

DA eyes 4% agri growth in 2009

Buoyed by a bigger budget that will be spent mostly on hard infrastructure such as irrigation systems, farm-to-market roads and post harvest facilities, the Department of Agriculture is eyeing to achieve a four-percent growth this year.

"The completion of such projects and other initiatives will increase farm and fishery productivity, lower costs, higher rural incomes, and better returns on investments for agribusiness," said Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap during the Philippine Economic Briefing, with the theme, "Challenges and Opportunities in a Global Crisis," held February 25, in Makati City.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo keyed the affair, where she assured the public that the government is up to the challenge of keeping the economy stable in the face of the global economic crisis through investments. She called on the private sector to work with her administration in order to ensure that the country's resources will be used to provide long-term opportunities and thus improve the lives of the Filipino people.

Sponsored by the Investor Relations Office of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), the briefing also featured respective presentations of the other economic man-



Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap (right) presents the challenges and opportunities of the agriculture and fisheries sector at the recent Philippine Economic Briefing.

agers, namely: Finance Secretary Margarito Teves, BSP Governor Amando Tetangco Jr., National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Ralph Recto, Trade and Industry Secretary Peter Favila, Budget and Management Secretary Rolando Andaya Jr., and Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes.

In his presentation, Secretary Yap said the bulk of the proposed 2009 DA budget of P44 billion will bankroll the various interventions under the FIELDS program.

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Agri infra projects, livelihood to benefit 131,670 individuals

The Department of Agriculture targets to create this year an initial 131,670 new jobs, as it implements agricultural infrastructure and livelihood projects that form part of the Arroyo administration's P330-billion economic stimulus program to insulate Filipinos from the adverse effects of the global financial meltdown.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap

made the commitment during the recent 'Jobs Summit' in Malacañang, where he reported the DA's various job-generating initiatives, namely: repair and rehabilitation of irrigation facilities - 81,134 jobs; construction of farm-to-market roads - 36,500; production of organic fertilizers - 10,400; and goat and swine raising - 3,645 jobs.

"The jobs to be created in the agricultural sector represents about one-sixth of the total commitment of at least 800,000 new jobs that will be generated through the various economic pump priming projects of government this year," added Secretary Yap, who also serves as the Cabinet steward in charge of livelihood and emergency employment projects in the provinces of Region 2 (Cagayan Valley) and Bohol.

He said such infrastructure and livelihood projects will not only benefit rural workers in the short term, but will also benefit Philippine agriculture in the long run, as these

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(Pls turn to p15)

DA-BAI culls ERV-affected pigs

As a precautionary measure, the Department of Agriculture through the Bureau of Animal Industry (DA-BAI) will depopulate a swine farm in Pandi, Bulacan, where there was transmission of Ebola Reston Virus (ERV), based on test results of blood and tissue samples taken from said farm in January 2009.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap said the procedure — as recommended by the joint mission of international and Filipino who conducted a 10-day investigation last January — is needed to prevent further spread of the ERV among pigs

within and outside the farm.

The mission was composed of international experts from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN-FAO), World Animal Health Organization (OIE), and World Health Organization (WHO), and Filipino veterinary and medical experts from the DA and DOH.

The pigs, totaling about 6,000 head, would be burned and buried in a designated area within the farm. The culling operation will be spearheaded by the DA-BAI, DOH, the farm owner and LGU veterinar-

ians. International experts will observe the entire process.

Secretary Yap assured that the swine farm owner will be compensated for all the pigs to be culled, and that the DA-BAI will provide appropriate assistance to enable the farm to get back on its feet immediately after the culling operations.

The culling operations will follow current OIE procedures to ensure animal welfare (that is, humane killing), operator safety (to minimize human exposure) and bio-security (to curtail wider spread).

National moral recovery

The urgent change within

It should be viewed as the strengthening of the country's public institutions, the weeding out of the corrupt in public service, and discouraging those "corruptable" ones. Anchored on the premise that good governance is one of the key underpinnings of a progressive nation, it seeks to resurrect the faded and jaded but time-honored concept that a public office is a public trust.

On January 30, 2009, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo issued Administrative Order No. 255, which calls for the adoption of "zero tolerance for corruption" in the country's anti-corruption drive, and for the promotion of the Filipino values of being "maka-Diyos, maka-tao, maka-bayan and maka-kalikasan," as embodied in the 1987 Philippine Constitution.

Through the AO, all bureaus, regional offices and attached agencies of executive departments nationwide are directed to "adopt and implement the Integrity Development Action Plan (IDAP) which is the National Anti-Corruption Framework for the Executive Branch."

Further, the President instructed all agencies to join the values formation activities of the Presidential Council on Values Formation, and to "enlist the participation of religious, civil society and civic groups through consultations, program development, promotion and implementation of their respective Moral Renewal Program."

As such, it envisioned to be a multi-sectoral, government-led moral cleansing and renewal movement meant to strengthen the people's awareness and their resolve to combat corruption.

In spirit, there's really nothing new about the AO. Rather, it is an reiteration of this administration's enduring pledge to live and breathe the principle of leadership-with-a-conscience — by advancing values formation and ethical behavior among government officials and workers.

President Arroyo's anti-corruption directive can never come at a better time, especially now that we in the Department of Agriculture are in thick of our wide-ranging efforts to rebuild our agency's corporate image.

The order of the day is to restore public confidence in the Department of Agriculture and in all our institutions.

We believe that the dispense of graft-free services and initiatives that can withstood the test of these trying times are a hallmark of a modern, strong government. To realize this objective, we must make certain that our financial and other resources are administered with transparency, accountability, and tough fiscal regulations.

For starters, we have crafted and refined a comprehensive blueprint to ensure effective implementation of "high-impact" projects that would not only cushion the farm sector from the adverse effects of the global economic crisis, but more importantly guarantee easy monitoring of such to ensure the judicious disbursement of funds particularly to its program partners in the private sector.

Our aim is to award and carry out 60 percent of our hard infrastructure projects by the first half of 2009 — so we could create more jobs and rev up the economy, es-

pecially in the countryside where most of our poor families reside.

This blueprint dovetails with our earlier order issued October last year to create teams to conduct "periodic field validation and rapid appraisal" of the department's intervention measures as undertaken by our Ginintuang Masaganang Ani (GMA) banner programs (rice, corn, livestock, fisheries and HVCC), and the adoption of stringent guidelines on the release of funds to program partners like nongovernment organizations and people's organizations.

To maximize the use of DA funds, we are also doing away from "soft interventions" such as input subsidies for farmers and fishers, and instead pour investments on "hard or big-ticket projects" including the rehabilitation and repair of small-scale irrigation systems, fishports, postharvest facilities, farm-to-market roads, and farmers' trading centers.

For instance, instead of the fertilizer discount coupons that we in the DA have handed out to farmer-beneficiaries via local governments last year, we will empower farmers to produce their own organic fertilizers to provide them with cheaper and more sustainable alternative inputs, in view of the high cost of petroleum-based fertilizers.

Moreover, the DA will give priority to areas where the local government units are willing to provide counterpart funding for farm-friendly programs. As our bridge to farm and fishery stakeholders, the support and commitment of our local chief executives are also vital to ensure the effective and speedy implementation of these projects from which our small farmers and fisherfolk beneficiaries can continuously obtain tangible and sustainable benefits.

It is our mission to pluck millions of our countrymen from the quagmire of poverty and despair. Obviously, poverty is not merely a socio-economic issue. And as public servants, we are aware of the enormity of this task, which lends an urgency to our attitude and work ethic.

Hence, the reforms that we must carry out will not only involve our development policies. It also about changing mindsets.

In all, we are facing a tall order for the sake of the Filipino people. But it can be done. It must be done.

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"Rice self-sufficiency will continue to be our centerpiece program," he said, "In tandem with the local government units, we will help rice farmers increase their productivity, primarily through irrigation repair and small water impounding projects.

"We will capacitate farmers to produce their own organic fertilizers. We will strengthen the Agricultural Guarantee Fund Pool, which today stands at P 3.68 Billion, and allow Land Bank to lend against that sum for food production, including providing financial assistance to seed growers to produce quality certified seeds," he added.

The DA will also establish post harvest dryers and milling centers for rice and corn, and ice making machines, chillers and ports for the fishery sector.

More importantly, he noted, "we will also ensure reasonable farmgate prices through aggressive local palay procurement and a proactive rice distribution strategy to assure us that we will not experience another rice price crisis this year and in 2010."

He noted that the DA banner programs have been refined, with funds being moved to hard infrastructure. This will bring about the lowering of costs, higher rural incomes, and better returns on investments for agribusiness.

All told, the DA forecasts a 4.4% increase in palay harvest to 17.54 million metric tons.

Aside from palay, the other 2009 'growth drivers' are: aquaculture, expected to expand by 8.2%; banana - 6.2%; poultry - 5.4%; and municipal fisheries - 4.7%.

In closing, he said: "For decades, we chose to neglect the path of agriculture in our march towards industrialization. In the face of the experiences of China, India, Thailand, and today, Vietnam, we realize the folly of our ways.

"Let us stay this course of aggressive rural infrastructure investment and bequeath unto our children, the genuine gift of a fighting chance, in the years to come, to banish hunger from our beloved land."

Most of all one discovers that the soil does not stay the same, but like anything alive, is always changing and telling its own story. Soil is the substance of transformation. – Carol Williams

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PGMA offers Samal Island as investment site for poultry, fishery projects

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has offered to Thai businessmen the Island Garden City of Samal in Davao as an ideal investment site for poultry and mariculture projects.

"The President and Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap had briefed a visiting delegation of Thai businessmen on the rich investment potentials of Samal Island during their recent visit to Mindanao," said DA Assistant Secretary Salvador Salacup.

The 38-member business delegation was led by Dhanin Chearavanoni, chairman and chief executive officer of the Bangkok-based Charoen Pokphand Group Co. Ltd (CP), the biggest agribusiness conglomerate in Thailand and the fifth largest feed mill operator in the world.

Salacup said the President and Secretary Yap accompanied the Thai investors around a 2,000-hectare area in Talikud Island that is ideal for poultry and mariculture projects.

Only 20 hectares of the 200-hectare mariculture park, jointly run by the DA's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and the city government of Samal, has thus far been developed by Davao-based agribusiness entrepreneurs into fish cages for bangus and other high-value marine species.

Salacup said Talikud Island is an



Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap (left) with Mr. Dhanin Chearavanont, Chairman and CEO of the Charoen Pokphand Group of Thailand.

ideal location for a poultry project because it was a relatively pristine island with wide and open flat and rolling highlands and that was outside the country's typhoon belt and that was very accessible to a major economic hub as well as to an international airport and international seaport.

Moreover, he said, President Arroyo and Secretary Yap had noted that raw materials and other supplementations are locally available, farm equipment and other logistics can be easily obtained, skilled labor was available, and the peace and order situation was generally stable.

