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Samar poised as Phl's biggest seed production area

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The government plans to transform Samar into the country's biggest seed production area.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol said the town of San Roque in Northern Samar would be converted into the biggest seed production center in the Philippines with about 2,000 hectares planted to selected high-yielding varieties developed by the Philippine Rice Research Institute.

The seed production area in San Roque will be the foundation of the recently-launched Samar Rice Development Program (SRDP), where new farms in three Samar provinces will use modern technology and mechanization.

"Under the program, a private seed production group will set up a nucleus farm of 200 hectares, establish rice seeds processing facilities and a refrigerated warehouse for the storage of the seeds," Piñol said.

"The private seed production group will engage the farmers of San Roque in a seed production contract where the seeds from the farmers will be bought by the company," he added.

DA and PhilRice will provide the farmers with technical training, equipment and loan support and establish farm-to-market roads and irrigation systems.

It will likewise purchase the seeds produced in San Roque to be distributed to the rice farmers in the rest of Samar Island, including parts of Leyte.

The development of Samar as the new production area for rice is expected to be the first beneficiary of the Tariffication Law as part of the government's efforts to boost supply of the country's main staple.

By 2020, the SRDP is expected to contribute an estimated 1.2 million metric tons of paddy rice to the national production, which will make Samar Island one of the major rice production areas of the country.

The SRDP is part of the DA's Southern Swing Initiative that aims to develop at least 300,000 hectares of new rice farms in the southern provinces of the country to compensate for the projected damage by typhoons every year on crops in Northern Luzon.

Other areas identified in the Southern Swing initiative are Western Visayas, Mindoro and Palawan, Central Mindanao, Lanao del Sur, Bukidnon and Zamboanga Peninsula.

The targeted 300,000 hectares of new rice areas are expected to be fully developed by 2020.

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Go stresses importance of food security

Former special assistant to the president Christopher "Bong" Go yesterday stressed the importance of ensuring the country's food security.

Go also welcomed the results of a recent survey showing a significant drop in the hunger rate among Filipinos in the fourth quarter of 2018.

"The survey proved that President Duterte is serious about fulfilling his promise to improve the life of every Filipino, and we are beginning to feel the fruits of his policies and programs," Go said in Filipino.

The survey showed 10.5 percent experienced involuntary hunger at least once in the past three months, a significant drop from the 13.3 percent experiencing hunger in the September 2018 survey.

Likewise, the hunger rate for 2018 was pegged at 10.8 percent – the lowest since the seven percent hunger rate recorded in 2003.

On Thursday, Malacañang said the survey result on hunger is among the reasons why President Duterte continues to win the trust and approval of the Filipino people.

Go, a senatorial candidate in the 2019 elections, said the government must sustain the crucial effort towards achieving food security. He vowed to support the administration's programs to improve agricultural production in the country.

Food security is among the priorities Go has listed in his legislative agenda.

Among others, Go is proposing to establish TienDA Malasakit stores in key cities to provide consumers with fresh and cheaper food commodities. Conceptualized by the Department of Agriculture, a TienDA Malasakit store offers agricultural produce at farm gate prices.

Go is also proposing to provide farmers and fisherfolk with easy access to farm and fishery inputs, such as machinery, fertilizers, seeds, irrigation and low-interest credit facilities to increase their productivity.

In addition, he also wants expert assistance for farmers and fisherfolk, such as business and skills training, to further increase their income.

To encourage children of farmers to remain in the agricultural sector, Go is seeking to provide them with scholarship grants and similar incentives. In addition, he wants to include barangay agriculture as a subject in the curriculum of elementary and secondary school students.

Go is also considering the idea of establishing a national Farmers' and Fishers' Pension Fund for retiring workers in the agricultural sector, providing financial security to farmers and fishers who are too old to work.

He is also pushing for improved medical services, including the establishment of Malasakit Centers throughout the country to improve access to quality health care of people in rural areas.

Former special assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence 'Bong' Go is proposing to establish TienDA Malasakit stores in key cities to provide consumers with fresh and cheaper food commodities.

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Gov't buys 1M palay from farmers

THE National Food Authority (NFA) has started its aggressive procurement program with the purchase of one million bags of palay in the first 15 days of the year from local farmers.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol said an initial budget of P7 billion, the NFA aims to buy 350,000 metric tons of palay or paddy rice for the first half of 2019.

"This is equivalent to 227,500 metric tons or 4.450-million bags of rice. With a buying price of P17 per kilo plus an incentive of P3.70 per kilo, the NFA expects to hit the 350,000-metric ton procurement target well ahead of time," Piñol said.

Piñol explained that the DA is supporting the NFA since it has been transferred back to its Mother Agency four months ago.

