Maria Y. Orosa: In Peace and War

It has been said that Maria Y. Orosa lived a hundred years before her time. That she did. Imagine Filipino cuisine without banana catsup or native suka (vinegar)? Long before commercial sauce bottling companies ever thought of making vinegar from pineapple, or making wine from native fruits, Miss Orosa was already doing it before the war.

Maria established such an impressive academic record as recipient of B.S. and M.S. degrees from Washington University in 1919 that she was appointed assistant state chemist for the state of Washington the following year. Yet she gave up the prestigious post to serve her country. A true nationalist.

As a pioneer food technologist, her invaluable innovations and experiments in plant utilization, food preservation and canning , and her research, all of which started in 1935, research have incalculably enriched the Filipino diet for over six decades, while continuing to serve as a mine of scientific data to both government and private food laboratories to this day. The over 700 recipes Miss Orosa prepared and kitchen-tested herself, have likewise been a rich source or basis for countless cook and recipe books published throughout the country and abroad.

Miss Orosa pioneered in the extraction of nicotine insecticide from tobacco dust and tobacco waste material; rotenone from derris roots; rice bran became food rich in Vitamin B1 or thiamin for nursing mothers suffering from beri-beri. From the by-products of nata de pina she manufactured vinegar; the by-product of soybean curd became starch for bread and cookies, powdered coconut flour was used for biscuits and cookies.

Her many studies included the preparation of dehydrated fruits and vegetables, dehydration of meats, preparation of fish balls, preparation of agar from seaweed, preparation and utilization of peanuts for culinary oil and salad oil. She pioneered in utilizing green banana flour for baking, the pickling of cucumber and green tomatoes, in the making of catsup from banana, mango and ripe tomato, in the utilization of native fruits in manufacturing wines, and in the use of ash and lime for making soap.

In peacetime, she established and organized rural improvement clubs