The most preferred location among several options was Barangay Cogon, within Talikud Island of Kaputian District, which is an isolated island on the island's southernmost tip and was very far from existing tourism facilities.

As for the mariculture park, Salacup said the President and Yap had told the Thai businessmen that the Samal Island Mariculture Park facility is an excellent location with clean water and away from the typhoon belt, with reasonable

rental rates plus available technical assistance from BFAR and the local government unit (LGU).

The President and DA chief also cited the availability of marketing assistance from BFAR, LGUs and nongovernment organizations; the availability of feeds, fingerlings, fish cages, trained manpower and other ancillary services; and the availability of HACCP-accredited fish processing plants. HACCP stands for Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points.

Samal enjoys several comparative advantages as an investment area, Salacup said. First, it is a Coastal Resource Management or CRM-certified (Level 2) for quality management of coastal areas. It has excellent water quality. It is sheltered from the prevailing monsoon climate of Davao Gulf and Southern Mindanao. And it enjoys the full support of the City Government of Samal, the congressional office of Congressman Antonio Lagdameo, Jr., and the provincial government of Davao del Norte.

Aside from the mariculture park, Salacup said the government is also offering the Thailand investors another possible expansion site at a BFAR-managed 500-hectare mariculture park in Davao mainland.

SACY renders HVCCs to SoKor, Thai investors

Philippine agriculture can turn out to be a highly profitable enterprise for foreign investors willing to bankroll big-ticket projects to meet the rising global demand for biofuel along with the country's high-value crops and marine species.

In separate briefings late this month with prospective investors from South Korea and Thailand, Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap said the country's high-value commercial crops--particularly bananas, mango, and pineapple--offer opportunities for investors to develop postharvest and processing facilities, expand areas for production, and build physical infrastructure.

He with the South Korean businessmen at the Manila Hotel, and officials of the Charoen Pokphand Group of Thailand headed by its

Chairman and CEO Dhanin Chearavanont in Samal Island, Davao.

For banana, investment opportunities include expansion of production areas; banana processing into flour, cereals and vinegar; banana production and processing into Inulin; packaging equipment; logistics; research and development; and farm-to-market roads (FMRs).

Mango offers opportunities in developing irradiation facilities, extended hot water treatment tanks, freeze drying facilities, individual-quick frozen banana products, and processing plants, Yap said.

Investment opportunities in pineapple include expansion of production areas, R&D on effective pest management, processing facilities and packinghouses, and FMRs.

Agriculture is best investment option

Investing in agriculture sector is perhaps the best option an investor can make this year.

Thus said Daniel Go, an investment consultant, noting the agriculture sector prospers even during hard economic conditions.

"As an investment option, growth possibilities in the industry are boundless with the modernization of farming techniques, improved weather forecasting technologies, including renewed interest of the private sector together with government agencies, not to mention new demands in biofuel products," said Go.

"Countries like the US, Japan, China, and Taiwan trace their economic prosperity to agriculture. During a crisis, they could still feed their people with basic food staples," he added.

Globalization is also a key factor why investing in agriculture is feasible.

"The agriculture playing field has changed a lot owing to globalization, where it has now leveled off, making the Philippine agriculture sector better exposed to the demands of a bigger market. Since the country is blessed with fertile land, skilled workers and a great tropical weather, we are at an advantage."

For her part, academican Leonor Briones, former head of the Bureau of Treasury, said now is a good time to invest in agriculture.

"The first priority of the country should be in food production, marketing and distribution. It has been proven time and again that agriculture is a very resilient sector, even during hard economic times," she noted. (*The Philippine Star*)

DA starts FMR, irrigation projects nationwide

The Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Units (DA-RFUs), in tandem with the local government units, launched simultaneously on February 25 the construction of

ator for President Arroyo's Comprehensive Livelihood and Emergency Employment Program (CLEEP) in Region 2 and Bohol, said that more than half of the total

will be constructed in the Metro Luzon Urban Beltway, which include Central Luzon, to help 36,680 farmers and create 9,170 jobs.

implement infrastructure projects within the first semester of the year to generate jobs and stimulate economic activity in the countryside.

He has also created national and regional monitoring teams to conduct periodic field validation and appraisal of all DA-funded interventions.

The DA will also enforce stringent guidelines on the release of funds to program partners like non-government organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs).

Another 230.8 kilometers of FMRs will be constructed in other priority areas identified by the DA. These will create 5,770 jobs and benefit 23,080 farmers.

These FMR



Shown are the recently completed concrete bridge (above) and newly-opened FMR (right) in Sitio Fataldon, Brgy San Jose, General Santos City.

farm-to-market roads (FMRs) and irrigation systems nationwide.

This year, the DA targets to construct more than 2,100 kilometers of FMRs, and undertake rehabilitation and restoration of irrigation systems, covering 148,000 hectares.

These infrastructure projects will create about 53,000 jobs, as part of the Arroyo administration's economic stimulus program to help the country weather the global economic slowdown.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap said the projects will also benefit 212,000 farmers in food-producing and hunger-prone areas.

President Arroyo ordered the DA and other agencies last January to frontload labor-intensive projects in line with her P330-billion economic resiliency program meant to stimulate the domestic economy and generate about 1.5 million jobs by midyear alone.

Yap, who is the Cabinet coordi-

length of these FMRs would be built in Central Philippines and the Mindanao Super Region, where major food production sites are located.

The 567.6 kilometers of FMRs to be built in Central Philippines are expected to benefit 56,760 farmers and create 14,190 new jobs, while the 536.94 kilometers of roads in Mindanao will have 53,694 direct farmer-beneficiaries and require 13,424 workers.

The North Luzon Agribusiness Quadrangle, where Yap concurrently serves as development champion, will have 420.8 kilometers of new FMRs that will benefit 42,080 farmers and generate 10,520 jobs. Finally, 366.8 kilometers of FMRs

projects, worth P5.3 billion, will link farm and fishery areas to major road networks, onto markets and trading posts.

The roads will also serve other non-convergence areas within the Strategic Agricultural and Fisheries Development Zones, Community-Based Forest Management Agreements, and Agrarian Reform Communities, and vulnerable areas identified by the National Nutrition Council, and those within conflict areas, mostly in Mindanao.

Secretary Yap has instructed DA regional directors to bid out and

JICA funds agri training center

A new facility, an agriculture and fisherfolk training center, has risen up in Simuay, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao.

It is the first of its kind in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

It was inaugurated recently, and graced by Nasser Sinarimbo of JICA, ARMM Exec. Sec. Datu Quirino Udasan who represented Sultan Kudarat Mayor Bai Shajida Mastura Bandila, Secretary Keise T. Usman of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries-ARMM, field operations director Dr. Salik B. Panalunsong, Jalika D. Mangacop, director for research and development, and ARMMIARC Manager Siya Belongan.

The facility will serve as the venue for various agricultural and fishery trainings. The counterpart funding for various equipment, facilities and other training needs was provided by the DAF-ARMM.

The center will contribute its share in enhancing the development of the agriculture and fishery sector in Muslim Mindanao. (DAF-ARMM Info Div)

PGMA inaugurates fish hatchery in Misamis Occ.

Misamis Occidental has a new fish hatchery. Thanks to the joint efforts of the provincial government, the Australian Government and the Department of Agriculture through the Southeast Asia Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC).

The P8.8-million hatchery was inaugurated last January by President Arroyo, along with Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap, Misamis Occ. Gov. Loreto Ocampos and Australian Ambassador to the Philippines Rod Smith.

The project, which forms part of the Misamis Occidental Aquaculture Park, will directly employ fish

farmers and family members, and develop the aquaculture industry in Northern Mindanao.

The hatchery was built through the Philippines-Australia Local Sustainability (PALS) program, which allocated P5.56 million, while the Misamis Occidental provincial government provided the P2.44 million counterpart fund to complete the project.

SEAFDEC, headed by Dr. Joebert Toledo, provided the technical support, technology, and supervision over the project.

"The hatchery is expected to produce annually 576,000 grouper

(lapu-lapu) fry," Dr. Toledo said.

Milkfish, red snapper, crablets, seabass, seahorse and other high-value species are also expected to be produced in the hatchery, Toledo added.

The facility can support 32 grouper grow-out fish cages. It will be replicated in other areas along the 169-kilometer coastline of Panguil Bay and Murcillagos Bay.

With production cost of P70-P75 per kilo, a fish farmer could easily earn some P90,000 per cage, or a total of P180,000 for two cropping periods per year.

DA to focus on hard infra for corn in 2009

By McBien St Garcia

The Department of Agriculture has earmarked at least P400 million this year under the Ginintuang Masaganang Ani (GMA) Corn program to construct post-harvest facilities and related infrastructures, as well as bankroll various farm mechanization and research and development (R&D) initiatives to further increase corn productivity and quality and trim down post-harvest losses.

The amount represents one-half of the GMA-corn program's proposed 2009 budget of P817.7 million, nine percent more than last year's P658-million allocation.

"This is reflective of the DA's policy shift toward pouring more investments in hard infrastructures—away from providing soft interventions such as subsidies for corn seeds and microbial inoculants.

In a report to Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap, Assistant Secretary and concurrent GMA-Corn program national coordinator Dennis B. Araullo said P132 million will be spent for the construction of 44 units of village-type corn cob dryer, which will feature large-capacity dryers capable of drying 10 metric tons of corn for every 14 hours.

Araullo said the DA-GMA Corn Program is currently identifying qualified corn-producing areas of 100 to 200 hectares across the

country to receive the equipment designed to help farmers meet the global quality standard of a maximum of 14 percent moisture content of corn.

An additional P120 million has been allocated for the establishment of five (5) corn-postharvest and trading centers, which forms part of the DA's bigger goal of building 50 of such facilities by end of the year through joint venture agreements with local government units, farmers' cooperatives or the private sector.

The total target of 50 includes the 15 corn centers—seven in Luzon, two in the Visayas and six in Mindanao—which are under construction and will be finished by the first semester of 2009, through the lead effort of the DA-National Agribusiness Corp. (NABCOR), and the 30 corn centers whose funding will be derived from other sources, possibly including the Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (ACEF).

Each of these corn centers can dry 200 tons of corn every 36 hours.

On top of the National Corn Program's initiatives, the DA-National Food Authority will also spearhead the establishment of 50 corn post-harvest and trading centers between now and 2010.

"We are hopeful that these infrastructure developments will serve

Corn supply to stabilize

Corn may be in tight supply in Luzon, but a surplus in other parts of the country will be enough to tide over end-users, until the summer harvest starts in March, Philippine Maize Federation president Roger Navarro said.

"Right now, we may have a corn surplus of 360,000 metric tons in Visayas and Mindanao, so it's all going to Luzon," Navarro said.