He added that during the launching of the 2019 Procurement Program in Region 12, DA Regional Director Milagros Casis turned over five new hauling trucks to NFA Director Diane Silva.

He said the trucks will be used in hauling farmers' produce from the field to the NFA buying station.

"The DA will also turn over Mechanical Dryers to the NFA buying stations for free use by farmers. Additional incentives including one bag of free rice seeds will also be given to farmers who will sell 80 bags of paddy rice to the NFA," Piñol said.

The farmers associations and cooperatives, on the other hand, will also get farm machinery and equipment if they deliver huge volumes of palay to NFA.

Piñol added that a "cash advance" credit program is also being designed to allow farmers to get an advance payment on their deliveries to the NFA to protect them from loan sharks and usurers.

Cory Martinez

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Ice cream cone made from adlay

By LEOVELIZA FONTANIL

Ice cream is one of the most popular summertime cravings. It is always best served in a cone rather than in a cup.

Cones are designed to complement the sweet, creamy taste of ice cream.

Nowadays, there are many types of cones to choose from -- cake cones, sugar cones, waffle cones, and pretzel cones. Most of them are now creating much more appeal in the market as they value the uses of each cone type with the different variations, uniqueness, and special features.

But have you ever heard of sweet cone made from adlay?

As one of the active implementers of research activities on adlay, the Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Office 4B (MIMAROPA) has been consistent in developing technologies and carrying out initiatives that will further improve and promote the adlay crop. One of its most notable feats is a product called Adlay Sweet Cone.

Adlay, known as a healthy, versatile food ingredient, can be easily ground into flour and used to make bread, pasta, porridge, among others. It has a good quality, which shows adlay grains can also provide essential nutrients needed by the body.

DA-MIMAROPA is on track in showcasing techniques on how to prepare various affordable, nutritious, and palatable adlay delicacies which include *broas*, cookies, *kalamay, pandesal, turones de adlay, arroz-caldo, champorado, polvoron* and noodles. It also aims to produce unique products.

When it comes to taste, DA-MIMAROPA's Lorena Mendoza said the Adlay Sweet Cone is thicker, crispy, and has a little bit lumpy texture, giving an interesting twist to the customers' delight.

Even if eaten alone, Adlay Sweet Cone is more delicious compared to other commercially available cones in the market. Its shelf life can reach up to four months with proper storage.

Mendoza said the product has received many orders from Mama Sita's and the DA-RFO 5 to complement the Bicol region's bread fruit or Rimas ice cream.

DA-MIMAROPA envisioned a partnership with the DA-Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Division to give them important information on market development services and assist them in identifying potential market linkages, private adopters, and market matching activities.

Commercial cones are mostly blended with lots of sugars, wheat flour, and tapioca flour (a starch from cassava plant). Other than having one percent of iron recommended daily, there is no nutritional benefit in having an ice cream cone.

Based on its percent daily values and nutrition facts by the Food and Nutrition Research Institute, 100 grams of servings of any type of commercial cones have a total of 417 calories.

A typical cone will net around 10 grams of sugar which is almost 50 percent of the recommended daily intake. Consuming high amounts of sugar can lead to weight gain, diabetes, and increased production of ghrelin – a hunger hormone that tells the body that we are still hungry so we should get a second serving.

Apart from sugar, tapioca has harmful effects as well – it naturally produces cyanide. While the manufacturing process most likely gets rid of the cyanide, there is still a risk, no matter how small, that eating tapioca or anything with tapioca in it may introduce cyanide into the body.

Unlike typical commercial cones, the Adlay Sweet Cone is made from brown sugar, water, wheat flour and adlay grain flour.

Adlay grain is highly nutritious. According to a chemical analysis also provided by the FNRI, a 100-gram serving of adlay is superior in terms of its food energy content (365 kcal), rich in carbohydrate content (73.9 g), protein (12.8 g), and fat (1.0 g). It is also packed with other minerals including calcium (25 mg), phosphorus (43.5 mg), iron (5 mg), niacin (4.3 mg), (0.28 mg), and riboflavin (0.19 mg).

Adlay also has a high fiber that shows promising results in anti-cancer, anti-inflammatory, and blood sugar-lowering properties for optimum health of the human body.

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Year-end wishes for agriculture sector

(Part 4)

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

The previous columns dwelt on seven directions that will raise the productivity and global competitiveness of our agriculture, and most importantly raise the income of small farmers and fisherfolk. I am limiting my wish list to nine, although there could very well be more.

The last two wishes have to do with: 1) improving farmers' access to credit, and 2) measures to fortify the Department of Agriculture (DA) in its crucial role of providing central direction, coordination, monitoring and oversight of the programs to modernize the sector.

