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PROTOCOL SA BIRD FLU REREPASUHIN

BABAGUHIN na ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang polisiya sa pagbabantay sa kaso ng avian influenza virus o bird flu sa bansa.

Ayon kay Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol, pinulong niya ang mga bumubuo ng Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries, kasama ang pribadong sektor, para repasuhin ang protocol sa monitoring ng bird flu at sa iba pang agricultural commodities.

Aminado si Piñol na labis na naapektuhan ang industriya ng manok sa bansa dahil sa istriktong hakbang na ipinatupad nila nang makumpirma na may bird flu sa bansa noong Agosto.

"We will convene the Philippine Councilfor Agriculture and Fisheries. We will conduct a review of our policies in relation to avian flu and some. We will conduct a review on how we should handle AI problems in the future because, obviously, while many people said that we were successful in handling the bird flu crisis in Pampanga, the industry actually suffered because of the very strict measures that we implemented," paliwanag ni Piñol.

Aniya, nais nilang pagtugmain ang protocol ng ibang bansa na nakaranas ng bird flu sa paghawak nila sa kaso ng bird flu.

Sa kaso ng Pilipinas, sinabi ni Piñol na mula sa isang farm, pinatay ang mga manok at maging sa loob ng isang kilometro na malapit sa nakumpirmang may kaso ng bird flu at sa loob ng 7 kilometro ay sasailalim sa monitoring at bawal ang anumang pagbiyahe ng mga manok.

Aniya, bubuo ang PCAP ng protocol na magiging katanggap-tanggap at hindi makaaapekto nang matindi sa industriya sakaling magkaroon muli ng kaso ng bird flu sa bansa. **MONCHET LARAÑO**

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BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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6 new 'Faces of Biotechnology' honored

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) Biotech Program Office honored six champions of biotechnology during the holding of its Second Filipino Faces of Biotechnology Appreciation Night.

The event held on November 23 at a hotel in Quezon City recognized the champions of biotechnology in the Philippines to celebrate their exceptional contributions on biotech research and advocacy as scientists, policymakers and communicators.

Those honored were National Academy of Science and Technology President Dr. William Padolina for leading institutions and furthering more meaningful development agenda for biotechnology; former senator Edgardo J. Angara for championing science, technology and innovation for agricultural development in the Senate; Agriculture Undersecretary Segfredo K. Serrano for steering biotechnology policies and program in agriculture;

Academician Dr. Evelyn Mae Mendoza for pioneering genetically modified organism research and advancing biotechnology education; Acting Executive Director Dr. Reynaldo Ebora of Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development of Department of Science and Technology for leading institutions for biotechnology research and development; and former legislator and current journalist Angelo Palmones for advocating science and communicating biotechnology for food security and industry development.

The recognition was part of the 13th annual National Biotechnology Week (NBW) with the theme "Bioteknolohiya para sa Kalikasan, Kalusugan, Kagandahan, Kabuhayan, at Kaunlaran: Lamang ang Masa at Magsasaka sa Limang 'K' ng Bioteknolohiya". The NBW highlighted the beneficial applications of biotechnology in food and agriculture, health, environment and industry. ***Lyn Resurreccion***

HONORED as champions of biotechnology in the Second Faces of Biotechnology recognition by the Department of Agriculture Biotech Program Office are (from left) Agriculture Undersecretary Segfredo R. Serrano, journalist Angelo Palmones, Academician Dr. William Padolina, former senator Edgardo J. Angara, Academician Dr. Evelyn Mae Mendoza and the Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development Acting Executive Director Dr. Reynaldo Ebora. NONOY LACZA