He added that the tightness in supply felt in Luzon has more to do with the traditional shortfall between harvests, as well as the lingering effects of high fertilizer prices during the planting season last year.

The private sector has initially forecast that there may be a shortfall of 600,000 tons for the full year, although stakeholders said the estimate could be firmed up only af-

ter the summer harvest in March and April. The government said supply may fall short by 300,000 tons.

In any case, the government has allowed poultry raisers and hog raisers to import a total of 200,000 tons of corn for their feed needs.

The corn will be imported through the National Food Authority with a 35-percent tariff.

Poultry and livestock farmers earlier expressed fear that a corn shortage this year could raise prices and discourage farmers from increasing production.

In a production forecast released in January, the DA's Bureau of Agricultural Statistics said corn production in the first half of 2009 could drop 2.6 percent to 3.21 million metric tons, based on farmers' standing crop and planting intentions. (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*)

Corn husk dolls, anyone?

In the past, people used to consider that corn husks are worthless. Today, they are sources of income for housewives and children.

In this regard, the Department of Agriculture-Region 7 has been conducting a series of training for agricultural technicians and rural

women on how to turn cornhusk into an income generating project. For instance, dried and dyed cornhusks can be made into flowers, dolls, wall decors, slippers, trays, and can be utilized as garments.

Initially, two batches of the Skills Training on Cornhusk Utilization were conducted among

agricultural technicians from Bohol, Negros Oriental, Siquijor and Cebu. These were funded by the GMA-Corn program.

Inspired by the positive turnout, more training will be conducted in the municipalities of Daanbantayan and Borbon in Cebu,

Carmen and Sagbayan in Bohol, La Libertad in Negros Oriental, and in the cities of Cebu, Talisay and Toledo. To date, about 400 have availed of the training and are in turn expected to re-echo the technology to more farmers in their respective municipalities.

(*DA-RFU7 Info Div. / M.N. Sumagang*)



as magnet for the private sector to invest in the industry," he added.

Araullo blamed the current lack of drying facilities for much of the current 15 percent post-harvest losses. The DA-GMA Corn Program is aiming to cut post-harvest losses by up to 7 percent this year, Araullo said.

To date, there are already four corn processing and trading centers operating in the country—one each in Kabacan, North Cotabato; Banga, South Cotabato; Malungon, Sarangani Province, and Sergio Osmeña, Zamboanga del Norte—which provides drying and marketing services to hundreds of corn farmers in Mindanao.

Apart from post-harvest facilities, the DA-GMA Corn Program will sustain its distribution of production support, including 333 shallow tube wells worth P24 million for the irrigation needs of farmers, and 111 units of 4x4 four-wheel tractors worth P130 million to selected corn clusters through counterparting scheme with LGUs and farmers' cooperatives.

In addition, it will intensify its efforts to expand farm lands devoted to corn by opening new corn fields nationwide; encouraging more farmers to use organic and microbial fertilizers to reduce production costs and maximize their incomes; and pushing further the use of hybrid corn technology.

Regarding its R&D projects,

Araullo said the national corn program through its partner agency, the Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR), will carry out studies about the profitability of corn farming, specifically on production, distribution, usage and surplus.

To date, 43 corn projects have been funded by DA-GMA Corn Program since the collaboration commenced in April 2006. These projects include: 14 projects on seed systems, 12 projects on fertilizer trials, and 17 projects on post production and marketing systems and other areas.

Amid the combined impact of high fertilizer prices and typhoon damage on corn plantations, last year's national corn production reached 6.93 million tons, which surpassed 2007 harvests by more than 200,000 tons.

For 2009, however, the DA is looking at figures lower than its original target of 7.9 million tons due to a host of factors, including the expected decline in corn yields due to reduced fertilizer usage in reaction to high cost of this input, and the government's directive to temporarily lift the tariff on feed wheat importation, which reportedly dissuaded some farmers to plant corn.

Araullo said the revised production target also took into account the possible effects of adverse weather conditions as a result of shifting weather patterns on the farm sector.

DA-BPI starts testing rice hybrids

The Bureau of Plant Industry of the Department of Agriculture (DA-BPI) starts conducting "growth tests" to determine the performance of a hybrid rice variety, which according to farmers in Nueva Ecija and Isabela had demonstrated abnormal growth patterns.

"The growth tests will be done in Pangasinan, which will be handled by the BPI's regional seed quality control laboratory in Sta. Barbara," said DA-BPI Director Joel Rudinas in a report to Secretary Arthur Yap.

The tests will complement the "hybridity" tests that it will undertake in partnership with sister agency, DA-Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice), using the facilities of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Los Baños, Laguna.

Rudinas said the "growth tests" would last for five months, from planting to harvest.

Secretary Yap has also directed Dr. Frisco Malabanan, national coordinator of the DA's Ginintuang Masaganang Ani-Rice Program, to continue providing technical assistance to affected farmers so



Above are members of the investigating and monitoring team that verified the reported abnormalities of a commercial hybrid rice variety in several towns in Nueva Ecija. At left, an agricultural technician measures the tillers of SL-8H.

they could attain high yields.

Contrary to earlier media reports about widespread devastation, hybrid farmers, and Municipal

Agricultural Officers (MAOs) from Nueva Ecija and the other affected areas said their hybrid rice plants started to recover when they

NFA to buy 3-M bags summer palay

Government through the Department of Agriculture's National Food Authority (DA-NFA) targets to buy some 3.2 million 50-kilo bags of palay from farmers, starting March through June.

At an effective support price of P17.70 per kilo, said procurement volume translates to P2.84 billion.

NFA administrator Jessup P. Navarro said his agency will aggressively buy the summer or palagad harvest of farmers, with the following monthly targets: March - 939,200 bags; April - 1.1 million; May - 889,800; and June - 232,300 bags.

In addition to the support price of P17 per kilo, the NFA has increased the additional incentives for cooperative development to P 0.30 per kilo, while the drying and transport incentives are now at P0.20 each per kilo – for a total of 70 centavos per kilo for clean and dry palay.

For the month of January 2009, the NFA was able to buy 798,519 bags, overshooting its target of 796,900 bags.

For the entire year, it targets to buy a total of 14 million bags, six percent more than last year's 13.2 million bags.

Good harvest seen in Q1

With more and more farmers planting quality seeds coupled with cheaper fertilizers, the country expects a "good harvest" of palay this 1st quarter of 2009.

Thus reported Dr. Frisco Malabanan, national coordinator of the Department of Agriculture Ginintuang Masaganang Ani (GMA) rice program, to Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap.

Malabanan said as of February 16, total area planted to hybrid and certified seeds (CS) has reached 1,157,404 hectares (has.): 1,051,811 has. to CS, 386,775 has. more than last year; and the rest to hybrid varieties.

Harvest will commence late March and peak in April.

His projection reinforces the 2009 1st quarter palay production forecast of the DA's Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (DA-BAS), based on its January 2009 survey of farmers' standing crop and planting intentions.

The DA-BAS said palay production for January to March 2009 may reach 3.99 million MT, 240,000 tons or 6.4% higher than last year's 3.75 million MT. Harvest area may expand to 1.1 million has.

Six regions are expected to contribute to the additional harvest:

Bicol, Cagayan Valley, Soccsksargen, Davao, Ilocos, and Central Luzon.

Further, the DA-BAS said the availability of seeds, restoration and rehabilitation of some irrigation facilities, continuous release of irrigation water, and early onset of rainfall have enabled farmers to plant early in November and December last year. Subsequently, harvest would start early, in March.

On the average, farmers are expected to improve their productivity, from 3.6 MT to 3.63 MT per hectare due to more usage of hybrid and certified seeds, sufficient water supply and good weather conditions.

In all, the DA-BAS forecasts that palay harvest for the first semester may reach 7,214 million tons, 1.3 percent more than last year for the same six-month period.

For his part, Malabanan said efforts of the DA family through the GMA Rice program directorate and Regional Field Units (DA-RFUs), in partnerships with the local government units (LGUs) and private seed companies, are paying off. These include subsidies for hybrid and certified seeds, conduct of technical briefings, and establishment of techno-demo farms.

continued employing the proper cultural management methods.

For his part, Dr. Malabanan said based on previous experiences and planting schedules, the initial findings of the quick response teams had traced the stunted growth and fewer tillers to the cold stress and strong winds in Nueva Ecija and Isabela from December 2008 to the early part of February.

Malabanan dismissed, meanwhile, the allegation that SL-Agritech has been enjoying a monopoly on seed subsidies, at P1,500 per hectare. He said that the program has been subsidizing the hybrid seeds produced not only by SL Agritech but by other private growers as well, and that farmers are free to choose the varieties they wish to plant, such as Bayer Crop Science, BioSeed Research Philippines, HyRice Corp., Syngenta Philippines, and even growers' cooperatives that also produce hybrids developed by PhilRice.

For his part Engr. Redentor S. Gatus, Regional Executive Director of DA-RFU 3, said most of the reported 'abnormal' SL-8H are now showing signs of improvement, as confirmed by the three composite teams that include representatives from the DA-RFU3, agricultural officers and technicians from Nueva Ecija, PhilRice, BPI-National Seed Quality Control Service, and SL Agritech.

The teams, led by DA-RFU 3 Regional Technical Director Eduardo M. Gonzales, conducted three separate visits in each of the 10 towns where the abnormalities were reported, namely: Aliaga, Gapan, Licab, Llanera, Rizal, San Isidro, San Jose City, Sta. Rosa, Sto. Domingo and Zaragosa.

Gonzales said the teams observed the continuous increase in terms of plant height, as well as the number of tillers of the plants in every visit they made.

Moreover, farmers who followed the advice of technicians--particularly not to replant, apply the proper fertilizers, and irrigate the field--saw their rice plants recover.

The agri experts also attributed the 'abnormal' growth of the SL-8H to the cold weather that pervaded in the months of December and January.

"Sa nakikita kong improvement sa tanim naming palay, naging panatag na ang kalooban namin (With the improvement I see in our rice plants, we are now appeased)," remarked Ernesto Palon, a farmer from San Isidro, Nueva Ecija. (DA-RFU3 Info Div)

Filipino farmers will now have access to new legume varieties, notably peanut, pigeonpea, and chickpea.

Thanks to a recent partnership forged between the Department of Agriculture through the Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR) and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), based in India.

In a report to Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap, DA-BAR Director Nicomedes P. Eleazar said the three ICRISAT-developed legumes will be field-tested in selected regions of the country.

The agreement was signed by DA-BAR Dir. Eleaza and former DA acting secretary and ICRISAT Director General Dr. William D. Dar.

The one-year project entails four components: varietal introduction and field-testing; on-station seed production; technology dissemination and promotion; and educational enhancement of R&D personnel through research fellowships and training at ICRISAT.

The project will be implemented by ICRISAT in collaboration with selected DA Regional Integrated

Agricultural Research Center (RIARCs).