Eighth wish: Full retention of the income of the Land Bank of the Philippines to be used for subsidized rural lending

The most straightforward explanation why our farmers are not as productive as our ASEAN neighbors is their lack of access to affordable credit with which to acquire more productive technology and the necessary inputs i.e. seeds, fertilizers, chemical, and equipment to put them into practice.

This problem is dramatically illustrated by the gross lack of congruence between economic contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) versus access to credit. In 2013, the agriculture and fisheries sector contributed 12 percent to our GDP but received only 1.93 percent of the total loans provided by the banking system. Worse, primary production in which small farmers are engaged, received only 0.63 percent. These figures may be a little out of date but the relative magnitudes have not changed.

The magnitude of the challenge is further elaborated by the following statistics gathered by the Agriculture Credit Policy Council (ACPC), the unit in the DA tasked to provide direction and oversight to rural credit. Of about six million farmers and fisherfolk households, only 28 percent (1.68 million) had access to credit. However of this number, only 57 percent obtained funds from formal sources (banks, cooperatives, microfinance institutions). The rest (0.72 million) got their credit from non-formal lenders (friends, relatives, input suppliers, rice millers, traders, and private lenders) often at usurious interest rates and exploitative lending terms.

But more significantly, 1.32 million farmers (22 percent) wanted and attempted to but were unable to borrow.

LandBank doing its job but can and should do more

The Land Bank of the Philippines (LandBank) was established specifically to provide credit to farmers, particularly to the beneficiaries under agrarian reform. In fairness to LandBank, it has not been remiss in its social mandate, and by far it is the biggest lender to agriculture.

In 2017, it provided ₱45.5-billion credit to small farmers, ₱82.5 billion to agribusinesses, and ₱89.6 billion to small and medium scale enterprises (SMSEs), many of which are food and rural-based. All told Land Bank extended ₱218 billion or 36 percent of its total loan portfolio of ₱610 billion to agriculture.

Commendable as they were, obviously the efforts of LandBank had not been enough The new LandBank president Alex Buenaventura realized this and early in his term announced three reforms to enable the bank to reach more small farmers and fisherfolk.

First, LandBank will establish **Lending Centers**, particularly in underserved areas, and hire more supervised credit supervisors to provide loans to target borrowers through direct marketing. Second, LandBank will introduce a new business model called **agri-corporatives** through which to channel credit to small producers. This novel lending concept marries the inclusive, equitable, pro-poor features of cooperatives with the efficiency, market orientation and robust financial controls of corporations.

And third, LandBank will issue "Small Farmers Corporative Bonds" against loans extended to the agri-corporative projects. These bonds will be auctioned to other banks as a mode of alternative compliance with the Agri-Agra Reform Credit Act (RA10000) of 2009, which required all banks to set

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aside at least 25 percent of their total loan portfolios for lending to agriculture and agrarian reform beneficiaries.

However, because of the relative higher risks and higher costs of lending to small borrowers, most banks are unable and/or reluctant to comply and simply prefer paying the penalty of 0.5 percent. Should these special bonds succeed, they are potentially worth ₱460 billion of additional credit.

We are in full support of the reforms contemplated by the LandBank president. In fact, the first two reforms redirect Land Bank to its original purpose and are long overdue. From a purely farmers' bank, LandBank was upgraded into a universal bank precisely to generate income with which to cross subsidize the not-so-profitable rural lending operations. Unfortunately, this was overridden by RA 7656 of 1994, which required all-government owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs) to remit half of their annual earnings to the National Treasury. The Land Bank proved to be very profitable and to date is second only to the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation in terms of its dividends to the national government.

My eighth wish therefore is that LandBank be exempted from RA 7656, and be allowed to retain all of its earnings with which to subsidize and further expand its rural lending operations as originally intended.

This can be readily accomplished by invoking Section 5 Flexible Clause of RA 7656 which endows the President the authority to adjust the dividend rate of any GOCC in the interest of the national economy and general welfare upon recommendation by the Secretary of Finance.

Since the last two years LandBank's earnings averaged ₱15 billion, this will multiply 10-fold the average annual appropriation of ₱1.5 billion to the Agro-industry Modernization Credit and Financing program (AMCFP) for subsidized rural lending under the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997 (AFMA).

More than CAMELS

Corollarily, the manner by which LandBank's financial and managerial soundness is assessed must be changed accordingly. Like all other banks, LandBank is under the supervision of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), and must perform against the six universally accepted bank standards — the so-called CAMELS in banking parlance — namely Capital Adequacy, Asset quality, Management, Earnings, Liquidity, and Sensitivity to the market.

