

Promoting Diverse Uses for Millet in Taitung and Keeping Up with International Trends

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Images courtesy of Taitung District Agricultural Research and Extension
Station of the Ministry of Agriculture

Dining as a Key to Six-sector Industrialization for Lohas Agrotourism

Propelling six-sector industrialization in agriculture is a major effort being undertaken by the Taiwanese government. The Taitung District Agricultural Research and Extension Station (TTDARES) of the Ministry of Agriculture has incorporated the cultural features of the many Indigenous people groups in Taitung in developing core technology based on the region's features of Indigenous people's traditional crops, early ripening and full harvests, and organic LOHAS living. With agricultural production (primary sector) as the foundation, the TTDARES is integrating agricultural product processing (secondary sector) and marketing/services (tertiary sector) to achieve a synergistic effect in promoting six-sector industrialization in Taitung.

In recent years, the TTDARES has held a variety of cooking competitions based on local crops, spurring a diversity of benefits, such as new business opportunity, the development of agrotourism with distinct local features, and the promotion of the Lohas concept. On September 27 of this year (2023), the TTDARES held the Taitung Indigenous Village Creative Food Contest, with millet as the theme, at the Eastern Taiwan Vocational Training Center. Ten teams, including dining business owners and those from Tian-Mama restaurants and Homemakers Classes from Indigenous communities, presented features of Indigenous cuisine. By doing so, they helped push the development of the local Lohas agrotourism industry and took part in the spirit of the UN's International Year of Millets (IYM 2023).



Figure 1. Cooking contests based on regional crops help propel the Lohas agrotourism industry.



Figure 2. Image from the IYM 2023 website.

The IYM 2023 and Millet in Taitung

The point of the IYM 2023 is to promote the culture of millet, an important crop in the southern Sahara and Asia. With its high nutritional value and resistance to drought, disease, and pests, it has great potential as the world faces climate change. Of traditional Taiwanese Indigenous people's crops, millet has a long history and is known as the most sacred of them all. Valued both religiously and culturally, it is used in all the seasonal ceremonies, and millet wine is an integral part of harvest festivals for all Taiwanese Indigenous groups.

The TTDARES began the collection, selective breeding, and variety improvement of the local millet germplasm in 1955, actively developing its potential in response to climate change. The most recent variety (2012) was named "Taitung No. 9 (TT9)." Besides breeding new varieties, the TTDARES has also developed numerous modes of processing the crop, such as improving the churning method to develop millet mochi into millet dumplings, mochi skewers, and strawberry daifuku. Moreover, the TTDARES has developed crispy pancakes, puffed millet, and cookies through puffing technology. Such effort links the production of the primary industry to the marketing of the tertiary industry. Furthermore, millet is promoted through training events and competitions, and related information is spread through special publications for farmers to boost their economic benefits.



Figure 3. Taitung No. 9, a millet variety of exceptional quality.



Figure 4. Millet dumplings with local flavor developed by the TTDARES.



Figure 5. Millet cookies developed by the TTDARES.

Classes in Indigenous Communities Reinforce Millet Industry

In 2022, the Ministry of Agriculture launched the “Reinvigorating the Indigenous Village Ecology and Sustainable New Agriculture Program” to invest in the transmission of knowledge on Indigenous crops, operations and technology, industrial integration, database establishment, and promotion. To accelerate guidance millet industry guidance, the TTDARES initiated the Indigenous Community Mobile Classroom to promote sustainable development models that incorporate production, the ecology, and daily life in Indigenous communities so as to boost their local economies and encourage young people to return from the cities, which are part of the IYM 2023 spirit.

The TTDARES held several Indigenous Community Mobile Classroom classes in 2023 based on the needs of growers and others in the industry to develop millet products. The personalized class content includes the demonstration and practice of designing boxed meals with local features, enhancing the soft power of the diverse applications of millet. In the class, participants learn about how to design the meal boxes, plating, and the use of local ingredients. Accomplished local chefs are invited to exchange creative ideas and turn them into realities. With the synergistic effect of the classes, millet dishes with a distinctly Indigenous flavor are created as we foster professional skills and bring out the hidden potential for development in Taitung’s Indigenous communities.



Figure 6. A class on making meal boxes with Indigenous flavor gives participants inspiration and sparks their creativity.



Figure 7. A demonstration of plating creative dishes of Indigenous cuisine.