Dr. Carmencita V. Kagaon, DA-BAR's chief of the Program Development Division, will serve as project leader.

ICRISAT is known for its significant contributions to agriculture of several semi-arid countries in the past decades.

Through the years, it has successfully generated cutting-edge knowledge and high-impact technologies on crop genes and production systems that it shares with interested research partners.

Prior to this project, ICRISAT has shared packages of technologies with the DA-BAR, particularly on the development of confectionery varieties for Asha peanut and sweet sorghum for biofuel production.

These have been proven effective and beneficial to farmer-partners who have adopted the technologies.

Dr. Kagaon said that ICRISAT peanut germplasm and breeding lines/selections were proven suitable under Philippine conditions.

BAR, ICRISAT to test new legumes

At right, ICRISAT officials show a good stand of sweet sorghum. Based on DA-BAR field tests, several of such varieties--for food, feed and bio-ethanol uses--are adapting well in the Philippines.



In fact, three of its peanut lines have already passed the standard field testing requirements of legumes under the National Cooperative Test (NCT). (Rita T. dela Cruz, DA-BAR)

Minimal rat damage in Nueva Ecija

Rat infestations in Nueva Ecija palay farms are very minimal, according to DA-Region 3 director Redentor Gatus.

In his report to Secretary Arthur Yap, Gatus said timely massive rat poison campaign was the key, teaming up with the Office of Provincial Agriculturist of Nueva Ecija and Municipal Agricultural Offices in Talavera and Sta. Rosa.

They jointly carried out an "Oplan Pain" using zinc phosphide as rat poison.

He belied earlier media reports of rampant rat attacks in Talavera, saying these were only true for rice fields near creeks and irrigation canals.

Further, as reported by Andres Padilla, the provincial IPM and crop protection coordinator of Nueva Ecija, only an average of 4.3% of the total rice fields in 16 municipalities was attacked by rats.

For her part, Virginia Ferrer, Municipal Agriculturist of Talavera, said only two to five percent in her town was rat-infested.

She said in Talavera, the Mabaloslos Creek and NIA sub-irrigation canals serve as breeding grounds of rats.

Creeks and canals are frequently inhabited by rats because of the abundance of dirty water and animals consumed by the vermin such as frogs and snails,

In all, a united community effort is essential to eradicate rats.

This can be done by employing the following procedures:

1. Proper sanitation or removing all straw piles in the paddies after harvest;
2. Synchronous planting, prefer-

ably within the month of the regular planting time; and

3. Synchronous extermination of the rodents by massive application of rodenticides like zinc phosphide.

Gatus said it is also imperative to teach farmers various ways to eliminate rats.

These included narrowing the sizes of their dikes and levies, six inches in height and eight inches in width so as to preclude rats from living in them and digging the holes and burrows found in their farms, he said.

Farmers are also advised to encircle the rice fields with plastic sheets through the Total Rat Barrier System.

This should be done one month before the regular planting.

The plastic sheets are designed to trap the rats attempting to penetrate the fenced area, which houses rice plants intended to lure the rodents inside the blockade, Gatus said.

Besides Central Luzon, the DA has also extended assistance to farmers in Bicol and Cagayan Valley that were affected by floods and rat attacks.

Earlier, DA Bicol Regional Director Jose Dayao reported to Secretary Yap that they have to date distributed over 9,900 sacks of certified seeds to affected farmers in January in Bicol alone.

Another 1,200 bags from Pangasinan and 2,000 bags from Nueva Ecija were due for delivery in Bicol, Dayao said.

A total of 1,500 hectares of rice fields were damaged by rats in Bicol: 1,000 hectares in Albay, and the rest in Camarines Sur.

Model watershed coastal resource project up in Agusan Norte

The indiscriminate use and abuse of our natural resources, from the uplands and watersheds down to the coastal areas, continue to threaten not only our ecosystem, but also our life support system.

This is the regrettable scenario not only in the Philippines, but also worldwide.

There's a bit of good news!

A ray of hope shines in Mindanao, particularly in Nasipit, Agusan del Norte, where a novel community-based watershed and coastal resource management is ready to take off the ground, so to speak.

Implemented under the Department of Agriculture's Mindanao Rural Development Program—Adaptable Program Loan 2 (DA-MRDP), the project adopts a natural resource management strategy that cuts across the entire watershed area — from the upland, lowland and down to the coast.

The initiative features four related sub-projects, namely: Jaguimitan Community Based Agro-Forestry Project; Riverbank Stabilization Using Bio-Engineering Technology; Establishment and Development of Fishery Reserve in Punta;

and the Development of the Nasipit Marine Sanctuary. These projects total around P7 million.

But before the municipal government could proceed they should provide a counterpart of at least one-fifth or 20% of the total project cost.

Thus, Nasipit town officials, led by Mayor Roy Orlando Doyon and members of the Sangguniang Bayan, banded together to raise the needed counterpart, and sought financial support from the Provincial Government and other institutions, and they succeeded.

The Provincial Government through Governor Erlpe John Amante gave the municipality P170,000, while the Nasipit Water District shared P250,000.

Other partners—the DA-RFU 13, the target barangays, and a People's Organization—are also extending their share.

The Nasipitnons are thus hopeful for a bright future and sustainable development ahead.

The road ahead may seem difficult, but with strong partnership among the national government through DA-MRDP, LGUs, POs, and the private sector, nothing is impossible. (DA-MRDP)



Tomatoes (left and below) are grown between humidicola, a pasture grass. Intercropping vegetables is a profitable venture while waiting for forage grasses to grow.



Grow veggies in dairy farm

By Ching M. Lumanta

The parishioners of Sta. Cruz in Lipa City are now also raising vegetables, in addition to their ongoing venture -- raising dairy cattle.

This is the latest among the innovations that Pastor Roger has introduced in their farm. If you go by his logic, then you would know he has good reason to do so.

It takes some three months to grow forage grasses for grazing for large ruminants like cows.

Likewise, it takes also that same amount of time to grow cash crops, such as vegetable.

So, while waiting for the pasture grasses to grow, raising tomatoes, cabbage, and pepper in-between waiting periods was

beneficial to the parishioners.

The operating principle is by the time the cash crops are ready for harvest, the forage grasses have grown in time for livestock to pasture.

Cabbage can be intercropped with tomatoes and *Humidicola* grass.

After picking the tomatoes, the cabbage has enough space to

grow more leaves while the *Humidicola* grasses inch their way upwards.

What is the moral lesson in these times of dwindling resources?

Be it land or capital, the best way to beat the odds is being creative, innovative, focused, and making do with what is available.

Combining the strategy with a lot of common sense is a surefire formula "in growing money in trees."

Growing cash crops along with raising dairy cows to beat the economic crisis this 2009 can be done with one's self respect intact. Remember the Green Revolution?

The challenge is: Try it.

The church in Lipa -- the Batangueños -- shows that it can be done.

The alternative projects that provide for additional incomes not only help the church people provide for the food and nutrition needs of their families but, more importantly, keep them away from trouble for having so much time in their hands doing nothing. (DA-Nat'l. Dairy Authority)

It was a welcome sight in Villaba, Leyte, as villagers witnessed the first-ever parade of goats in colorful costumes.

For the first time in Eastern Visayas, particularly in Villaba, Leyte, a Farmers' Field and Market Day and Goat Festival were held.

The goat parade -- with around 200 goats of different breeds such as *Anglo-Nubian* and *Boer*, including upgraded 'natives' -- was made even more interesting with the animals' unique adornments, colorful costumes and accessories, while they walked around the thoroughfares of the municipality.

"What we see happening in the goat industry particularly in this part of the region is a positive impact of the Rural Enterprise Development (RED) through Innovative Goat Production Systems, a project spearheaded by RTD Wilson A. Cerbito," said Regional Executive Director Leo P. Cañeda.

"We are fortunate that Region-8 was included in the four pilot areas under the project. The other areas are Regions 1, 2 and 3.



Goats parade in Leyte

We are grateful for the all-out support of the municipal and provincial government, as well as the other collaborating agencies and most especially the farmers in the successful implementation of the project," he added.

He further mentioned that the RED project in the region covers the municipalities of Villaba and Tabango, in Leyte.

"Based on the latest inventory, we have 115,122 goat population in the region, in which Villaba, is known as the goat capital of

Region-8," said Dir. Cañeda.

Meantime, in his keynote speech, Edwin C. Villar, Director for Livestock Research and Development of the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD) said: "We have a very favorable market for goat nowadays. Once goat production in the region improves, we can export to other regions. Using the right technology on goat raising, I believe our farmers in the region can be as

competitive as other goat raisers anywhere, especially in Luzon.

"Right now, we are glad that our goat population especially in the areas covered under the project, are mostly upgraded, with good pasture and proper housing."

Other important activities were the launching of the technogabay; Investment Forum; Community-based Goat Marketing Enterprise and booth, logo, slogan and trivia contests; best buck/doe/kid contest, cooking contest and skills competition.

In all, the affair was attended by 150 participants, mostly of officials and members of the Villaba Association of Goat Entrepreneurs (VILLAGE) and farmers from nearby municipalities, LGU officials headed by Mayor Claudio Martin A. Larrazabal and Dir. Caneda and his staff, Dr. Jose L. Bacusmo of the Visayas State University, Dir. Paulino T. Cabahit of the Agricultural Training Institute-8, Manager Cresencio Deligero of the Phil. Crop Insurance Corp. and some personnel from the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist of Leyte led by Mr. Rogelio O. Portula. (Rodel G. Macapañas, DA-RFUB Info Div)

San Agustin, Isabela is country's 'buffalo capital'

"San Agustin, Isabela is known to have the most number of buffalo crossbreds in Region 2, if not in the Philippines," Mayor Virgilio A. Padilla declared.

"This resource, if continuously nurtured, will gain for the municipality the reputation of being the province's buffalo milk capital," he added.

At present, San Agustin takes pride in its close to 1,000 buffalo crossbreds that give added income to a good number of farmers.

Padilla said they bankrolled the training of 72 farmer-owners in 2001 on crossbred buffalo management, milk collection and processing, at the Department of Agriculture's Philippine Carabao Center (DA-PCC) at Cagayan State University, in Piat. In 2006, another 52 farmers were trained on the same courses.

After the training, the participants organized themselves into the San Agustin Crossbred Buffalo Farmers' Cooperative (SACBF). Their main business focused on the collection of milk, processing and selling of dairy products such as pastillas de leche (milk candies), kesong puti (white cheese), chocolate-flavored milk and yema (custard candy).

However, the group did not

pursue their interest due to lack of capital. The situation was remedied when the provincial government of Isabela led by Gov. Grace Padaca, upon seeing the potential of buffalo dairy industry in the area, donated P500,000 for

Employment (DOLE) organized the San Agustin Women Dairy Processing Association (SAWDPA), which is responsible for milk processing. The strong interest of the women convinced the DOLE to provide processing

diagnosis (PD). They were also provided with AI kit, liquid nitrogen field tanks, and continuous supply of frozen buffalo semen and other items. Then former Isabela Provincial Veterinarian Dr. Andrew Villacorta, now assistant regional director of DA-RFU II, played a key role by providing his full support.

