

**BALANCING PROFITABILITY, SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF ISLAND'S BEST FOOD**

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Abstract

This case study documented the historical perspective, business practices concerning sustainability and social responsibility, and marketing strategies of the Island's Best Food, a family-oriented business that specializes on lemon products such as ready-to-drink calamansi juice, calamansi concentrate and calamansi jelly. It also investigated the challenges faced by the enterprise, the effectiveness of strategies in terms of sales since its inception in 2009, the reasons for customer patronage, and product processing procedures.

This study used interviews following a structured interview schedule with open-ended questions, on-site observations in its factory located at Brgy. Cantahay, Guiuan, Eastern Samar, and documentary analysis to gather data. There were 8 informants in this study: two (2) owners, three (3) employees, and three (3) customers who were canteen managers in three schools in Guiuan, Eastern Samar.

Some salient findings of the case study include the following: a) the company has vastly improved its production methods since 2009 due to the acquisition of machineries and equipment; b) the trainings and seminars spearheaded by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and Eastern Samar State University (ESSU) significantly helped in the effectiveness and efficiency of their production; c) the biggest increase in sales happened within the last two years – 2015-2016 and 2016-2017; c) customers prefer their products due to their high level of nutrients and all-natural content; and d) the management of Island's Best Food put premium on meticulous environmental practices, multi-sectoral engagements and sustainable production strategies.

The recommendations made based on the results of the study include the following: a) for future researchers to conduct a study on customers' perception of Island's Best Food products; and b) for entrepreneurs to replicate the best practices of Island's Best Food.

Keywords: Island's Best Food, Customer Loyalty, Family-Oriented Business, Strategies

c. Objectives

The study worked along the following specific objectives:

- 1) Describe the historical profile of Island's Best Food;
- 2) Identify the strategies that Island's Best Food uses in attracting its customers;
- 3) Identify the challenges that Island's Best Food faced in maintaining customer loyalty;
- 4) Examine the effectiveness of the strategies that Island's Best Food uses in maintaining the loyalty of its customers;
- 5) Explore the reasons customers prefer to patronize Island's Best Food products;
- 6) Document the stages of Island's Best Food production procedures; and
- 7) Investigate Island's Best Food practices in relation to sustainability and social responsibility.

Introduction

Businesses all over the world, may they be macro or micro in scale, have developed strategies that helped them survive various problems. Some focus in product development, some on marketing, and others prioritize on strengthening certain weaknesses that they want to improve on.

Indeed, for a business to survive in the industry, it must be highly competitive considering the fact that today's market is dominated by cutthroat competition. Muganda, et al. (2014) stated: "A business that offers quality product and better services will definitely have an advantage over others due to the diversity in consumer markets." Hence, there are strategies that businesses do in order to remain in the game.

A business strategy is a way for a company to come up with a method or plan to help them achieve their goals and assist them in the growth of their company as time passes. It may vary depending on the situation that a company is currently facing. There are four kinds of business strategies according to Suttle (2017): a) Growth Strategy, which entails introducing new products or adding new features to existing products; b) Product Differentiation Strategy, which uses competitive advantage such as superior quality or service; c) Price-Skimming Strategy, which involves charging high prices for a product,

particularly during the introductory phase; and d) Acquisition Strategy, which entails purchasing another company, or one or more product lines of company.

These strategies are increasingly becoming important since the situation in the market today indicates that in many industries, consumers are becoming more mature and a lot of customers are being less available. Hence, the only way to survive the said situation is for companies to maintain their current customers and to get the customers from their competitors. As time passes, many companies found that generating more business from existing customers may be cheaper and more effective than just simply trying to create new customers or winning and stealing them from the competition (Rittippant, et al. 2009).

Furthermore, Muganda et al. (2014) added that managing customers and ensuring that they do not only purchase products from the store, but also maintain a lifetime of patronage and maximize customer lifetime value, is a sure ingredient for profitability and their way to survivability in the industry. Ensuring customer satisfaction is thus a paramount strategy supermarkets use to gain customers loyalty in today's competitive and turbulent environment.

Similarly, Kumar & Shah (2004) stated that the concept "loyalty" has been around for centuries. In the olden times; "loyalty" was used to maximize power and control. Customer loyalty has been universally recognized as a valuable asset in competitive market.