Unfortunately, the CAMELS do not capture the metrics relevant to the Land Bank's missionary role of lending to small producers. The appropriate performance measures are: Number of farmers served, amount of loans extended, productivity and profitability of farmer borrowers, and repayment rates.

Thus in order for Land Bank management to behave accordingly, they have to be held accountable both for: 1) the CAMELS, and 2) the small farmer metrics. With these additional metrics the Land Bank officers will be forced to go out of their way to reach the small borrowers.

To be continued... Part 5

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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).

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Go stresses importance of food security

Former Special Assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go has stressed the importance of ensuring the country's food security as he welcomed the results of a recent survey showing a significant drop in the hunger rate among Filipinos in the fourth quarter of 2018.

"Patunay ang survey na desidido si Pangulong Duterte na tuparin ang kanyang pangako na iangat ang buhay ng bawat Pilipino at nagsisimula na nating matamo ang bunga ng kanyang mga polisya at programa (The survey result is a proof that we are now reaping the fruits of President Duterte's commitment to uplift the lives Filipinos)," said Go.

The survey showed 10.5 percent experienced involuntary hunger at least once in the past three months, a significant drop from the 13.3 percent experiencing hunger in the September, 2018, survey.

Likewise, the hunger rate for 2018 was pegged at 10.8 percent – the lowest since the seven percent hunger rate recorded in 2003.

Go, a senatorial candidate in the 2019 elections, said the government must sustain the crucial effort toward achieving food security. He vowed to support the administration's programs to improve agricultural production in the country.

"Pangunahin nating pangangailang ang pagkain kaya importanteng masigurado ang sapat na supply nito. Dapat nating mas paigtigin ang mga programa para suportahan ang sektor ng agrikultura at mga proyekto para sa mas maayos na distribution at mas murang pagkain (Food is our basic need and supply must be sustained. To attain this, we must support the agriculture sector to improve food security)," Go said.

Food security is among the priorities Go has listed in his legislative agenda.

Among others, Go is proposing to establish TienDA Malasakit stores in key cities to provide consumers with fresh and cheaper food commodities. Conceptualized by the Department of Agriculture, a TienDA Malasakit store offers agricultural produce at farm gate prices.

"Pag mas marami tayong TienDA Malasakit stores mas marami ang makikinabang sa mababang presyo ng mga pagkain. Pati ang mga magsasaka at iba pang food producers ay gaganda rin ang kita dahil hindi na nila kailangang dumaan sa mga middleman na karaniwan ay binabarat sila (More TienDA Malasakit stores will ensure low food prices and better income for food producers as supply will no longer go through middlemen)," Go explained.

Go is also proposing to provide farmers and fisherfolk with easy access to farm and fishery inputs, such as machinery, fertilizers, seeds, irrigation and low-interest credit facilities to increase their productivity.

He also wants expert assistance to farmers and fisherfolk, such as business and skills training, to further increase their income.

To encourage children of farmers to remain in the agricultural sector, Go is seeking to provide them with better scholarship grants and other similar incentives. In addition, he wants to include Barangay Agriculture as a subject in the curriculum of elementary and secondary school students.

Go is also considering the idea of establishing a national Farmers' and Fishers' Pension Fund for retiring workers in the agricultural sector, providing financial security to farmers and fishers who are too old to work.

In addition, Go is pushing for improved medical services including the establishment of Malasakit Centers throughout the country to improve access to quality health care of people in rural areas.

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Over 1,000 kilos of meat seized to protect PH from African Swine Fever

By **BETHEENA UNITE**

More than 1,000 kilograms of meat with no health clearance have been seized at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) terminals since the start of the year, the Bureau of Customs (BOC) said.

A total of 1,151 kilograms of meat were intercepted as stricter measures to protect the country from African Swine Fever have been imposed.

According to the bureau, the seized meat were brought into the country without Sanitary and Phytosanitary clearance from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI).

Customs agents deployed in airports have been directed to intensify inspection on baggages against possible entry of meat products coming from 13 African Swine Fever affected countries namely: China, Hungary, Belgium, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Moldova, South Africa, and Zambia.

From June to December last year, prior to the outbreak of African Swine Fever, a total of 5,302 kilograms of meat products with no Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and BAI clearance were seized at the NAIA terminals, the customs bureau said.

Earlier, the bureau and BAI jointly enforced stricter measures at airports to boost the country's boarder security against the possible entry of contaminated pork meats and meat products from African Swine Fever high-risk countries.

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A broader look at today's business
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S&T innovations in rice to maximize productivity, farmers' income

FARMERS in Victoria, Tarlac, recently had the chance to witness innovations in rice production which they can adopt during a science and technology model farm (STMF) exhibit in the province.