To give San Agustin farmers with better appreciation of buffalo-based dairy enterprise development, PCC organized educational tours (Lakbay Aral) to various dairy cooperatives in Nueva Ecija and Laguna provinces.

San Agustin farmers will undertake several initiatives to further improve their operations.

These include four major initiatives:

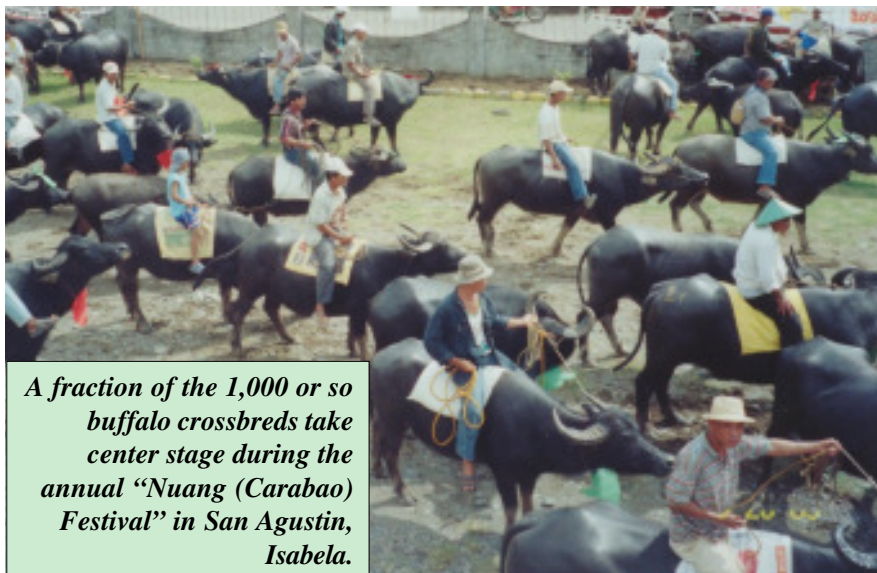
1. Gradual improvement of their milk processing center to cater to the growing milk

production in the area;

2. Production of superior crossbred progenies with higher bloodline from 50% Murrah blood to as high as 87.5% or higher to improve the quality of their dairy buffaloes;

3. Establishment of a triple A slaughterhouse and meat freezing plant for meat derived from fattened male crossbreds and unproductive cows and bulls; and

4. Establishment of close linkages with various government agencies and private groups that provide technical and financial support. (DA-Phil. Carabao Center)



A fraction of the 1,000 or so buffalo crossbreds take center stage during the annual "Nuang (Carabao) Festival" in San Agustin, Isabela.

the construction of a milk processing center in the municipality. The building is already nearing completion.

With this development, a new cooperative was formed in July 2008 called the San Agustin Dairy Development Cooperative (SADADECO). It was organized collectively by the crossbred owners in 23 barangays (villages), which were divided into six different clusters. Each cluster is composed of three to five barangays.

Meanwhile, the provincial office of the Department of Labor and

equipment worth P150,000. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) also gave its share by training the coop's farmer-members on packaging and marketing of dairy products, and assisting them in promoting their products in various trade fairs in Cagayan Valley.

For its part, PCC facilitated the production of buffalo crossbreds in by loaning out to interested barangays 17 purebred Murrah buffalo bulls. Moreover, the center trained six municipal and barangay technicians on artificial insemination (AI) and pregnancy

Salmonella is 'under control' in Samar

Tacloban City – "This situation calls for our cooperation and vigilance," ordered Department of Agriculture Region 8 Executive Director Leo P. Cañeda, as he received reports of hog mortalities in Brgy. Old Manunca, Sta. Rita, Samar, in December last year.

His office immediately conducted an investigation and laboratory tests of liver and tissue samples of animals infected with *salmonella*.

It was not hog cholera as earlier reported, Cañeda revealed.

Hogs infected with *salmonella* bacteria exhibit clinical signs, such as inappetence, high fever, diarrhea, nasal discharge and conjunctivitis.

He said that the DA-8, through its Quick Response Team in collaboration with the local officials of Sta. Rita and neighboring municipi-

palities, including Tacloban City, are presently administering certain prevention and control measures against the disease.

"We have been conducting a series of animal health missions in that municipality, giving priority to the affected barangays.

So far, 334 pigs had been treated, 252 were given prophylaxis and 87 were vaccinated," Dir. Cañeda disclosed.

Latest data indicate a total of 676 sick pigs, 84 of which have died, while 25 were slaughtered when detected by owners that the a0 been prevented if only suspected animals were at once reported and consequently given treatment. We encourage the hog raisers to immediately contact the nearest veterinary or agriculture office once they observe manifestations of the

disease," he stressed.

Based on assessment, at least 90% of the animals given treatment have recovered, Dir. Caneda added.

"We are presently intensifying information campaign focused on proper management practices in backyard swine raising, observance of good hygiene and proper disposal of dead animals.

"In order to prevent the spread of the disease to non-affected areas, we recommended a 30-day strict quarantine regulation in Sta. Rita. This means, in particular, that movement of hogs will be regulated through several checkpoints installed at strategic locations.

"Likewise, we proposed banning the slaughter of sick animals," he concluded. (Rodel G. Macapañas & Jessa Faye G. Esponilla -- DA-RFU8 Info Div)

RP, Korea forge agri-livestock MOU

The Philippines and South Korea recently forged a memorandum of agreement (MOU) to enhance bilateral cooperation in agriculture and livestock industries.

The MOU was signed January 6, 2009, by Dr. Libertado Cruz, executive director of the DA-Philippine Carabao Center (DA-PCC), Director Hak Kyo Lee of the Gyeonggi-do Regional Research Center (GRRC) of Hankyung National University, and Director Jong Kee Kim of GRRC-Chungang University at the DA-PCC, Muñoz, Nueva Ecija.

The agreement calls for technical cooperation for two years, focusing on conduct of collaborative researches and training, and dispatch of experts in the fields of dairy farm management, and ensuring production of hygienic and safe products. (Minda Diloy, DA-PCC)

From the Regions

Selected news and developments on agriculture, fisheries, agribusiness and related sectors, as reported by the DA-Regional Field Units, and those published in national and provincial publications.

Rubber program in South Mindanao in full swing

"In unity, there is strength."

Thus said Dr. Roger C. Chio, DA Davao regional executive director, as he recognized projects collaborated by various government agencies during a formal launch of the Rubber Development Program in Southern Mindanao at RIARC Satellite Station for Hillyland in Marahan, Marilog, Davao City. That was in 2006, when the vast, idle, and barren hilly terrains in the area were seen everywhere.

Today, the opportunity in this vast terrain becomes a sprawling productive agricultural hub of indigenous and tropical cash crops of vegetables, high value fruit crops, root crops, and plantation crops.

"Research is allocated in this 50-ha area. We want to empower and help our poor indigenous brothers not only earn from their labor, but from them to become entrepreneurs in the near future" quipped Dr. Alfredo M. Cayabyab, chief of the Southern Mindanao Integrated Agricultural Research Center (SMIARC).

He added that various rubber-based projects are established in the area in close collaboration with various units and program of DA-RFU 11, private sector, local government units (LGUs), members of the academe, and concerned stakeholders.

Noel T. Estellena, SMIARC senior agriculturist and chief of hillyland farming station in Marilog said that the "rubber program came at time when DA RFU 11 is starting to focus in developing the station adding that it was an opportune time that the Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR) has included rubber as its priority commodity for research and development (R&D).

"Rubber is a viable agro-forest crop suited to grow in hilly areas. The crop's increasing trend in market demand and Davao's favorable climate made it ideal for growing rubber which is comparable to Malaysia's condition", Estellena stressed.

Curious on how this project will gain impact, Prospero Tanutan, regional rubber coordinator and program leader, explained that rubber

becomes productive on its sixth year but with proper care and maintenance, tapping can start as early as its fourth year. Farmer can earn a cumulative net income of 32,000 per hectare from cuplump during the second year of tapping.

With high value intercrop like lakatan banana, planted in between double rows of rubber, Tanutan has already yielded six cycles of harvest, since his farm was established in August 2007. Initial harvests from sweet potato and cassava were likewise noted as promising. The latter cuttings were used as shade for the growing lanzones as another intercrop to rubber plants.

Jessel Cardines, project in-charge, reported on several components of the program such as adaptability trial on different clones

of rubber, where she observed the amazing growth of rubber clones, PB 260, PB 330, and USM 1.

The establishments of rubber nursery and budwood garden in Marahan and in Central Experimental Station (CES) in Manambulan have already gained their impacts. Cardines reported that 18 municipalities in the five provinces of Region 11 were given quality rubber buddings from four different clones as source for their respective budwood gardens.

On technology transfer, Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities have been successfully undertaken from 2006 to 2008 wherein 452 rubber stakeholders were trained on planting rubber. They were also given copies of print materials as references. Rubber enthusiasts coming from different

provinces in Mindanao and other regions have also come to the area for a field tour of the project.

Cardines said that with BAR's continued fund support, phase II of the program has now been implemented. Three hectares expansion project was devoted to rubber-based farming system. An initial one hectare on rubber + coffee (Robusta) has been established which will be followed by another one hectare on rubber + cacao (F-1 hybrid). Earmarked for the year are expansion projects on rubber nursery area for seedlings propagation and additional area for production projects.

Part of the station initiatives was the establishment of a reservoir that supplied the potable water for household use. Through the High-Value Commercial Crop (HVCC) program, manpower, infrastructure, and vehicle unit were provided in support to the hillyland projects of SMIARC. This serves as reinforcement in the efficient delivery of services to the stakeholders. (*Anecita Telabangco and Jessel Cardines, DA-SMIARC*)

Lanao Norte farm families benefit from 'PEACE'

The Productivity Enhancement in Agriculture through Community Empowerment (PEACE) project is reaching out to rural folk in three barangays of Baroy, Lanao del Norte with technology interventions and opportunities to augment income of households.

The project -- initiated by the Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Unit 10 (DA-RFU 10) and the Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR) through the Northern Mindanao Integrated Agricultural Research Center (NOMIARC) -- has provided farm inputs, livestock, technical assistance, and technology interventions to an initial 42 farmer-cooperators in Barangays Pange, Upper Sagadan, and Princesa.

Re-dispersal and rollover of benefits sustain the project ensuring extension to more community beneficiaries thereafter.

Components of the project include crop diversification, poultry and livestock production and capability building.