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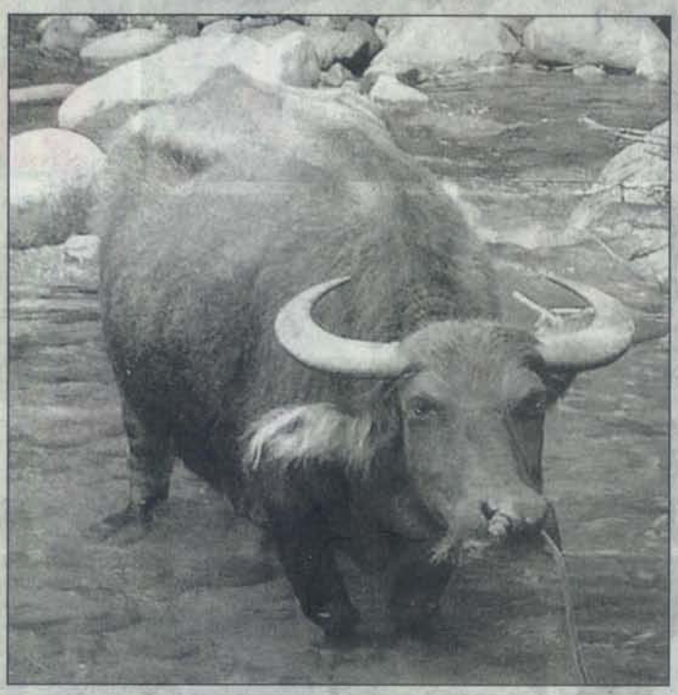
Carabaos, milk output on the wane



LOS BAÑOS, Laguna —The Philippine carabao population is ranked the sixth largest in Asia, but its milk industry is among the lowest in the region. As of 2013, there were 2.912 million carabao heads in the country, accounting for two percent of Asia's total buffalo population of about 188 million.

India was the world's top buffalo producer—109.4 million, constituting 58 percent of the global population. It was followed by Pakistan (33.7 million), China (23.3 million), Nepal (5.24 million), and Myanmar (3.3 million).

The Philippines is nowhere in the list of top buffalo milk producers in Asia.

According to the book "Dairy Buffalo Value Chain Analysis in Luzon", the Philippine carabao population has been declining. Its population decreased 2.3 percent from 2010 to 2014.

The decline was attributed to rapid urbanization in some regions that substantially reduced the pasture land and forage area for carabao, the aging population of carabao farmers who are forced to sell their animals owing to difficulty in providing proper care and management, and the increasing trend of slaughtered native and male buffalo iin some regions in Luzon.

The book is a joint initiative of the Department of Agriculture-Philippine Carabao Center and the Philippine government-hosted Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA).

It features seven key industry players—input producers,farmers, milk collectors, dairy processors, wholesalers-retailers, retailers, and consumers.

The book examines selected carabao-based products in four regions in Luzon and recommends interventions to improve the competitiveness of the carabao industry.

– Rudy Fernandez

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MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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Organic farming: Perceptions and reality

(Part I)

WHY NOT?
DR. EMIL Q. JAVIER

'There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why... I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?'
– Robert Kennedy

Last week's issue of Manila Bulletin's Panorama magazine was dedicated to organic farming. The weekly featured the experiences of individuals who appeared to be fairly affluent and who have "discovered" the happiness of shifting from their stress-filled urban lifestyles to the romantic idyll of healthy living in the farm growing crops, poultry and livestock in a "natural" or organic way.

Indeed, this kind of farming is growing worldwide as people from developed countries, and increasingly the urban elite in the developing countries, willingly pay a premium for food grown in this manner.

But organically grown foods are not cheap. Because of the lower yields and higher costs of production, organic food have to be sold at a premium for the farmers and retailers to keep their margins.

Consumers are willing to pay higher food prices in exchange for the perceived benefits of organic produce being more nutritious, safer, more palatable, and more benign to the environment.

The impression one gets is that organic agriculture is the way to go as far as meeting the world's future food needs and saving the environment.

However the reality is not as rosy as organic farming advocates would make us to believe. The claimed benefits from organic farming are more perceptions than reality.

In the same Panorama magazine, one of the authors, Bulletin regular columnist Cheshire Que, a registered nurse, articulated her misgivings and posed the question: Is **organic really worth it?** The following articulates more clearly the background to the pros and cons of organic farming.

Organic farming – what it is not

It is important that we define organic farming in contrast with conventional farming for which it is claimed to be a better alternative.