At a recent Farmers' Field Day and Forum, the Masalasa Marketing Cooperative's STMF provided updates and insights on its adoption of S&T technologies and its overall performance.

The cooperative's STMF was a product of the project, "STMF on Integrated Rice and Rice-Based Package of Technologies."

The field day exhibited different technology components, such as rice-fish, rice-duck, small pond, tilapia pond, orchard, sorjan area, vegetable garden, azolla production, seedling production area, mushroom processing area, vermicomposting facility, rice-straw soaking area, goat/swine area, mushroom fruiting house and rice seed production area.

Moreover, Gerry Garcia, a farmer cooperator of the cooperative, showcased his variety of crops, a pig pen and a tilapia fishpond in farm.

The project, funded by the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development of the Department of Science and Technology, aimed to maximize the productivity and income of Magsasaka Siyentista and farmer cooperators by applying the full package of technologies for the target commodities.

It also helped develop or widen linkages of farmer cooperators for postharvest and marketing activities. Four major rice component technologies were addressed by the project. These include the use of quality seeds of recommended varieties; site-specific nutrient management; water management/controlled irrigation; and integrated pest management.

The project also included a component on agripreneurship.

The Philippine Rice Research Institute implemented the project in cooperation with the Central Luzon Agriculture, Aquatic and Resources Research and Development Consortium, Department of Agriculture-attached agencies in Central Luzon, Department of Trade and Industry, and the local government unit of Victoria, Tarlac.

Thirty-three farmer beneficiaries under the Masalasa Marketing Cooperative in Victoria, Tarlac, registered with the Cooperative Development Authority. They were identified as the recipients of the three-year project.

FARMERS sell their farm produce and other products during the field day of Masalasa Marketing Cooperative's science and technology model farm. PATRICIA L. NAREDO/TTPD-PCAARRD

S&T Media Services

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Agrikultura at katiyakan sa pagkain

CARITAS

Fr. Anton Pascual

ANG kasaysayan ng Pilipinas ay luntian - berde at masagana - dahil tayo ay dating namayagpag bilang isang agrikultural na ekonomiya.

Kung matatandaan n'yo, ang ating mga textbook noon, partikular na sa sibika, ay laging nagsasabi na ang ating bansa ay agrikultural. Marami na ang nagbago sa paglipas ng panahon. Luntian at taniman pa rin ang maraming lugar sa ating bansa, pero marami rin ang nagsisimula nang mag-ibang anyo.

Anong dalang biyaya at problema ng pagbabagong-anyo na ito?

Tinatayang 97,500 ektaryang lupa na ang naapruba para sa conversion bilang lupang agrikultural tungo sa non-agricultural purposes, gaya ng residensiyal at komersiyal, mula 1988 hanggang 2016. Ang lupang ito na dating tinaguriang sakahan ay kasing-laki ng Metro Manila at Cebu City. Maliban pa dito, tinatayang mga 165,000 ektarya ng irrigated land ang na-convert o nasalin na rin bilang non-agricultural land.

Sa pagsalin na ito, maraming magsasaka ang naapektuhan. Maraming magsasaka ang nawawalan ng trabaho. Nawawalan din ng taniman para sa mga halamang maaaring magbigay ng katiyakan sa pagkain ng lahat.

Kapanalig, kailangang marebisa at mabalikan ang ating polisiya sa land conversion. Kung hindi masusupil at mapag-aaralan nang masinsinan, ang land conversion ay maaaring maging instrumento ng pagkitil sa espiritu ng Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program, na naglalayon na mabiyayaan ng lupang sakahan ang maralitang magsasaka. Kapag nasalin ang gamit ng lupa mula agrikultural tungo sa iba pang pakinabang gaya ng komersyal o residensyal, natatanggal ito sa sakop ng repormang pang-agraryo.

Ang kawalan ng lupang sakahan ay malaki ang epekto, hindi lamang para sa magsasaka, kundi sa buong lipunan. Ang kawalan nito ay kawalan din ng katiyakan sa pagkain. Habang lumalaki ang ating populasyon, lumalaki din ang demand para sa pagkain. Kung walang taniman, walang aning makakain. Aasa tayo sa importasyon na mahal at magastos, at maaagaw pa nito ang kita ng karaniwang Pilipino.

Kapanalig, ang Department of Agriculture (DA), sa ilalim ng dating kalihim nito na si Rafael Mariano, ay nanawagan para sa masusing pag-aaral ng land conversion. Wika nito: "We need to preserve prime agricultural lands for the nation's food security."

Ang panawagang gaya nito ay dapat lamang nating pakinggan kahit pa maiba ang mga pinuno. Inuuna nito ang maralitang Pilipino. Inuuna nito ang dignidad ng tao.