Cropping patterns in diversified farming systems using component technologies were introduced, namely: organic + inorganic fertilizer application, use of appropriate and improved varieties, Integrated

Nutrient Management (INM), and Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

To maximize land utilization, income, and ensure affordable meat for the family, livestock production (goat and swine) is integrated in the system. Initially, improved breeds of one packet of goat (1 buck and 5 does) and weaned piglets for each barangay were delivered to beneficiaries.

A group of PEACE staff, led by Project Leader Cora Dumayaca and Site Coordinator Jaime Jerusalem recently met the recipients of

the project and discussed issues/concerns on how the project progressed in the sites.

Dionesio Artajo, one of the recipients, said he is most enthusiastic that with the PEACE and the continuing cooperation of community members, more of his community folks can experience greater opportunities to improved living conditions, more food available at table, more income and self-sufficiency. (*Mae Odimir Abarabar-Morales, DA-NOMIARC*)



Above are some of the PEACE beneficiaries in Baroy, Lanao Norte.

Baguio City — A monitoring team from the Department of Agriculture's National Agriculture and Fishery Council (DA-NAFC) has recently completed its initial monitoring and validation of agricultural infrastructure projects in the Cordillera, funded by the DA, National Irrigation Administration (DA-NIA), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), and local government units (LGUs).

As part of its mandate, the NAFC was requested by DA Secretary Arthur Yap to undertake the independent evaluation. I joined the

concrete marker, declaring that it was a DA-assisted project.

In another locality, when the evaluation team asked a farmer whom he thought constructed the FMR, he answered: "An NGO did it."

It was also unfortunate that the DA's Bureau of Postharvest Research and Extension (BPRE) and NIA have also neglected to install signboards and permanent markers on their on-going and completed projects.

What is the big fuss about project signboards and permanent mark-

Wanted: Permanent markers

By Robert L. Domoguen

team in some of its trips to the hinterlands, not as an evaluator, but to document some of the completed and on-going projects.

The NAFC evaluation team has yet to prepare and submit its findings to the DA Secretary. I am writing this as my own impression.

Specifically for the Cordillera, we may declare that for CY 2007-2008, the DA implemented millions-worth of farm-to-market roads (FMRs), multi-purpose drying pavements (MPDPs), small farm reservoirs (SFRs), spring development projects (SDPs), screenhouses and greenhouses, footpaths, agricultural tramlines, small water impounding projects (SWIPs), diversion dams (DDs), and delivered farm and postharvest equipment.

The public may have actually seen a lot of completed or on-going infrastructure work or deliveries of farm and postharvest equipment. But without labels, signboards and markers, the credit can go to anybody or organization, except the right one, the DA and NIA. For instance, only one of all the FMRs we visited in one province had a

ers anyway?

Simply, they tell the public what the project is all about. In fact, the implementers install them as an act of transparency and commitment to follow through with the requirements of the project. Of course, putting the name of the agency and the people involved in the project tells the public that they are primarily involved and accountable for such facility or infrastructure.

The markers or signboards contain basic information, such as: project's name, cost, proponent, starting date, and target or actual completion date, purpose, and technical dimensions, among others.

But it is worth it, if a permanent marker is installed in every project. This will be a good reference to commend the implementer if the project would last beyond its expected life, or denounce the responsible agency if it did last long enough, say, for only a few months.

Markers are therefore tools of transparency, as the projects should be implemented well.

DA-Cordillera Regional Executive



Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap (2nd from right) inspects the construction of irrigation canals, at Bgy. Lataag, Laoag City, which forms part of the P8-million Laoag-Vintar River Irrigation System. Once completed in May, the project will irrigate 1,850 hectares and benefit 2,642 farmers.

DA fasttracks implementation of countryside infra projects

This year, the Department of Agriculture through the National Irrigation Administration (DA-NIA) will continue to restore and rehabilitate national and communal irrigation systems, with a proposed 2009 budget of P6 billion.

It will enable the agency to rehabilitate 24,430 hectares (has.) and restore 41,735 has.

Last year, the DA-NIA has allotted P206 million in the Ilocos Region, rehabilitating 1,688 has. and restoring 2,852 has.

Early this month, Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap visited

Director Cesar Rodriguez has been particular on installing project signboards and markers.

And provincial officials support him like Governor Maximo Dalog of Mt. Province and Governor Eustaquio Bersamin of Abra. I am certain that other governors in the region share the same sentiment.

Thus, for every DA-CAR project, our field personnel would prepare steel, G.I sheets or wooden signboards, which are delivered to the beneficiaries. However, some beneficiaries do not want to install the signboards. Worse, some markers already set up were stolen.

In the case of FMRs, it is proposed that the contractors should set-up the permanent markers themselves. To ensure that markers are not stolen or destroyed, these should be in the form of cement structures.

(Editor's note: The author is the Regional Information Officer of DA-Cordillera Administrative Region)

Laoag City and inspected the rehabilitation and restoration of irrigation systems to highlight the urgency of fasttracking the implementation of agri infrastructure projects within the first semester of 2009.

One such project is the rehabilitation of the Laoag-Vintar River Irrigation System.

While there, he also committed to pursue other infrastructure projects in Laoag City, totaling P22M. Of this amount, P14M will go to the repair and rehabilitation of national irrigation systems, particularly the Laoag-Vintar NIS and additional P2.5 million for other irrigation projects; P2.5M for FMRs and one flatbed dryer; and P3M for fish cages through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

Yap also enjoined the farmers to avail of the loan programs of the DA with P3B in the Land Bank of the Philippines as guaranteed fund for rural and thrift banks.

For this purpose, he directed all branch managers of LBP to make further information and massive promotion drive about the loan programs to enable farmers to avail said program

Aside from these commitments, Yap in his visit took chance to interact with the officers and members of the irrigators association and heard directly from them their issues and concerns.

Realizing all these bold moves and doable strategies, Yap expressed high hope that the country would be able to surpass again the challenge of dwindling global economic conditions this CY 2009.



Shown above is the ongoing concreting of a DA-NIA funded tunnel type irrigation system in Abra.

International News Round-up

A digest of selected news, developments and breakthrough agriculture, fisheries, agribusiness and related fields culled from websites and publications of international institutions and organizations.

IFAD, FAO and EC extend assistance to bankroll part of RP rice program

Three United Nations food and development agencies — the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Program (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) — continue to join hands to protect the welfare of the poorest and hungriest by providing direct support to governments on an emergency basis and beyond, while providing resources and designing policies to re-launch agriculture and revitalize rural economies.

For instance, together with the Government of the Philippines, IFAD and FAO developed the Rapid Food Production Enhancement Program, which aims to contribute to government's emergency responses to soaring food prices. In particular, it will; support long-term plans of the Philippines to improve paddy production; contribute to government policy and its development efforts to improve the overall living condition of rural people in all regions; and facilitate policy dialogue in the agriculture sector.

IFAD will finance the program with a loan of US\$15.9 million and a grant of US\$500,000. Recently, the European Commission also approved a •10-million grant to co-finance the program by scaling up its coverage and scope. Two projects will be implemented under

the program: The Rapid Seed Supply Financing Project, which seeks to acquire and distribute just under 1,000,000 bags of certified inbred paddy seeds during the 2009 dry season crop in selected rice-producing provinces; and the Irrigated Rice Production Enhancement Project, which will support the rehabilitation of at least 5,000 hectares of communal irrigation schemes in focus provinces, under the Philippines' initiative entitled, 'Focusing on Increasing Provincial Productivity – Rice Self-Sufficiency Plan 2009-2013.' The plan envisions to attain 100-per cent sufficiency in rice by 2013.

"Access by farmers, especially indigenous people and women, to resources such as land, water and rural financial services, is key to ensuring food security," said Sana F.K. Jatta, IFAD country program manager, during the Second IFAD-Philippines Partners Knowledge and Learning Market: Food Security, People's Wealth, held in Manila, 28-29 October 2008.

Given the right support and opportunity to access resources, and with their high level of adaptability and resourcefulness, Filipinos can cope with the challenge posed by the soaring food prices, he said. (IFAD Newsletter Issue 24: Jan-Feb 2009)

Human urine: Safe, cheap fertilizer

Researchers in Finland report successful use of an unlikely fertilizer for farm fields that is inexpensive, abundantly available, and undeniably organic — human urine.

Despite the 'yuk!' factor, urine from healthy individuals is virtually sterile, free of bacteria or viruses. Naturally rich in nitrogen and other nutrients, urine has been used as fertilizer since ancient times.

Urine fertilization is rare today but it has gained attention in some areas as farmers embrace organic production methods and try to reduce use of synthetic fertilizers.

In the new study, human urine was collected from private homes and used it to fertilize cabbage crops.

The analysis showed that growth and biomass were slightly higher



with urine than with conventional fertilizer.

There was no difference in nutritional value of the cabbage. The results show that human urine could be used as a fertilizer for cabbage, and does not pose any significant hygienic threats or leave any distinctive flavor in food products. (sciencedaily.com)



Half of world's people could face climate-induced food crisis by 2100

New research shows that rapidly warming climate is likely to seriously alter crop yields in the tropics and subtropics by the end of this century and, without adaptation, will leave half of the world's population facing serious food shortages.

The stresses on global food production from temperature alone are going to be huge, and that doesn't take into account water supplies stressed by the higher temperatures.

Thus, there is a compelling reason to invest in adaptation because it will take decades to develop new food crop varieties that can better withstand a warmer climate.

There is greater than a 90 per cent probability that by 2100 the

lowest growing-season temperatures in the tropics and subtropics will be higher than any temperatures recorded to date.

In the tropics, the higher temperatures can be expected to cut yields of primary food crops, maize and rice, by 20 to 40 percent, researchers said.

But rising temperatures also are likely to play havoc with soil moisture, cutting yields even further.

Many people will just move out of agriculture, and even move from the lands where they live now.

Currently 3 billion people live in the tropics and subtropics, and their number is expected to nearly double by the end of the century. (www.sciencedaily.com)

Biofuels are more harmful to humans than petrol, diesel

Some biofuels cause more health problems than petrol and diesel, according to scientists who have calculated the health costs associated with different types of fuel.

The study shows that corn-based bio-ethanol, produced extensively in the US, has a higher combined environmental and health burden than conventional fuels. However, there are high hopes for the next generation of biofuels, which can be made from organic waste or plants grown on marginal land that is not used to grow foods. They have less than half the combined health and environmental costs of standard gasoline and a third of current biofuels.

Several studies last year showed that growing corn to make ethanol biofuels was pushing up the price of food. Environmentalists have highlighted other problems such

deforestation to clear land for growing crops to make the fuels.

The health problems caused by conventional fuels are well studied and stem from soot particles and other pollution produced when they are burned. Problems are caused by particles given off during their growth and manufacture.