Actually organic farming embraces a number of traditional, broadly accepted but scientifically proven agronomic practices and techniques. Among these are minimum tillage; legumes cover cropping; land fallowing (resting); application of animal manures and compost; multiple cropping and crop rotation; use of improved resistant varieties; deployment of biological control agents to suppress pests and diseases, etc.

However, these agronomic practices are not unique to organic farming. Conventional farmers adopt them as well to varying degrees depending upon local soil, climate, labor and market conditions.

But what really set organic apart are the growing methods it prohibits.

Organic farming under international convention, and as defined by law under Republic Act 10068, prohibits the application of chemical fertilizers, use of synthetic pesticides and use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), whether crops, animals and microorganisms.

Total ban on chemical fertilizers devoid of scientific bases

The *Rothamsted* plots in England, the widely recognized longest running crop experiments of their kind, had been continuously sown to wheat, potatoes and beans and fertilized with chemicals since 1843 and these fields are still around.

The Morrow plots continuously planted to maize and chemically fertilized since 1876 are still there in the center of the University of Illinois campus in Midwest America when I last visited my Alma Mater.

And closer to home, the rice plots at the gate of the International Rice Research Institute in Los Baños started by the late Dr. Robert Chandler in 1963 and continuously planted to three crops of rice a year, look as green and as productive as ever.

Continuous fertilization with chemical fertilizers will not render soils unfit for growing crops, provided the fertilizers are not applied in excess, and the nutrients appropriately balanced and some of the plant residues retained to preserve soil organic matter.

The real problem is excessive fertilization. But this problem applies as well to excessive application of manures, like the massive environmental and aquifer problems created by unregulated, excessive spreading of hog and dairy farm manures in pastures in Holland (where I lived for three years). And closer to home, excessive application of chicken manure on vegetables in Benguet.

In the first place, the plant roots cannot distinguish nutrients coming from composts from those out of a chemical fertilizer bag.

Neither will gastric juices in our stomachs discriminate between plant proteins from organic versus conventional farm products. All proteins regardless of source are digested into amino acids which our bodies need.

Reality of lower yield And higher food prices

But what are real are that the yields from organic farms are less than conventional farms. And prices of organic produce in the market are higher to compensate for the lower yields and generally higher costs of production.

Meta-analyses of hundreds of studies worldwide have consistently affirmed that organic produce are not any more nutritious nor tastier than conventionally grown food.

Claims of superiority of organic foods over conventional foods are therefore for the most part just perceptions — not reality.

However, published data as reported by US and Canadian scientists show that organic crops consistently lag behind their conventional counterparts by 10 to 35 percent in a yield per acre basis.

The yield penalty on organic crops is worst on annual row crops. In 2014, a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) scientist reported that organic corn, organic soybean and organic cotton yields were 35 percent, 31 percent and 45 percent lower than their conventional counterparts.

Imagine how much more forestlands and grasslands have to be plowed under worldwide to grow the same amount of food if all these crops were organically produced. That much more native vegetation plowed under will have massive consequences to soil erosion and loss of biodiversity on a global scale. Besides for a land-poor country like the Philippines, we do not have that luxury.

Why the yield penalty?

The yield penalty on organic farming especially on short maturing row crops is associated with the low concentration of nutrients and the slow rate of nutrient release from manure decomposition and their lack of synchrony with the nutrient demand at different stages of the life cycle of plants.

In addition to being short of the major nutrients, particularly nitrogen which crops demand in the large amounts, the rate of release of nutrients from manures is more of less uniform throughout the year. But the nutrient demand of crops is not even and surges at the rapid vegetative, flowering and fruit development stages. The plants run out of nutrients when they are most needed. Hence, the need to supplement with nutrient-dense chemical fertilizers at these crucial stages for high yields.

Because of their low nutrient density, crops would require tons and tons of manure and compost per hectare to meet the crop nutrient requirements. A few hundred kilos of manure to fertilize small vegetables plots or gardens is manageable but not if we grow crops commercially by the hectare.

Manures if at all available are bulky and expensive to assemble and spread.