Ang tanong ni Pope Francis sa Lumen Fidei, bahagi ng panlipunang turo ng Simbahan, ay isang angkop na reflection point sa tema ng agrikultura at katiyakan sa pagkain. Pagnilayan natin ito: "Why claim what grows for the benefit of man, rather than for the most savage of the brute beasts? (Bakit natin aangkinin kung ano ang lumalaki para sa kapakinabangan ng tao, sa halip na sa pinakamalupit sa ganid na hayop?)"

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Raising the bar: Malagos cacao gets heirloom status

Davao-based Puentespina Farms, maker of the world renowned Malagos Chocolate, added another impressive feat to its long list of accomplishments.

Its cacao beans have been awarded Heirloom Cacao status by the Heirloom Cacao Preservation Initiative (HCP), a partnership between the Fine Chocolate Industry Association and the US Department of Agriculture that is tasked with identifying the finest flavor cacaos and rewarding the growers who cultivate them.

The announcement was made at ceremonies held in San Francisco on Jan. 12. The cacao beans underwent extensive evaluation by a tasting panel comprising nine chocolate experts from around the world.

"We are elated to be part of this very small group of farmers who have been given this designation as Heirloom Cacao. We are only the 16th to be given this honor, and the first in the Philippines," said Charita Puentespina, founder of Puentespina Farms.

Malagos Chocolate's cacao farm-Puentespina Farm

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Rex and Charita Puentespina

A majority of HCP's tasting panel noted the light color of the chocolate liquor (the pure cocoa mass) and the chocolate itself.

The HCP panelists likewise noted the mostly pleasant yet slightly astringent chocolate taste with herbal liquor flavor. The chocolate was further praised for being flavorful.

Puentespina Farms joins 15 other heirloom cacao farmers around the world from Bolivia, Ecuador, Hawaii, Costa Rica, Belize, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Tanzania and Madagascar.

The company started its cacao farm in 2003. Since then it has gone on to attract international attention by supplying the fine quality dried fermented cacao beans that are used in the manufacture of the company's own chocolate brand, Malagos Chocolates.

To date, Malagos Chocolate has won 28 international awards.

Chocolate industry professionals, chocolate makers, farmers, and chocolate enthusiasts from around the world are determined to save the quickly diminishing Theobroma cacao trees that produce the most high-quality, flavorful chocolate and identify the farmers who grow them.

HCP has designated trees on a number of farms around the globe as Heirloom Cacao. Its mission is to "identify and preserve fine flavor ("heirloom") cacao varieties for the conservation of biological diversity and the empowerment of farming communities".

The fine flavor Theobroma cacao variety is the source of high-quality, flavorful chocolates. Sadly, it has been replaced by varieties grown mainly for its productivity and not by its flavor.

Heirloom cacao is important because it is primarily grown by small-scale farms in the lowland tropical regions where cacao is an important source of livelihood.

It is also good for the ecosystem because it is grown in the shade along with other fruit trees like bananas, coconuts, or forest trees.

As such, heirloom cacao provides much-needed habitat for both flora and fauna and is a natural solution for areas plagued by deforestation and a vanishing biodiversity.

To be recognized as "heirloom cacao" is an incredibly high standard to meet. Flavor-wise, there must be a balance, uniqueness, complexity and clarity all at once – a unique flavor profile that commands a premium in the world of fine foods.

Helping preserve these heirloom cacao helps the livelihood of the farmers that continue to grow them.

"We are very pleased with all the feedback, both positive and negative," said Puentespina.

"This is exactly what we set out to do: anticipate any criticism and build on these to adjust our processes to make our beans even better. In the end, we want our products to be worthy of the heirloom designation that has been given to us," she said.

To celebrate this accomplishment, MalagosAgri-Ventures Corp., a sister company of Puentespina Farms, issued a limited-edition bar of Malagos Heirloom Chocolate 72 percent Dark Chocolate.

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Agri-Talk

By ZAC B. SARIAN

Unique Tilapia Farm Up In The Mountain

(Memoirs of an Agri Journalist)

In 1997 we visited a unique tilapia farm up in the mountain of Tarlac—the Peter Mountain Fish Farm managed by **Pedro Manese** with his son **Paul**, 20-year-old then, who was a fisheries graduate from the Central Luzon State University.

The farm was really unique in many ways. First, it was up in the mountain where there was no natural source of water. And it was not a small farm by Philippine standards. It was 16 hectares. The only source of water was a submersible pump which was in operation every day during the summer months.

The owners didn't feed their fish with commercial feed. They depended mainly on natural feed which was algae. They didn't use any commercial fertilizer, either, to enhance algal growth. They didn't use any chemical pesticide to kill whatever predator there might be in the pond before stocking with fingerlings.