Health problems from biofuels and gasoline include increased cases of heart disease, respiratory symptoms, asthma, chronic bronchitis or premature death. The team has calculated the economic costs associated with these. (www.guardian.co.uk)

Agriculture is the noblest of all alchemy; for it turns earth, and even manure, into gold, conferring upon its cultivator the additional reward of health.
-Paul Chatfield

'GIFT' will provide Asians, Africans low-cost, high-quality fish protein

Aquaculture is expected to play a crucial role in meeting the developing world's growing demand for fish, which is likely to double by 2020, according to World Fish Center.

It currently accounts for 30 per cent of the global fish output and is the fastest growing segment of world food production.

It is an increasingly important activity to the economies of developing countries, which account for 90 per cent of the world's aquaculture output.

And one aquaculture species will play a major role.

It is known as *GIFT* (Genetically Improved Farmed Tilapia). It will help farmers raise fish that are bigger and grow faster.

The tilapia, often called the 'aquatic chicken,' is now the most widely farmed fish in the tropics. It originated in Africa, but is now farmed extensively in Asia.

The freshwater fish is prolific and easy to grow. It is also exceptionally hardy and requires little or no expensive high-protein feed to grow quickly. The fish eats almost anything

from grass clippings to vegetable matter and suspended solids.

Also, it requires only modest amounts of water — the fish tolerates incredible overcrowding — and is cultivated in many different types of production systems, from extensive to super-intensive practices at small-scale as well as large-scale level.

GIFT grows 60 per cent faster

and has a 50 per cent higher survival rate to adulthood than the original fish. Sometimes also known as the Super Tilapia, the fish was developed through vigorous selection-breeding programs — the first time a

tropical food fish has been improved using such methods. The fish used to breed *GIFT* was the Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*).

The fish allows three crops a year, instead of two that is obtained with normal strains. Impact assessments show that *GIFT* farmers enjoy significantly lower production costs (20 to 30 per cent) and better profits.

Being fast growing and high yielding, *GIFT* has encouraged

more of the poor to take up fish farming, and in the process promote low cost, environmentally friendly aquaculture. It has also given economic empowerment to women who grow them in local ponds.

GIFT is now being farmed in 13 countries in Asia — including Bangladesh, China, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam — where it is making important contributions to increasing the supply of low-cost, high-quality protein to the poor.

GIFT was developed with funding from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Asian Development Bank.

The Philippines' Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and Central Luzon State University collaborated on the project, along with the Aquaculture Research Institute of Norway and institutions in Egypt, Ghana, Kenya and Senegal. (www.worldfishcenter.org)



New bird flu cases revive fears of human pandemic

Hong Kong, believed to have been free of H5N1, is forced to cull thousands of poultry after a recent outbreak. Meanwhile, two avian flu deaths are reported in Egypt and Indonesia.

Just when it thought it could

ter a two-year decline in the number of confirmed human deaths from H5N1 bird flu and as fewer countries are reporting outbreaks among poultry. The United Nations report showed improved surveillance and the rapid culling of potentially infected poultry for helping to contain and even prevent outbreaks in many countries.

H5N1 already has been a disaster for poultry farmers in Asia. Public health officials estimate that as many as half a billion fowl

have been killed by the virus or culled to contain its spread, causing enormous economic strain and food shortages. But the bigger fear has always been that H5N1 would give rise to a human pandemic like the so-called Spanish flu of 1918, which killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide. And as long as the virus continues to circulate, the threat that it could mutate to pass more easily among humans remains, according to the U.N. report. (www.latimes.com)



scratch bird flu off its list of things to worry about in 2009, the deadly H5N1 virus has resurfaced in Hongkong in poultry for the first time in six years, reinforcing warnings that the threat of a human pandemic isn't over.

India, Bangladesh, Vietnam and mainland China also experienced new outbreaks in December. During the same period, four new human cases -- in Egypt, Cambodia and Indonesia -- were reported to the World Health Organization.

The new cases come af-

'World Agri Forum' set in Thailand

The World Agricultural Forum will hold the 2009 Asia Roundtable in Phuket, Thailand, March 8-10, 2009, with the theme, "Balancing the Agricultural Bottom Line."

Topics to be discussed include agriculture's impact on the global economy and its potential to reverse current conditions, and on managing risks and exploring the options for securing the finance needed to sustain and grow agriculture in a global recession.

The forum strives to generate action plans to form effective partnerships between the participants, while attracting greater global attention to agriculture. Participants include heads-of-state and other government officials, corporate CEOs, leaders of non-governmental organizations and renowned academics.

The Asia Roundtable will serve as the final meeting leading up to the World Agricultural Forum's Sixth Biennial World Congress, scheduled on May 18-20, 2009, in St. Louis, Missouri, USA. (www.poultry.com)

Egg intake linked to diabetes risk

People who sit down to a daily breakfast of eggs may have an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes, new research suggests.

In a long-term study of 57,000 U.S. adults, researchers found that those who ate an egg a day were 58 percent to 77 percent more likely than non-egg-eaters to develop type 2 diabetes.

Based on the current data, it is recommended to consume eggs in moderation and not to exceed six eggs per week.

The study does not explain ex-

actly why eggs are linked to diabetes, but cholesterol may play a role. The study participants' daily cholesterol intake was also related to diabetes risk, and when the researchers factored this in, the relationship between egg intake and diabetes weakened. (www.reuters.com)



'Golden rice,' anyone?

The Philippines may be the first country to commercialize Vitamin A-fortified or 'golden rice' to provide a healthier staple for Filipinos.

Golden rice is rich in Vitamin A, Vitamin E, Zinc and Iron, and resistant to tungro, said Director Ronilo A. Beronio, of the Department of Agriculture's Philippine Rice Research Institute (DA-PhilRice).

In 2004, Swiss biotechnology firm Syngenta donated the Golden Rice, which is characterized by its high beta-carotene content, to the Humanitarian Board, granting investors and countries license-free rights to use and enhance the technology.


Since then, the government has tried to crossbreed it with local strains.

"It is now under the confined testing. Thereafter, we will test it in the fields," Beronio said.

The rice will then be subjected to assessments to ensure the qual-

Golden Rice

A genetically modified rice that produces high amount of beta-carotene in its grains, producing its characteristic yellow color




+ *Phytoene synthase gene from maize*

and

+ *Phytoene desaturase gene from a common bacterium*

➔



Source: Dr. Antonio A. Alfonso, DA-PhilRice

ity and safety of the produce.

"There has been a significant improvement (in beta-carotene content). Now we have 15% to 25% microorganism of beta-carotene per gram from less than 10% before," Beronio said.

"Among our crops, rice is the most important food crop, espe-

cially for the poor," said Randy A. Hautea, director for Southeast Asia of the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications.

Other countries interested on commercializing golden rice are China, Vietnam and Thailand. (*Business World*)

MIRI reduces water use in rice fields

Rice is a labor-intensive crop that also requires plenty of water. Often, water pumped to flood rice fields comes from shallow aquifers that are dwindling.

The Agricultural Research Service (ARS) of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and cooperating scientists are studying a system that cuts water use by 24 percent, called multiple-inlet rice irri-

gation (or MIRI).

It involves laying disposable, thin-walled, polyethylene irrigation tubing to connect rice paddies as they are flooded with water. Currently, most rice fields are flooded by gravity, discharging water from the highest paddy and allowing it to flow into lower paddies.

Reducing irrigation water on MIRI fields is important to farmers for

more than just water and energy savings, since rice fields often share water supply with other crops. The amount of water available to irrigate other crops usually depends on how much water is used to first adequately irrigate rice fields. Thus, a 24-percent reduction in rice crop's water usage could mean higher yields for other crops. (www.ars.usda.gov)

Flood-tolerant rice may solve hunger

DAVIS, California -Scientists have bred a new strain of flood-tolerant rice that could help feed mil-

lions.

Rice is grown in flooded fields, usually to kill weeds. But rice plants do not like it when they are submerged in water for long periods.

Normal rice dies after three days of complete flooding. Researchers know of at least one rice variety that can tolerate flooding for longer periods, but conventional breeding failed to create a strain that was acceptable to farmers.

The isolated the gene, called Sub1, and introduced into normal rice varieties, is a generating rice that could withstand being sub-

merged in water for 17 days.

Using precision breeding, scientists introduced the Sub1 gene three years ago into test fields in Bangladesh and India. The subsequent rice harvests were a resounding success.

The farmers found three- to five-fold increases in yield due to flood tolerance. They can plant the normal way. They can harvest the normal way and it tastes the same. Farmers had more food for their families and they also had additional rice they could sell to bring a little bit of money into the household.

Because the plants are the product of precision breeding, rather than genetic modification, they are not subject to the same regulatory testing that can delay release of genetically modified crops.

Farmers hope to have drought-tolerant, salt-tolerant and insect-resistant varieties someday. (www.cnn.com)

Three biotech crops in the offing

Davao City -Three modified crops would be available in the next three years, according to Dr. Eufemio Rasco of the University of the Philippines in Mindanao.

These include a variety of *Khak Nuan papaya*, genetically-modified to resist the common pest ringspot, an eggplant variety modified to resist fruit and shoot borers, and Golden Rice. They would add to the four already in the market: Bt corn, soybeans, cotton and canola.

In Mindanao, Rasco has led the field experiments in *sago*, a kind of palm, where starch could be derived for baking and other industrial uses, and source of lactic acid; and the *pitcher plant*, for ornamental use. He said experiments have been done in the last 12 years.

He is also experimenting on a plant called *nepenthes*, which exhibits the unique characteristics of being a cross between a plant and an animal. "It grows like other plants would, but it also feeds on other plants, a different kind of 'plant-animal' hybrid," he said.

The plant could become a new platform for genetic engineering. "We may hijack its own sap to determine why it eats on other plants, while growing as a plant," Rasco explained.

Nepenthes is an ornamental plant, "and biotechnology could help save this plant-endemic in the Philippines-from extinction."

"Yes, this is an endangered species," he said.

"These are our achievements in plant biotechnology: seed propagation media, hydropriming biology of flowering and seed production; in-vitro cutting propagation, callus and regeneration, plant growing media, acclimatization, selling of in-vitro seedlings and selling of clones," he said.

Contrary to common perceptions, however, "what we are using here in the Philippines is still the traditional kind of biotechnology, but we are using new materials," Rasco added.

In developed economies, scientists use gene-splicing, or genetic engineering and protoplast fusion, or, "in general, any technique that forces unnatural or horizontal DNA transfer.

He said current uses of traditional biotechnology are in food processing and production, biomedical applications such as drugs and vaccines, and in industrial applications such as cleaning agents. (*Business Mirror*)



lions.

As sea levels rise and world weather patterns worsen, flooding has become a major cause of rice crop loss. Scientists estimate 4 million tons of rice are lost every year because of flooding. That's

Agri-infra ... (from p1)

would contribute to increase food production and incomes of farmers and fishers, reduce postharvest losses, speed up the transport and distribution of farm and fishery products to the markets, and improve the competitiveness of small farmers and fisherfolk.