Cooking Contest Develops Lohas Agrotourism Industry in Indigenous Communities

On the morning of a hot summer day, ten teams from all over Taitung County took part in the Taitung Indigenous Village Creative Food Contest. Within two hours, they had to make a meal for eight consisting of an entrée, a signature dish, two sides, a soup, and a beverage, the entire meal being based on millet and accompanied by other traditional ingredients. Critical aspects in the judging included whether the colors, fragrances, and tastes of the food incorporated Indigenous tradition and whether there was a sense of narrative.



Figure 8. Contestants making a complete meal within a two-hour time limit.

Within the strict time constraint, the contestants created 60 ingenious, tasty dishes in total, including rice balls with wild vegetables and cheese, djulis sprouts with a sauce, rice dumplings, spring rolls, flatbread, pearl meatballs, rice with pigeon peas and wild vegetables, sago soup, chicken rolls, rice with sauce, drunken chicken, stuffed bitter melon, creamy pumpkin and seafood soup, milk with starch-based additions (like bobas), cake, pork with wine and pickled mustard greens, carbonated cocktails, and rose soda. The dishes were truly mouth-watering.



Figure 9. Judges evaluate the food made by a team.

Five judges evaluated the food on the criteria of ingredients selected, the cost-performance value of the meal, the narrative, the description, the nutritional value, and the tourist itinerary. In the end, Qapulu (a coffee shop) won first place. Second place was taken by Tribe Walk/Work and Bulamilashang Inn. Third went to the Xinxing Homemakers Class – Cipuwa Community, the Tian-Mama Restaurant at the Rice School in Guanshan, and the Chinong Tian-Mama Restaurant. Millet Classroom, Long-a Shop (supported by the Duoliang Community Development Association and the Third Grain Production and Marketing Group of the Taimali Farmers' Association) Zhu'en Jiugugu Workshop, and Zouyitang Bunun Children's Playground all won creativity awards. The award-winners had clearly figured out the essence of how to creatively use Indigenous ingredients.



Figure 10. Qapulu won first place for their outstanding performance.



Figure 11. The first-place meal.



Figure 12. All the contestants.

Documentation of the competition has been published on the IYM 2023 website (authored by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), giving Taitung a voice among those of governments, organizations, and individuals from around the world. Through the promotion of millet, Taitung is advancing the fulfillment of several of the UN's sustainable development goals.

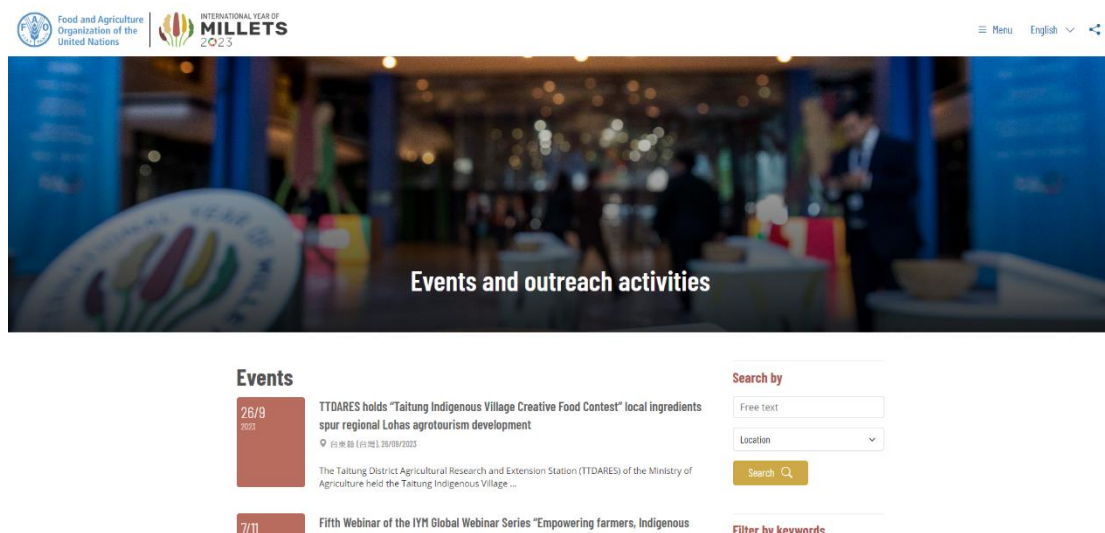


Figure 13. Image from the IYM 2023 website indicating the publication of a press release on the contest.

The TTDARES will compile the documentation from the contest into a single publication for agrotourism farms, B&Bs, those in the dining industry, and consumers so that they may use and promote the foods, which will in turn continue to inject life into tourism in Indigenous communities and keep Taitung up to speed with international trends.