In line with this view, Pratminingsih, et al. (2013) explained that "customer loyalty is the main objective for strategic marketing planning since it brings about many favorable outcomes to companies. Customer loyalty occurs when a customer buys a product or service repeatedly, and he/she holds appropriate and positive attitude towards goods and services of the companies."

Moreover, Dick & Basu (1994) said that "the central thrust of the marketing activities of a firm is often viewed in terms of development, maintenance, or enhancement of customers' loyalty toward its products or services. Although most marketing research on loyalty has focused on frequently purchased packages good (brand loyalty), the loyalty concept is also important for industrial goods (vendor loyalty), services (service loyalty), and retail establishments (store loyalty). Indeed, customer loyalty constitutes an underlying objective for strategic market planning and represents an important basis for developing a sustainable competitive advantage."

With the aforesaid strategies being commonly employed in today's market, this study focused on the strategies used by Island's Best Food, a pioneering family-oriented business that specializes on lemon products in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, in maintaining customer loyalty

alongside with its social responsibility. Specifically, this study also investigated the historical perspective and business practices related to such strategies.

Lastly, the researchers, in collaboration with a group of senior high school students from the ESSU Guiuan Campus, which is one of the training partners of Island's Best Food together with TESDA, DOST and DTI, deemed it necessary to conduct this research. The inherent value of the study, which sheds light on marketing practices alongside with social responsibility and sustainable practices, gave impetus to this academic undertaking.

Significance of the Study

This study investigated the strategies and practices that Island's Best Food use in maintaining the loyalty of its customers.

Furthermore, the results of this study may benefit the following:

Island's Best Food Management. This research may be essential to Island's Best Food management for this can be a way for them to realize their full potential in attracting new customers and maintaining present ones. This can also conclude if their strategies are sufficient to maintain their customers' loyalty, otherwise there is still space for improvement.

Customers. This research may help the customers to build awareness within them regarding the strategies implemented and production procedures used by Island's Best Food.

Researchers. This research is significant to the researchers since they can get ideas on the effective strategies in order for a business to maintain the loyalty of its customers.

Future Researchers. This research may serve as their guide as they conduct their own respective studies on nature of business, marketing strategies, entrepreneurial practices, and the like.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION

This research focused on exploring and developing understanding concerning the strategies that Island's Best Food uses in order to maintain the patronage and loyalty of its customers. This study was conducted in Guiuan, Eastern Samar in S.Y. 2017-2018.

The informants of this research were the customers, employees, and customers of Island's Best Food. The result of this study depended on the data and information that were

gathered from the informants through interviews, on-site observations, and documentary analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research is a qualitative descriptive-case study that tackled the various strategies utilized by Island's Best Food in its operations. Case study enables an in-depth analysis of the history, strategies and production procedures employed by the said company.

Thomas (2011) defined case study as: "...analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame — an object — within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates."

As a case study, the researchers examined the Island's Best Food from multiple perspectives.

Research Locale

This study was conducted at Brgy. Cantahay, Guiuan, Eastern Samar, where the processing plant of Island's Best Food is located. The study was conducted within the school year 2017-2018.



Fig. 1. The location of Island's Best Food in Brgy. Cantahay, Guiuan, Eastern Samar along Guiuan Airport.



Fig. 2. The processing site of Island's Best Food products in Brgy. Cantahay, Guiuan, Eastern Samar

Informants

There were eight (8) informants in this study: two (2) were the owners of Island's Best Food who served as the key informants of this research; three (3) employees who had hands-on knowledge on the production of calamansi products; and three (3) customers who were managing the school canteens of three schools in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, namely: Guiuan National High School (GNHS), Immaculate Conception School (ICS), and Eastern Samar State University Guiuan Campus.