The owners sold their fish from ₱23 to ₱33 per kilo yet their fish farm was very profitable. Profitable because they didn't have any expenses on commercial feed which was and still is the biggest expense in fish farming. Every day, five days a week, they harvested 500 kilos. At ₱23 per kilo for the 50 grammers, that was already ₱11,500 daily. At ₱33 per kilo (100-grammers), that was a cool ₱16,500 in one day.

Why the low selling price which was about half the prevailing price of tilapia then? Well, unlike other tilapia farmers who grew their fish to bigger size (4-5 pieces to a kilo) the Maneses preferred the smaller ones because that was what their target market in Tarlac wanted. The ordinary families preferred the smaller fish so that each member of the family could have at least a piece during meal time.

Paul said that they only used chicken manure to promote the growth of algae which was all that the tilapia ate. Although they did not use commercial feed, the growth rate of their fish was comparable to those who did. Chicken manure was applied every week. There was no specific quantity of manure that was applied. Usually, however, they scattered four big sacks of chicken manure over the water per 1,000-sq.m. pond.

FISH HARVEST No, the Peter Mountain Fish Farm did not grow their tilapia to a big size as in photo. They preferred the 50 to 100-grammers which they sold at ₱23 to ₱33 per kilo.

Paul explained that one has to observe the growth of algae in the pond so he could figure out how much manure to apply. The condition is just right for the fish if the color of the water is greenish and there is a thin film of scum on the surface. That means there is enough food for the fish.

One more thing that kept their cost of production was that they produced their own fingerlings. The Maneses were one of the four hatcheries that were licensed to produce fingerlings of GIFT, the Genetically Improved Farmed Tilapia.

Well, isn't the Peter Mountain Fish Farm really unique?

The Manila Times

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Chicken importers told to go slow

THE United Broilers Raisers Association (UBRA) is urging the country's chicken importers to go slow in their business to address the influx of imported chicken and plummeting farmgate prices of the commodity.

"Our importers should be encouraged for the cut or stoppage of importation of chicken until we get timely data, so that the stakeholders of the poultry industry could make appropriate business decisions," UBRA President Elias Jose Inciong told *The Manila Times* on Friday.

"We are expecting [importers'] opposition on this matter, but it's one way to address our problem in oversupply and very low prices of chicken at the farmgate level," he said.

Inciong explained that no "timely data" were made available to the stakeholders of the poultry industry, which could present an understanding of the overall supply and consumption in the country. The absence of such, he said, has made local poultry producers suffer from supply glut.

"There should be timely data so that the players and stakeholders can decide [what to do] on their own. Right now, we don't have timely data to tell us whether or not our importation has already exceeded the volume we need," Inciong said.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) earlier said the unabated importation had caused prices of chicken to drop substantially, to the detriment of local poultry producers. Data from the DTI showed that importation of the chicken leg quarter from January to November 2018 had reached 61.43 million kilos, significantly higher than the 44.83 million kilos imported in 2017.

"Normally, farmgate prices are low during the first and last quarter of the year because production conditions are good, so we normally expect increase in overall production. However, in the second quarter and part of the third quarter, that's when we expect difficulties," Inciong explained.

Inciong emphasized that while farmgate prices of chicken had fallen to about P38 per kilo in some areas in the country due to oversupply, its retail prices at market level remain high due to alleged profiteering of some players in the industry.

He fears that if importation of chicken is not cut, even at least temporarily, poultry growers could be pushed to quit raising chickens.

"Why is it that when prices at the farmgate level are going down, there is no clear assistance form the government. But when the prices are high, may it be at the farmgate or retail level, their instinct is to favor the importers and yet they do not recognize that there is really no connection between the farmgate and the retail prices," Inciong said.

"The industry has been losing money since September [last year] and a lot of small and medium businesses have either cut back or stopped growing [chickens] and waiting for the [market] cost to go down," he added..

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THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

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Green financing vs climate change

By Joshua Lao

Climate change is a major global concern affecting everybody from the tropics to the poles as the Earth's temperature rises causing an increase in extreme weather events, shrinking water supply, dying coral reefs, forests fires and other intense variations in the atmosphere.

For its part, the Philippines has had its share of the ill-effects of climate change, with Super Typhoon Yolanda (international code name Haiyan), the most devastating to hit the country in November 2013 killing at least 6,300 people on official count (some estimates the death toll to reach nearly 20,000).

The increased number of super typhoons hitting the Philippines had significantly impacted the agriculture sector. With this concern brought by climate change, the Philippine government in collaboration with the local communities and international partners are joining hands to act with the clear aim of escaping the worst impacts of climate change and establish a safer future for the country.