He also called on Congress of the Philippines to do its share by passing an economic stimulus bill that would bankroll commitments reached during the Jobs Summit.

The other government agencies that committed their respective contributions during the Jobs Summit are the Departments of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Education (DepEd), Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Labor and Employment (DOLE), Trade and Industry (DTI), and State Universities and Colleges (SUCs).

In all, under the FIELDS program, the DA will continue to implement infrastructure and livelihood projects nationwide, which include:

- Production of organic fertilizers in Ilocos;
- Construction of flatbed dryers,

repair of irrigation systems, and agro-forestry projects in Cagayan Valley;

- Production of organic fertilizers and vegetables in the Cordilleras;
- Livestock production and construction of irrigation systems in Central Luzon;
- Setting up of more Tindahan Natin outlets in Metro Manila;
- Construction and repair of irrigation systems in Bicol;
- Swine livelihood, bantay-dagat program and establishment of Balicasag marine sanctuary in Central Visayas;
- Construction of FMRs and flatbed dryers and employment of Bantay-Dagat in Eastern Visayas;
- Livestock production, coconut-corn intercropping and agro-forestry in Zamboanga Peninsula;
- Repair of irrigation systems and production of organic fertilizer in Northern Mindanao;
- Agribusiness, irrigation projects and fishers' livelihood programs in Davao;
- Marine management resource project in Soccsksargen; and
- Fisherfolk livelihood programs at the ARMM.

DA-BAI culls ... (from p1)

The DA-BAI will also survey adjoining farms to ensure that the ERV is effectively contained, including other major swine diseases.

Secretary Yap made the announcement, along with Health Secretary Francisco Duque III, during a press conference, February 23, at the DA's Bureau of Soils and Water Management (DA-BSWM), in Quezon City, after receiving the complete laboratory test results of the 160 pig blood and tissue samples analyzed by the Research Institute of Tropical Medicine of the Department of Health (DOH-RITM) and the US Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC), in Atlanta, USA.

Of the total samples, 133 came from Bulacan and 27 from Pangasinan.

RITM and CDC analysis showed there is ongoing ERV transmission in Bulacan, but none in Pangasinan.

"From the time of the collection of the samples up to the present, none of the pigs in both farms showed signs of any illness. Quarantine can now be lifted in the Pangasinan farm," Secretary Yap said.

The RITM and US CDC likewise tested 147 human samples — from

'Let's all be proactive'

Thus said newly-appointed Press Secretary Cerge Remonde, as he urged more than a hundred public information officers (PIOs) of various government departments, agencies and corporations who convened February 12, at Manila Hotel, for their first consultative meeting, upon his invitation.

"Let us all serve as catalysts in effectively disseminating and communicating the accomplishments and priorities of the Macapagal-Arroyo administration to achieve the country's development goals," added Remonde, who was appointed to his new post February 1, 2009.

He lamented that President Arroyo's policies and programs have not been proactively and adequately communicated to the people, thereby creating a gap between public perception and what is actually happening.

"We must close this gap to bring governance closer to the people and make them productive participants towards nation building," noted Remonde, who previously served as Presidential Management Staff Director-General.

Thus, barely two weeks as press secretary, he instructed the holding of the first consultative conference of PIOs under his watch

"to specifically attend to this glaring crack in the government information dissemination system."

Secretary Remonde distinguished himself as a hard-hitting Cebu radio broadcaster, who was elected national chairman of the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pllipinas (KBP) for a record six terms.

"If there is any group of people who know the sacrifices,

the endeavors, the efforts being made by public servants in public service, people who know what good the government has done and has been doing, it is the PIOs," he said.

Heeding his call, the PIOs pledged to consolidate their respective efforts in responding to the needs of the people, and agreed to be grouped accordingly, following the Cabinet cluster system. They also concurred to convene regularly to share strategies and experiences in effectively and efficiently communicating the modest successes and triumphs of the Arroyo administration.

The DA was represented by Noel O. Reyes, Information Service OIC-Director; Cheryl Coloma-Suarez, editorial section chief; and Cecille Quimbo of the Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority.



Press Secretary Cerge Remonde



Wearing the prescribed personal protective equipment (PPE), Dir. Davinio Catbagan (center) leads volunteer veterinarians and workers from the DA-BAI and provincial government of Bulacan, including the Department of Health and international observers, as they commence the depopulation procedures in Pandi, Bulacan.

affected farms in Bulacan and Pangasinan, and from slaughterhouses in Pangasinan and Cabanatuan — for ERV antigens and antibodies (either IgG or IgM). Of these, six were found to be positive for IgG antibodies.

"The additional positive human sample (five were previously reported) was traced to a male worker in a slaughterhouse in Cabanatuan. The worker was not sick when visited by the investigation team. He does not recall any direct contact with sick pigs, but remembers having flu-like illness in the past 12 months. There is no evidence however that the flu-like symptoms can be attributed to ERV infection," Health Secretary Duque said.

To date, Duque said ERV poses low risk to humans. However, as a general precaution, swine farm workers in Bulacan are advised to report to health workers in case they get sick.

"Until depopulation is carried out, some of the workers can still handle

pigs in the farm using of course, proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)," Secretary Duque said. All workers in farms and slaughterhouses should wear appropriate farm gloves, mask, boots, and apron.

The DA and DOH will continue to partner with international agencies, and LGUs to carry out further scientific studies to determine the source of the ERV in pigs, and characterize pig-to-pig and pig-to-human transmission and infection.

In all, Secretary Yap assures the general public that pork is safe to eat. It should be properly handled and cooked. Consumers should buy their pork and other meat from stores accredited by the DA-National Meat Inspection Service.

Likewise, he enjoins all farm owners and workers, and LGU veterinarians to immediately report sick pigs to the DA-BAI, tel. (02) 925-9999. Consumers are also encouraged to report suspected market retailers selling 'double-dead meat.'

SACY lauds BAI, DOH, int'l experts for nipping 'Ebola'

Giving credit where it is due.

Such was the appreciative and heart-warming mood of Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap, when he commended the men and women of the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Animal Industry (DA-BAI), international and Filipino experts, and representatives of the livestock and poultry industry, during the agency's 79th anniversary celebration.

"What could have been a disastrous blow to the country's reputation as a reliable source of high-quality agricultural products, not to mention the potential public health hazard it could generate, was nipped in the bud with the timely and decisive action to contain and manage the emergence of the Ebola Reston Virus (or ERV)," noted Secretary Yap

He thus thanked not only the BAI officials and staff, led by Dir. Davinio Catbagan, but also the vital and critical assistance extended by the Department of Health, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Office International des Epizooties (OIE) or World Organization for Animal Health, World Health Organization (WHO), and the country's livestock and poultry industry.

To symbolize the DA-BAI's gratitude, Secretary Yap and BAI Dir. Gatbagan handed over plaque of appreciation to five international and Filipino experts, during the anniversary celebration held February 25, at the BAI compound in Quezon City.

They include Dr. Juan Lubroth of FAO Rome, who led the joint mission of FAO, WHO, OIE, DA-BAI and DOH that conducted a 10-day investigation of ERV-affected swine farms in Bulacan and Pangasinan; Dr. Soe Nyunt-U, WHO representative in the Philippines; Mr. Kazuyuki Tsurumi, FAO representative in the Philippines; and two DOH officials, Dr. Enrique Tayag of the National Epidemiology Center and Dr. Yolanda Oliveros of the National Center for Disease Prevention and Control.

The DA chief urged the BAI to

further pursue its mandate to sustain the development, modernization and global competitiveness of the country's livestock and poultry industry—as part of the DA family's enhanced 'farm-to-plate' initiatives under the FIELDS program of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

He cited in particular five major initiatives that BAI should pursue with greater effort, namely the:

Swine Breeders Farm Accreditation Program, in partnership with the Swine Breeders Association of the Philippines (SBAP), to establish a Philippine Swine Registry similar to the US Swine Registry that offers services such as litter registrations, performance pedigrees, breed promotion and marketing assistance. During the affair, Secretary Yap inducted the new SBAP officers. The group is composed of 20 DA-BAI accredited breeders farms in Luzon (16), Visayas (3), and Mindanao (1).

**Swine Accreditation for Export to Singapore.* To date, five commercial farms in Mindanao have been certified as compliant to international production standards;

**Policy support for the creation of an accreditation system for Swine Artificial Insemination Centers and Providers* (the Administrative Order was signed last year);

**Code of Good Animal Husbandry Practices*, to ensure stronger focus on food safety, and emphasize the importance of hygienic practices throughout the production chain to complement efforts in animal health protection; and

**United National Artificial Insemination (AI) Program* to enhance AI services extended by local govern-

ment veterinarians and technicians.

Secretary Yap also cited the continuing efforts of the BAI, LGUs and livestock and poultry industry partners as they jointly safeguard and protect the animal population from FMD and bird flu, thus further boosting the country's competitive advantage in the global market.

"I thus commend the men and women of our national, regional, provincial, city and municipal Avian Influenza and FMD Task Forces. Likewise," he added, "we thank the continuing assistance extended by the governments of Australia, New Zealand, US and Japan, and the FAO and OIE."

For instance, to continuously defend the country bird flu, he said the DA-BAI has set up Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) in high-risk areas, where birds from temperate countries migrate for temporary shelter during the winter months, from October to February.

He added that the DA will continue to implement stringent biosecurity measures — from farms, sites of migratory birds, meat processing plants, to quarantine checkpoints at airports and seaports — and impose temporary import ban on poultry and livestock

from farms, sites of migratory birds, meat processing plants, to quarantine checkpoints at airports and seaports.

He added that the DA will continue to implement stringent biosecurity measures — from farms, sites of migratory birds, meat processing plants, to quarantine checkpoints at airports and seaports.

The BAI will also continue to implement its major programs that include: Livestock genetic improvement; Rabies eradication; Vaccination versus Newcastle Disease, hog cholera, Hemosep, and other disease; Operation and rehabilitation of livestock auction markets; Price monitoring of meat, and other livestock and poultry products in Metro Manila public markets and supermarkets; and Implementation of "Kambingan at Bakahan Sa Niyugan" and "Manukang Bayan."

In all, Secretary Yap said, "if all goes well, the Philippines would expect to resume exports and unlock lucrative international markets.

"Our policies and services are hoped to spur the continued expansion and modernization of the Filipino animal industry, and more importantly secure a better life for small farmers and entrepreneurs."



Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap (middle, left photo) congratulates Dr. Juan Lubroth of the Food of Agriculture Organization (FAO), as DA-BAI Director Davinio Catbagan look on and guests (foreground) applaud during the agency's 79th anniversary celebration.



animals and meat products from countries, where incidence or outbreak of major diseases have been detected and validated by the OIE.

He added that the DA will continue to implement stringent biosecurity measures —