Research Instruments

The researchers drafted three sets of interview schedules to gather information relevant to the investigation being conducted: 1 for the key informants; 1 for the employees, and another for the customers. The questions were structured, logically arranged, and open-ended. However, they also allowed a high degree of flexibility since the researchers asked further follow-up questions to elucidate on some points of the research.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers gathered data by giving duly approved separate communication letters to the informants requesting their participation in the study. Their approval served as an assurance for their full involvement during the entire research period. The researchers used mix methods of data gathering that are typical among case studies such as:

1. **Interview**, which used sets of "Higher Order Thinking Skills" (HOTS) questions. It was done by having personal interaction with the informants, where the researchers asked and arranged a schedule in order to communicate with the participant. This method led the participant to narrate their experiences, share the marketing strategies, and explain the procedures in producing Island's Best Food's products.
2. **Observation**, which is one of the data-gathering methods used by the researchers. This was done in the natural setting where the business establishment operates, specifically in Brgy. Cantahay, Guiuan, Eastern Samar. The researchers used a variety of methods for observing such as taking general notes, using checklists, or time and motion logs.

3. Lastly, the researchers used documentary analysis. They collected all printed materials that support the questions asked in the interview. All data gathered needed to be analyzed and explained in a logical and coherent manner.

Enhancement of Trustworthiness

In this research study, the information that were acquired by the researchers were treated with strict confidentiality and for educational purposes only. Also, the information will not be used by anyone without the prior consent of the owners, researchers, and the people who were involved in this study.

Data Analysis

In this study, the analysis of the collected data was done by transcribing the recorded files (audio), writing down all the things that have been observed on the research locale, and by simplifying, summarizing, and interpreting all the collected printed data.

The data analysis was divided into six parts, which formed the themes and parts of the discussion:

1. Historical Perspective
2. Strategies Used in Maintaining Customer Loyalty
3. Challenges Faced by Island's Best Food
4. Effectiveness of Strategies In Terms of Sales
5. Reasons for Customers' Patronage of Island's Best Food Product
6. Food Processing Procedures
7. Sustainability and Social Responsibility

Ethical Consideration

This study was subjected to certain ethical issues. As mentioned earlier, all participants signed consent letters regarding their full participation in this research. These letters assured that the participants voluntarily participated in this research. Also, the participants were fully informed regarding the objectives of this research and reassured them that this will remain confidential and will be used solely for academic purposes. For the key informant interview, the letter was approved on September 19, 2017 by the owner of Island's Best Food.

- f. Results and Discussion

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

This section presents the answers to the research questions posed in this study based on the data gathered.

4.1 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the year 2009, Island's Best Food was established with a meager Php 500.00 as capital. The owner attended a three-day seminar about livelihood training conducted by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) together with the Department of Science and Technology (DOST). The said seminar covered topics like starting a business, product development, and even packaging. With the knowledge gained, the owner promptly started a business with the aforesaid capital.

The business venture started from humble beginnings as the owners at that time cooked the sweetened calamansi extract in a small pot at the back of their house. After making their products, they let their family members, relatives, and friends taste their produce and heard their reactions and feedbacks. As time passed by, they bought bottles of mineral water and cleansed them with water that has chlorine. These they then used as containers for their products which they later sold at an affordable price.

After two years of working at their backyard, they sought help from DTI. The constant trainings enabled the owners and their employees to be fully knowledgeable and proficient in their craft. This made their company grow into what they are now.

Far from preparing their products in that small pot, today, they already have equipment which make the process of producing their products easier. Due to these innovations, they were regularly invited by the DTI to join its sponsored trade shows, including those in Metro Manila.

Their business was doing great until Guiuan, Eastern Samar got hit by super typhoon Yolanda. It devastated everything they built over the past four years. Everything, including their equipment and working area, was swept away in the morning of November 8, 2013.

Undeterred, the owner took out a special-term loan of Php 340,000.00 in order to get the business back to its feet. With the assistance of DTI, and other government and civic organizations, her family business was able to avail of the Enterprise Rehabilitation Facility for Yolanda-affected micro, small, and medium businesses.

As time passed, their business was back on track, selling to institutional and walk-in buyers at the BAHANDI Eastern Visayas Trade Fair in the year 2015 where they were

awarded “Top Seller Producer.” Again in 2017, they accomplished the same feat when they were again awarded as “Top Seller Producer Award” for generating sales worth Php 3.7 million.

Their latest accomplishment is a manifestation that through sheer hard work, determination and adaptation, the business venture that started from “*guti*” or humble beginnings will have a long way to go.



Fig. 3. Certificates received by Island’s Best Food during their participation in the BAHANDI regional trade fair from 2015 to 2017.