Merits of manures and composts

Nevertheless, the application of more animal manure and compost is meritorious for two reasons: The organic matter in manures and composts improve soil aggregation and allow for better aeration and supply of oxygen to the roots of crops for healthier plant growth.

Moreover, the complex micro-biota in manures and composts replenish/enhance the proliferation of beneficial soil microorganisms which crops need. Chemical fertilizers which are inert and devoid of soil microorganisms are not helpful at all.

Hence, the ideal is the judicious balanced application of manures as basal fertilizers and chemical fertilizers as nutrient-rich supplements.

Not the total ban of chemical fertilizers as organic purists prescribe.

To be continued... (Part II)

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Dr. Emil Q. Javier is a Member of the National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) and also Chair of the Coalition for Agriculture Modernization in the Philippines (CAMP). For any feedback, email eqjavier@yahoo.com.

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Palay, corn harvest to grow 10% – PSA

The country's production of palay (unhusked rice) is seen to grow 10 percent this year on improved yield and better climatic conditions.

Based on the latest crops outlook of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), palay output may reach 19.4 million metric tons by yearend, higher than the 17.6 million MT recorded a year ago.

According to the PSA, harvest area may expand six percent and yield may improve to 4.03 MT per hectare from the 3.87 MT per hectare per harvest last year.

For the fourth quarter alone, production based on standing crops is projected to rise 6.3 percent to 7.45 million MT as substantial increment is anticipated in Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, and the Cordilleras.

"This may be attributed to the sustained use of high-yielding varieties coupled with sufficient water supply and rainfall during the early stages of crop development," PSA said.

While harvest area may contract by one percent, yield per hectare is seen to grow six percent to reach 3.99 MT per hectare.

Corn production is also expected to improve 10 percent to 7.92 million MT.

Harvest area is forecast to expand to 2.55 million hectares, 2.64 percent higher than last year.

Yield may rise to 3.11 MT per hectare, up seven percent despite the foreseen decline in production in the last quarter of the year.

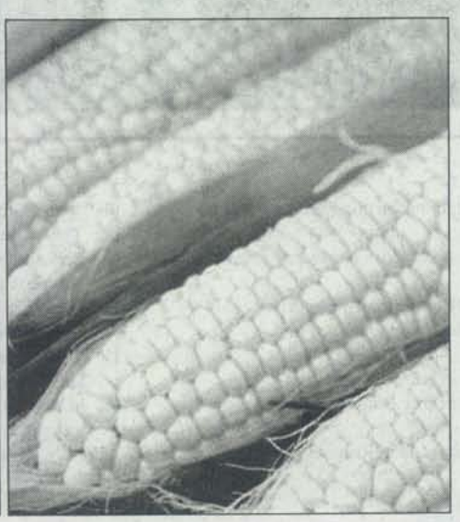
This will be offset by the improvement in yield per hectare of 1.26 percent to 2.88 MT.

PSA said production may decline in Western Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Soccsksargen and ARMM.

Possible decrement in harvest area may be due to inadequate supply of seeds and the often occurrence of rains which may affect plant growth in some areas.

"Some farmers are hesitant to plant due to rat infestation and delay planting caused by heavy rains and the shifting of crop from corn to squash, string beans and okra in Central Luzon and watermelon and squash in Western Visayas," PSA said.

– Louise Maureen Simeon



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Auro Chocolate

A world-class Pinoy creation

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

While Filipinos naturally have a sweet tooth, many of them have a growing taste for good chocolate from Europe or the US. But, bean-to-bar chocolate company Auro plans to change that as it strives to put the spotlight on the country's premium cacao beans.

Kelly Go, a self-confessed chocolate lover, was greatly inspired by the journey of her mother who searched for the best possible sources of cocoa seven years ago.

"My mom always has this love for chocolates and one day she saw an American chocolate bar that uses cacao beans from Davao. That time, no one was really aware that we could make our own chocolate and not just the usual *tablea," the 27-year old Go* shared.

" She went to Davao and interacted with the farmers. But my mom had a full-time job back then and she could not devote her time," said Go, who finished Political Science from the University of Chicago.

