



Jiabong: The Mussel Capital of Eastern Visayas

The municipality of Jiabong, Samar is known for its green mussel, commonly called tahong. It serves as the central trading center of mussel in Samar for shipments to Davao, Bicol, Cebu, Manila and other parts of the country.

Jiabong is the biggest supplier of mussel in the region, making it the mussel capital of Eastern Visayas. It has also the biggest area for mussel culture, thus having the potential of becoming the mussel capital of the Philippines.



Big sized concrete green mussel landmark at the town's plaza

Tahong was chosen as the region's One Town, One Product (OTOP) Model. OTOP is a program of the national government aimed at boosting indigenous products found in the municipalities. OTOP also aims to spur economic activities and generate employment in the locality. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) assists the LGUs in identifying its specific product or service and coordinates all forms of assistance from various agencies like DA, DENR, DILG, DOST, DOT and TESDA.

History. In 1882, during the Spanish regime in the Philippines, Jiabong was made into a town or municipio. It was made as the cabeza de barangay, incorporating the barangays of Jia-an, San Fernando, Malino, Camarubo-an and the rest of the barangays that were founded later. During the Filipino-American war in 1900 to 1904, Catbalogan, Samar, the capital town, was placed under military rule. Jiabong became a barrio of Catbalogan from 1905 until June 15, 1948.

Jiabong became a separate municipality of Samar and got its independence from the Municipality of Catbalogan on October 22, 1948 when Congress approved House Bill No. 1812 into law, under Republic Act No. 269. On October 27, 1948, Jiabong was inaugurated as a municipality. President Elpidio Quirino appointed Domingo Jabinal as the Municipal Mayor and Eleuterio Bacarra as the Vice Mayor.

The name Jiabong is a combination of the terms "Hiya-an" which means "a place of preparation before an attack", and "Bong" which is actually "the sound of a canon gun". According to the legend, during Spanish time, villagers from Motiong, Paranas and San Sebastian fled to Casandig (now Jiabong) to seek refuge from the invading pirates who killed, robbed and held them as captives.

To rescue the villagers, the Spanish soldiers and guardia civil camped at Casindig and mounted their preparations for an eventual pirate attack. The Spanish soldiers cried "Ensigueda Fuego Hia-Bong!" as cannons were fired on the invaders. After this victorious fight, remained two words: Jia-Bong.



Geography. Jiabong is situated at the western part of Samar Island. It lies along the coastal region of the province. It is bounded on the north by the municipality of San Jose de Buan, on the east by the municipality of Motiong, on the south by the Maqueda Bay, and on the west by the municipalities of San Jorge and Catbalogan.

The municipality is 11 kilometers away from Catbalogan, the capital town of Samar. It has a total land area of 67.7 square kilometers and is composed of 34 barangays.

Demography. Jiabong registered a total population of 15,397 in 2000. Its population density of 227.4 persons per square kilometer, is the ninth highest among the 25 municipalities in Samar. Most or 99.5% of the populace classified themselves as “Waray”.

Governance. Jiabong is considered as fifth class municipality. Its total income increased significantly by 129%, from 0.7 million pesos in 2005 to 1.6 million pesos in 2006. The Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) of the municipality amounted to 24.2 million pesos in 2007. This translates to an IRA per capita of 1,338 pesos.

Socio-Economic Activities. Jiabong’s total land area is classified as follows: 43% forestry and watershed development zone; 52% production land (for agriculture and others) and 5% built-up areas.

The main sources of livelihood of the populace are tahong farming and upland rice farming.



Bamboo poles serve as medium for tahong culture

The Mussel Industry. The mussel industry in Jiabong started in 1968 with marketing limited to mostly fresh tahong. When red tide struck the area in the early 80’s, the emerging industry experienced a temporary halt as demands from buyers decreased. At present, mussel farming in Jiabong has grown into a promising industry and has diversified into the production of processed tahong and shellcrafts.

To further boost the industry, the municipal government of Jiabong has recently embarked on the One Town, One Product (OTOP) Program of the government and identified tahong as its OTOP. Through OTOP, the municipality has gained the support of various government agencies and private sector, specifically in marketing and product development.

The municipality is now considered the mussel capital of Eastern Visayas, supplying the biggest volume of mussel for a growing market that includes buyers from Cebu, Davao and Manila. In 2006, total mussel production reached 6,431.8 metric tons, valued at 32.2 million pesos.

To date, Jiabong has a Mussel Meat Processing Center and a Mussel Shellcraft Center that produces bottled tahong, tahong crackers, half shell and shellcrafts, among others. These centers are being managed by the Jiabong Mussel Producers and Vendors Multi-Purpose Cooperative (JMPVMPC). The Cooperative has been participating in various trade fairs held in the country and has generated considerable sales. The industry has now a total employment of 279.

MUSSEL PROFILE OF JIABONG, SAMAR: 2006

Indicator	2006
Potential mussel area (in hectares)	200 (2005)
Area devoted for mussel (in hectares)	160
Number of bamboo poles installed	318,480
Volume of mussel production (in metric tons)	6,431.8
Number of sacks	128,635
Price per sack (in pesos)	250
Estimated value of mussel production (in million pesos)	32.2
Volume of bottled mussel production (number of bottles)	144,000
Tahong crackers production (in metric tons)	29.5 (2005)
Shellcraft sales in Bahandi Trade Fair (in million pesos)	3.3 (2002)
Employment generated	279

Sources of Data: Office of the Provincial Agriculturist - Samar
Department of Trade and Industry - Samar



Tahong and its processed products

Vision. The Municipality of Jiabong envisions that by the year 2011 and beyond, a progressive Jiabong shall emerge. It shall become a peaceful, politically mature and morally reformed society dedicated to alleviate the underprivileged citizenry who are wallowing in the difficulty of poverty; a society that is concerned with the protection and conservation of natural resources and a society with self-sustaining economy.

Mission. It shall promote local autonomy by developing and strengthening the capabilities of the Municipal Government in order to effectively and efficiently provide its constituents with the needed basic services. It shall institutionalize people empowerment by enjoining the constituents to participate in local governance in order to achieve a progressive and self-reliant community.

References:

<http://elgu.ncc.gov.ph/ecomunity/jiabong-wsamar>

<http://www.otopphilippines.gov.ph>

Industry Profile of Mussel Culture in Samar, DTI-Samar

2006 Regional Social and Economic Trends, NSCB

Photo courtesy of DTI-Samar