4.2 STRATEGIES USED IN MAINTAINING CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Island’s Best Food uses the following strategies in order to maintain their customers’ loyalty:

- a. **Flyers** – Flyers are regularly given to walk-in customers which makes them informed about their products, especially the new product which is calamansi jelly. They just give their flyers to the customers who just visited their factory located in Brgy. Cantahay, Guiuan, Eastern Samar. The flyer has three pictures of their products: the ready-to-drink calamansi juice, calamansi concentrate, and their newly produced product, the calamsi jelly. It also includes the address of their factory, contact number, and e-mail address.



Fig. 4. A sample flyer that is being distributed among the customers of Island's Best Food products.

- b. Product Content** – Their edge over their competitors is their product content, which doesn't have any kind of preservatives that may affect the taste and nutrition of their product. It is purely natural. When the Department of Health (DOH) launched the "banning of softdrinks which contain preservatives," their product was used as substitute since it does not have any preservatives in it.
- c. Maintaining Cleanliness of their Work Place (Factory)** - One of their strategies is to maintain the cleanliness of their work place to avoid contamination. Their company is supervised by the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) personnel to assure and check that they are following the pre-given industry standards.
- d. Word of Mouth** – They personally communicate with their customers to promote and disseminate their own products. They heavily rely on word of mouth in promoting their product in different places.
- e. Invitations from DTI and Department of Science and Technology (DOST)** – Every year, DTI invites Island's Best Food to exhibit their products in Manila or in different places. They have to showcase their products there to promote the product that they have.
- f. Sikap Book** – There products were featured in DTI "*Sikap Book*" together with the different products from other business ventures supported by the DTI. This is also one of their strategies to popularize their product, through the help of the "*Sikap Book*."



Fig. 5. The coverpage of the Sikap Book published by the Department of Trade and Industry which featured the products of Island's Best Food.

- g. Facebook** – One of their family members made their Facebook account to introduce their products and to easily receive feedbacks from their customers.
- h. Good Relationship with Its Employees and Customers** – Building good relationship with their employees in a way that they personally ask each of their employees if they are facing problems financially and also by giving advices. They also listen to valuable feedbacks from their customers in order to improve their products.

4.3 CHALLENGES FACED BY ISLAND'S BEST FOOD

After the super typhoon Yolanda, their facilities, machineries, and equipments got destroyed. Everything that was built over the past four years was swept away in the morning of November 8, 2013. This also includes the raw materials, specifically the calamansi from Homonhon Island.

The owner narrated: “...*hanyanana Yolanda, ruba man at an am planta an machine, rubagudngatanan*” (During Yolanda, our plant and machine were damaged, everything was damaged).

That is when the owner decided to take a special-term loan of Php 340,000 to resurrect their business. With the assistance of DTI, and other government and civic organization, their family was able to avail the Enterprise Rehabilitation Facility for Yolanda-affected micro, small, and medium enterprises. They were also helped by various Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) and International Non-Government

Organizations (INGO's): People in Need, Care Philippines, Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM), United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and The Gender-Responsive Economic Actions for the Transformations of Women (GREAT Women).

Another problem they encountered was when they had to move to another place from Jetty, Guiuan because of environmental issues. The place has poor sanitation which is not good for their product since they must maintain cleanliness and safety of their product. Furthermore, they were causing traffic to the place where their plant was located, since they have customers with big vehicles.

Lastly, there are times that they have to overwork just to meet their customer's demand, especially if they need to ship their products the day after. This is one of the challenges they are currently facing. But now they are expecting the arrival of new machineries that will help double the rate of production of their products which can reduce their problems in production.

4.4 EFFECTIVENESS OF STRATEGIES IN TERMS OF SALES

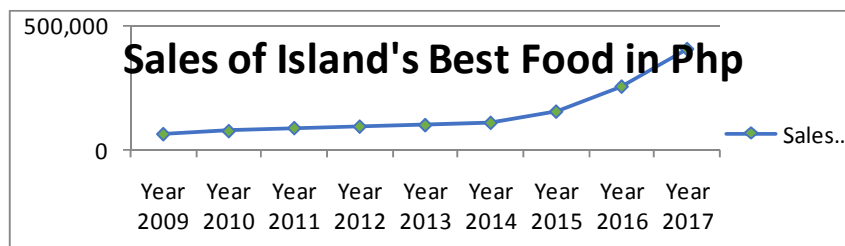


Fig. 6. The sales graph of Island's Best Food products since its first year of operation in 2009

The sales of Island's Best Food from the year 2009 – 2014 steadily grew until the year 2015 -2016 and 2016 – 2017 when they had a major increase of their sales due to the consolidator they met during the BAHANDI regional trade fair who helped them sell their products at Robinson's Supermarket in Metro Manila.