Go's love for chocolates and passion to help local farmers prompted her to pursue Culinary Arts in Paris and eventually, Industrial Chocolate Manufacturing in Germany.

"I worked at a large bank but I did not like it. That was what propelled me to find another route and pursue something I am more passionate about which is food and chocolates," Go said.

And hence began Auro Chocolate's journey in taking cocoa production to a whole new level. The name Auro came from Au, the chemical element symbol for gold and Oro which also means gold in Spanish.

It was in Chicago when Go met Mark Ocampo who was then studying at the Art Institute of Chicago and working in an advertising agency in the US.

"When I started this project in early 2015, I kept talking to him about it, sharing my experiences. That struck a chord with him. He was looking for a reason to come back to the Philippines so we decided to move back," Kelly said.

The Filipino bean-to-bar company uses the best cacao beans that thrive on rich volcanic soils in the lush tropical forests of Davao, where 80 percent of the country's total production comes from.

Even if the Philippines was the first country in Asia to grow cacao, the local cacao industry remains underdeveloped and has lagged behind other cacao producing nations.

And with the rich cacao heritage that the country has, Auro aims to bring back the golden days of cacao especially the extremely rare *criollo porcelana* heirloom variety, the first of its kind planted in the Philippines.

"It is the rarest cacao in the world, one of the most premium and we have it. People are not aware of it. It was abundant before because that was the only variety we used to have. When newer varieties started coming in, they didn't appreciate it," Go said.

Despite its significant value and potential, *criollo* has become the lesser known variety of cacao, taking up a measly 0.1 percent of the world's cacao production. Luckily for the Philippines, *criollo* is Davao's rare and special cacao.

Auro Chocolate owners Kelly Go (seated) and Mark Ocampo

"The biggest challenge is how do we tell this multi-faceted, complex story about our heritage when it comes to cacao and the kind of partnership we have with the farmers," she said.

Auro works closely with about 1,500 to 2,000 farmers from Davao and South Cotabato to make cocoa farming a

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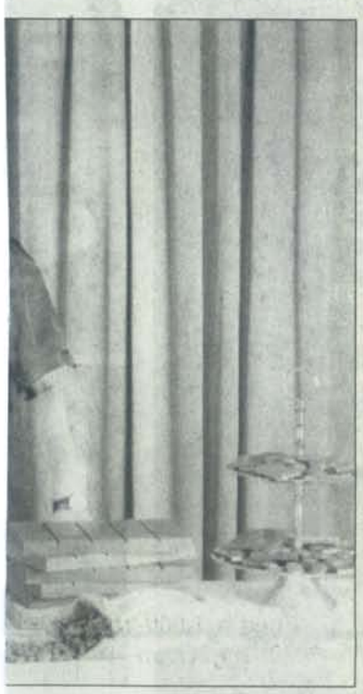
Auro chocolate's product line

profitable proposition. Its goal is to explore other regions and see if there are different flavors it can create.

Auro currently sells three kinds of cacao-based products: cocoa which can be both in nibs and mass, couverture which is primarily used for baking, and the bars which take up majority of the company's sales.

Apart from the very rare *criollo*, Auro makes use of the *forastero*, which makes up the majority of cacao production in the world, and the *trinitario* which is a hybrid of the two.



"We want to have the best Filipino chocolate. We'll keep researching on how we can turn the cacao beans that we have into an even better chocolate," Go said.

"We are not saying no to new varieties but with the heirloom that we have, it makes the Philippines unique in terms of flavor. If we plant the clone, which is also okay for the bulk sector, we become generic and we just want to keep a little bit of what's really special," she added.

Auro has invested in a 2,000 square meter factory in Calamba, Laguna which has the capacity to produce 1,000 kilograms of finished chocolate daily.

The plant, accredited by the Philippine Economic Zone Authority, still has a lot of room to grow as Auro is only manufacturing around 100 to 200 kg.

Auro has made a name of its own in a span of two years after it scored major corporate clients like flag carrier Philippine Airlines and high-end cafe Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf, as well as other hotels and stores.

It wants to grow further with plans to open a pop-up store. It also wants to see its products on shelves of major supermarkets nationwide by next year.

