia inspired Kablon Farms to process its own chocolates.

The processing is conducted by a well-trained workforce. Half of which are indigenous peoples who use only raw materials sourced from the farm and without putting in any artificial flavors or preservatives.

THE FUTURE

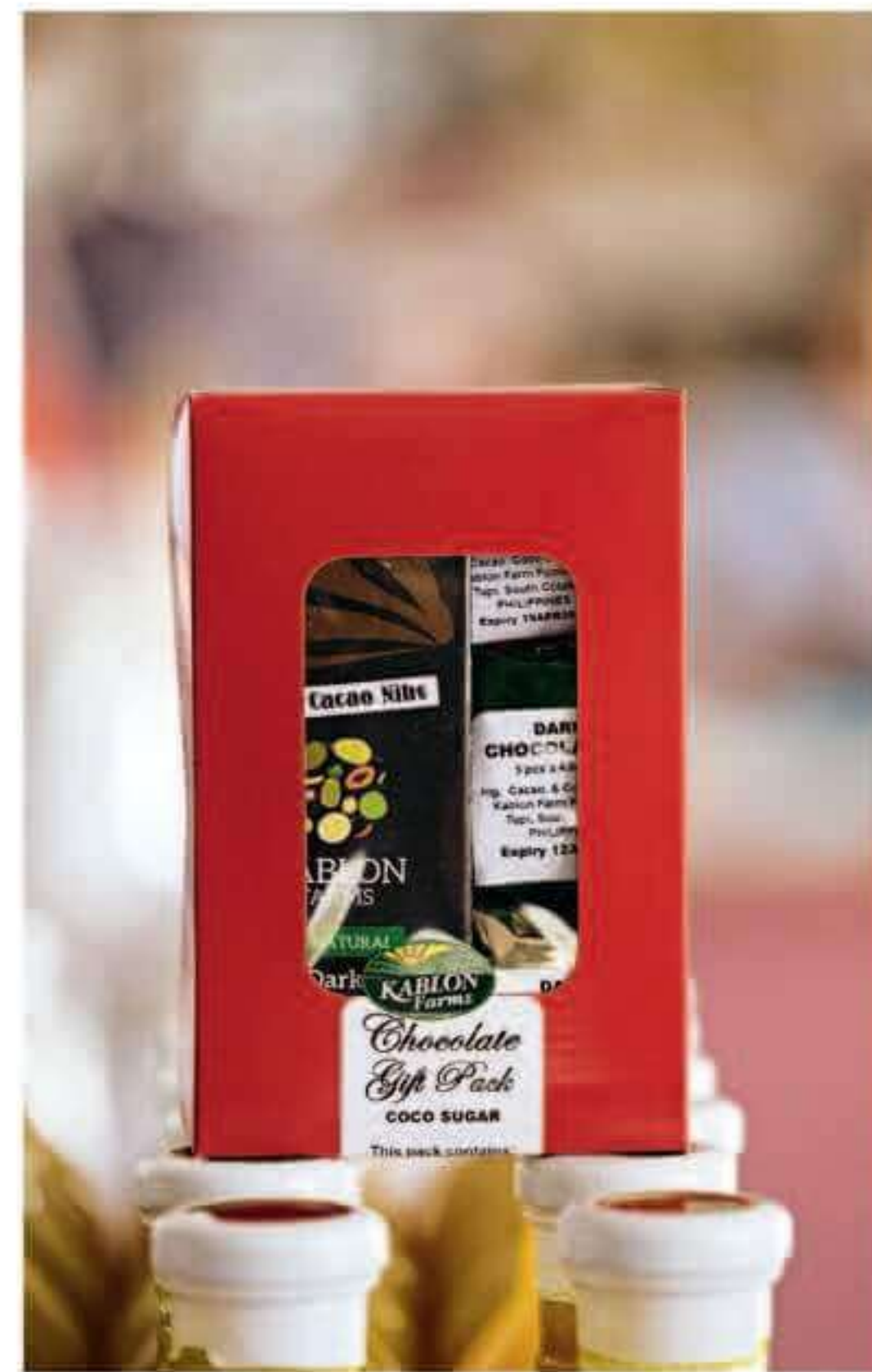
Southern Mindanao accounts for 90 percent of the company's market. The rest are in Metro Manila, Cebu, and Hong Kong. For future growth, the company is eyeing China and the rest of Southeast Asia.

But with DTI around, the Kablon Farms is bound to make Asians and truly "bring home the best!"

HOW DTI HELPED

By enrolling in DTI's **ripples Plus** and participating in the **International Food Exhibition (IFEX)** in Manila and other international trade fairs, Kablon Farms gained local and foreign buyers allowing them to penetrate the global market.

OPPORTUNITY FOR TUPI LOCALS
Kablon Farms has given livelihood opportunities to the small town of Tupi. 50 percent of the workforce are locals of Tupi.



BRANCHING OUT

Although Kablon Farms' first commercial hit was the pure *tab/ea* in the 1990s, it only ventured into selling chocolates in 2014. Some of its other products include fruit jellies and juice concentrates.

Lessons Learned

- 1 Use the Internet for product development research.
- 2 Use social media to know market trends and updates.
- 3 Check out the strategic direction of technological developments.
- 4 Always innovate and improve both products and operating systems.
- 5 Optimize the use of available resources while undertaking activities for development.
- 6 Conduct product tests and market research.
- 7 Conduct educational campaigns.