Also, the restriction of DepEd among schools to sell softdrinks to students helped spike their sales. The owner recounted: *"Nagingmasuronghiyainenga ready-to-drink hanpagstriktohanDepEdnga an mgasoftdrinks, bawalnahanmgaestudyante...kayitonDepEd dire na gin a'allow an softdrinkskaynapa UTI hankabataan."* (The ready-to-drink became a top commodity when DepEd

prohibited the sale of soft drinks to the students...because DepEd does not allow softdrinks because they can cause UTI (Urinary Tract Infection)).

Lastly, as can be gleaned from the graph, there is a large increase of sales since the establishment of Island's best Food in 2009 to this year.

4.5 REASONS FOR CUSTOMER PATRONAGE OF ISLAND'S BEST FOOD PRODUCTS

Customers prefer their products since they are purely natural and don't contain any kind of preservatives that may alter their nutritional value. Its taste quality is preferable to all customers that consume their products.

The canteen manager of ICS uttered: "*Karuyag hit mgaestudyante natural. Itonngawaraymga chemical dire paro hit mgasoftdrink.*" (The students likes the naturalness of the product that it does not contain any chemical unlike softdrinks.) The same with the canteen manager of Guiuan National High School: "*Kay asyama'tginbibiling hit mgatawo, gin bibilinggudnira. Kay waraynamansoftdrinks.*" (Because it is really what the students are looking for since softdrinks are not available anymore).

Lastly, their process of making their product is clean and safe for consuming and this is assured and certified by the DTI since they are always being monitored and supervised by them.

4.6 FOOD PROCESSING PROCEDURES

The raw materials or calamansi they use in making their products are taken from their calamansi farm in Brgy. Bitaugan, Homonhon Island, Guiuan, Eastern Samar, and sometimes they buy calamansi from other farms in Homonhon Island. They produce approximately 1, 200 bottles of ready-to-drink calamansi juice daily, and process calamansi concentrate and calamansi jelly depending upon the number of orders.

The process of making their products is as follows:

1. Harvesting the calamansi fruit for processing, and then sorting and discarding the overripe calamansi fruits.
2. Washing of the calamansi fruit using mildly-chlorinated water. Then, starting of extraction by the removal of the seeds and squeezing out of the juice.
3. This is followed by the pasteurization through adding of sugar and boiling of the mixture. It is then cooled and transferred to the dispenser.

4. Packaging through bottling and labeling.



Fig. 7. Calamansi Cleansing Area

The first stage of production happens here where the workers wash and sanitize the calamansi before being transferred and processed. The calamansi is washed with mildly chlorinated water.



Fig. 8. Juice Extraction Area

The second stage of production happens in this section of the plant where the juice is extracted from the calamansi. The seeds are removed and the juice is squeezed out from the calamansi and then transferred to the Pasteurization Area.



Fig. 9. Pasteurization Area

In compliance with industry standards, a clean area is maintained for the pasteurization of extracted calamansi juice. The boiling of the extracted juice together with the mixing of sugar occurs in this section. The juice extract are then transferred to the cooling area.



Fig. 10. Cooling Area

The cooling procedure, which is the fourth stage of the production process, takes place with the use of this facility. The pasteurized juice is then moved to the nearby dispenser for the next processing stage.



Fig. 11. Pumping Area

The fifth stage is the packaging of cooled processed juice extract into individual bottles. To ensure the right concentration, exact measurements are maintained for the three types of product – calamansi ready-to-drink, calamansi concentrate, and calamansi jelly.



Fig. 12. Stickers

Once done, the stickers are attached to label the different types of products, marking the sixth stage of the production process.