"I know we could still do better, but we are really proud of what the team has achieved given a short period of time," Go said.

And while 90 percent of its production goes to local consumption, Auro has started to penetrate the global market. It exports 10 percent of its produce to various countries in Europe.

It achieved its biggest milestone last month after the Department of Trade and Industry sponsored Auro along with seven other local chocolate companies to be in Salon du Chocolat in Paris, a yearly trade fair for the international chocolate industry.

"We need to build the reputation of the Philippines. We need to ensure that our quality is consistent because when you export, people expect a certain level of quality and we want to be able to deliver that," Go said.

"How we see it is that the more local chocolate companies there are, the more the public becomes aware that we are capable of producing Filipino chocolates," she added.

While the government has done a great job in encouraging farmers to plant more, Go said the focus should be on research and development.

At present, the country's annual average production is 10,000 metric tons to 12,000 MT. However, it is still not enough to meet the local demand of 30,000 MT yearly.

The world market has projected that cacao would be in demand for the production of cocoa butter and chocolate in the next five years. It also predicted that there would be a global shortage of one million MT of cacao by 2020.

Auro aims to find innovative ways to better connect chocolate lovers and consumers around the world with the country's farmers.

"We serve as the medium and we want to tell the compelling stories of our farmers, for people to have an idea of the challenges that they face and for consumers to help improve the lives of local farmers," Go said.

Go wants Filipinos to patronize local chocolates and help contribute in removing the misconception that imported chocolates are much better than the ones that come from one's own soil.

"Filipinos got used to really fine and smooth chocolates. And we are working on how can we meet those expectations and even surpass them because we also happen to have this great story to share," Go said.

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4.8M AGRI WORKERS SA MINDANAO

Apektado sa land review

ABOT sa 4.8 milyong banana, pineapple, cacao at palm oil workers, kasama ang mga nagtatrabaho sa agri-business sa Mindanao, ang apektado ng kasalukuyang congressional investigation sa Agribusiness Ventures Arrangements (AVAs).

Ito ang inihayag ni Michael Mendoza, national president ng Associated Labor Unions-Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (ALU-TUCP) at chairman ng labor coalition Nagkaisa.

"We respect the congressional inquiry on the AVAs but we cannot prevent Mindanaoan workers and their families whose lives have been anchored on and around the agribusiness in Mindanao for decades to feel anxious and uncertain over the fate of their livelihood in view of the investigation," ani Mendoza.

"We urged our lawmakers to assure Mindanaoans and guarantee that the outcome of the query of the arrangements shall not alter the existing playing field. It should not result to job losses and displacements. The investigation should not result in uncertainty among stakeholders. It should rather send a message that government is reliable social and economic partner," dagdag pa niya.

Ginawa ni Mendoza ang pahayag sa consultation sa isinasagawang imbestigasyon ng House Committee on Agrarian Reform na pinamumunuan ni Rep. Teddy Brawner Baguilat, Jr. sa CAP Grand Auditorium sa Andas, Davao City noong Huwebes.

Hinikayat ni Mendoza ang ALU-TUCP na suportahan ang mga panukalang batas na magpapalakas o magpapatibay sa lahat ng mga manggagawa sa agri-food, lalo na sa agri-entrepreneurship development and support mechanism.

"It is our view that any proposed laws on the matter should focus on developing a genuine partnership between farmer beneficiaries and the agribusiness so as to enhance the dignity of the farmers and farmworkers, and promote their agricultural security of tenure. It must retain existing investors and attract new investors as well to broaden the development in Mindanao," aniya.

Ang AVAs at Joint Venture Agreements (JVA) ay nakapaloob sa House Bills 5085 at 919. Ang HB 5085 ay inihain ni Baguilat, habang ang HB 919 ay ipinakilala naman ng Makabayan bloc.

Layunin ng nasabing mga panukalang batas na ma-regulate ang AVAs at tingnan ang mga kinakailangan ng agrarian reform beneficiaries.

Milyong manggagawa ang nakadepende sa agri-business ventures arrangements, kasama ng Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs).

JOEL AMONGO