In our pursuit of a robust economy and public infrastructure development, we make it a point to ensure that our sustainability goals are not compromised.

The Duterte adiministration's efforts to revive and rehabilitate the country's environment can be clearly observed with the ambitious P47 billion plan to clean the once pristine waters of the famous Manila Bay, duplicating the government's success in rehabilitating Boracay beach.

However, programs and actions to save the environment comes with a price and financing it added to the concerns. Good thing help came from concerned institutions and other countries such as the United Kingdom (UK).

Green Financing

The UK Government through the British Embassy Manila, convened a forum on green financing in partnership with the Department of Finance, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, National Economic and Development Authority and Climate Change Commission.

With the theme, Green Finance Towards a Sustainable Philippines, the forum intends to serve as a platform for harnessing and building on the growing interest in climate funding and development of new markets for green finance to support and accelerate green investment and projects in the country.

Among such projects in the country was the Green, Green, Green which aims to provide a more sustainable and livable community in 145 cities through the development of public open spaces.

Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno, whose department spearheaded the program's launch last year, had cited that the project was in line with the Duterte administration's massive infrastructure programs.

"In our pursuit of a robust economy and public infrastructure development, we make it a point to ensure that our sustainability goals are not compromised," Diokno said.

"Green, Green, Green will help city governments create forest parks, arboretum and botanical gardens; improve livability of urban areas through various activities and methods such as landscaping, turfing and tree planting; and transform streetscapes through installation of eco-friendly street furniture, fixtures and shading," he added.

Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III during the forum announced the possibility of green financing for various public private partnership projects and the desire of the government to provide mainstream access to such funding, encouraging sustainable development through banks and microfinance institutions.

"The Duterte administration is mulling over the possible expansion of the coverage of the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) Green Bonds Framework to include sectors such as transportation, infrastructure and commercial banking in step with heightened global efforts to mobilize investments aimed at improving the resilience of communities to the perils of climate change," Dominguez explained.

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SRI LANKA-PH TIES BOOST PLEDGED

By Jester Manalastas

FORMER President now Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo assured both President Rodrigo Duterte and Sri Lanka President Maithripala Sirisena that the House will cooperate fully on initiatives to enhance the relations of the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

On Thursday Arroyo paid a courtesy call on President Maithripala, on the third day of his state visit to the Philippines.

Speaker Arroyo led the Philippine delegation composed of Quezon City Rep. Feliciano Belmonte Jr., Baguio City Rep. Mark Go; Manila Rep. Cristal Bagatsing; Batangas Rep. Mario Vittorio Mariño; Senator Cynthia Villar, Philippine Ambassador to Sri Lanka Vivencio Badillo, Department of Trade and Industry Secretary Ramon Lopez, and Department of Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary Meynardo Montealegre.

Speaker Arroyo welcomed President Maithripala to the country and noted the historic nature of the visit, which is the first time for a Sri Lankan president in the 58 years of diplomatic relations between the two nations.

The Speaker also discussed the significant growth of Philippine and Sri Lankan relations in the last few years.

In terms of trade, the Philippines exports food products, activated carbon, polyethylene, coconut oil and sanitary articles to Sri Lanka while Sri Lanka exports postage, wheat and flour, garments, and table and kitchenware to the Philippines.

Speaker Arroyo noted that although trade is small, it has been growing steadily at an annual rate of nine percent a year. She hoped that with the shared commitment of the two countries, this growth can be sustained and even improved.

"So we welcome and support the conduct of inbound missions by Sri Lankan businessmen to the Philippines. Not only trade but also investments, which are very important for long-term development and poverty reduction. Our two countries certainly could benefit from increased FDIs (foreign direct investments) on both sides," Arroyo said.

Speaker Arroyo noted that police cooperation as well as a memorandum of understanding on defense and military education and training signed by President Maithripala earlier in his visit will help both countries in the fight against illegal drugs.

She also mentioned the great strides in the relations of Sri Lanka and the Philippines in terms of agriculture, tourism, education, and culture, and people-to-people exchanges.

"So there are so many areas for friendship between our two countries and your visit provides an impetus to develop those areas," she said.

Meanwhile, President Maithripala extended his best wishes to the Philippines for its rapid economic growth, congratulating the country's leaders for its hard work to elevate the level of development nationwide.

President Maithripala further observed that agriculture plays a key role in Sri Lanka-Philippine relations.

"The main feature that binds Sri Lanka and Philippines is that both countries have given priority to the development of agriculture… I feel that Sri Lanka and the Philippines, our two countries, face similar kind of challenges," he said.

He added that Sri Lanka and the Philippines have similar social problems, especially those revolving around the trade and use of illegal drugs. As such, he commended the initiatives of the Philippines in addressing this problem.