Fig. 13. Packaging Area

After attaching the stickers into the finished products, they are then packaged according to their appropriate boxes and are considered ready for shipping to various places.

4.7 SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Having made a decent leap from the 500-peso capital, Island's Best Food is now enjoying relative success in the market due to the aforesaid production strategies. However, the family-oriented business does not solely consider profit as the motivation in doing business. It also provides premium to the sustainability of its production and the inherent social responsibility it plays in the community.

At the onset, the owners have already envisioned helping the people through microenterprise, specifically using calamansi as a raw material because it is abundant in Homonhon Island, where they came from.

On the aspect of helping the people earn a living through this enterprise, the owner narrated: *"Han nakadto pa kami ha Homonhon, damongadtohinuraura an amoncalamansi. Baratohiyataposbinagyuhan. Nag huna-hunaakongamakabulighanmgatawo para an suwa dire makarag. So, anunangaginbuhatko nag request ak ha DTI para hin training kun aanhonmapreserve an mgacalamansi.* (When we were still residing in Homonhon, calamansi

was very much abundant. It was cheap and wasted by the typhoon. I thought of a way to help the people so as not to waste calamansi. So, the first thing I did was I requested DTI for a training on how to preserve calamansi.”

The trainings that were organized by the DTI were made possible through the Barangay Bitaugan farmers Association, a cooperative she organized to help uplift the people’s socio-economic status.

Moreover, their move to expand in Brgy. Cantahay from their initial site in Jetty, Guiuan was prompted because of environmental issues. In Jetty, the houses are built closely, with some standing on stilts as the place narrowly protrudes to the sea. Hence, with the residential nature of the place, sanitation and waste disposal became major concerns. These became their stumbling blocks in their bid to expand and in securing a permit from the Bureau of Food and Drug (BFAD).

Taking cue, they established their present processing site in 2013, where they meticulously maintain the cleanliness of the surroundings. The owner noted the following strategies they help in maintaining the cleanliness of the peripheries: a) a properly built perimeter fence around the actual processing site to keep off animals like dogs, cats, chickens, etc.; b) daily conduct of cleaning in the surroundings; and c) segregation of waste.

The following shows their waste management area:



Fig. 14. The actual waste disposal area located several meters at the back of the processing plant.



Fig. 15. A healthy population of various plants at the back of the processing plant.

The aforementioned strategies help them maintain the cleanliness of the area and be abreast with contemporary industry demands.

Furthermore, with the rate of production consistently rising due to high demands (with an average production rate of 4,000 bottles per day), the issue of sustainability always comes to the fore.

The owner explained that the supply side of the production is not in danger as there are a lot of suppliers from Homonhon Island alone. It also helps, the owner shared, that they have their own “*umahan*” (plantation) that helps continue the supply of raw materials.

Over the years of production, they have developed a scheme in maintaining sustainability of supply, e.g. that while they have their own “*umahan*,” they alternately purchase from calamansi farmers in Brgy. Bitaugan, Homonhon island.

“*Bale 25 percent la it am nagagamithitonsuwadidto ha amon hit amon barangay (Bitaugan). It ibanahigagawas pa nga’t ha merkado, ha Boronganngan MacArthur.* (We only consume 25 percent of calamansi in our barangay. The rest are even supplied to the market, Borongan and MacArthur [Eastern Samar],” The owner added, implying that the supply is abundant and that production can be sustained in the future.

Aside from these, they also engage in multi-sectoral activities especially with DOST, DTI, and Eastern Samar State University to upgrade their employees’ skills, promote their product, comply with industry standards, and contribute in one way another to the development of their partners and the community at large.

Lastly, the awards that they have raked in, and the economic contribution that that they have shared with the people and community, speak volumes about the premium that they give for social responsibility and sustainability.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research, it is concluded that the strategies used by Island's Best Food are effective, on the profit end, as reflected in the sales graph. The strategies that they're applying help in the success of their business. These would be a great aid for other microentrepreneurs who want to start their own business ventures.

Moreover, the findings revealed that aside from focusing solely on profit maximization, the proprietors of Island's Best Food also involve themselves and their employees with multi-sectoral engagements such as with DTI, DOST and the Eastern Samar State University to tackle issues of skills upgrading, industry standards and sustainability of production.

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