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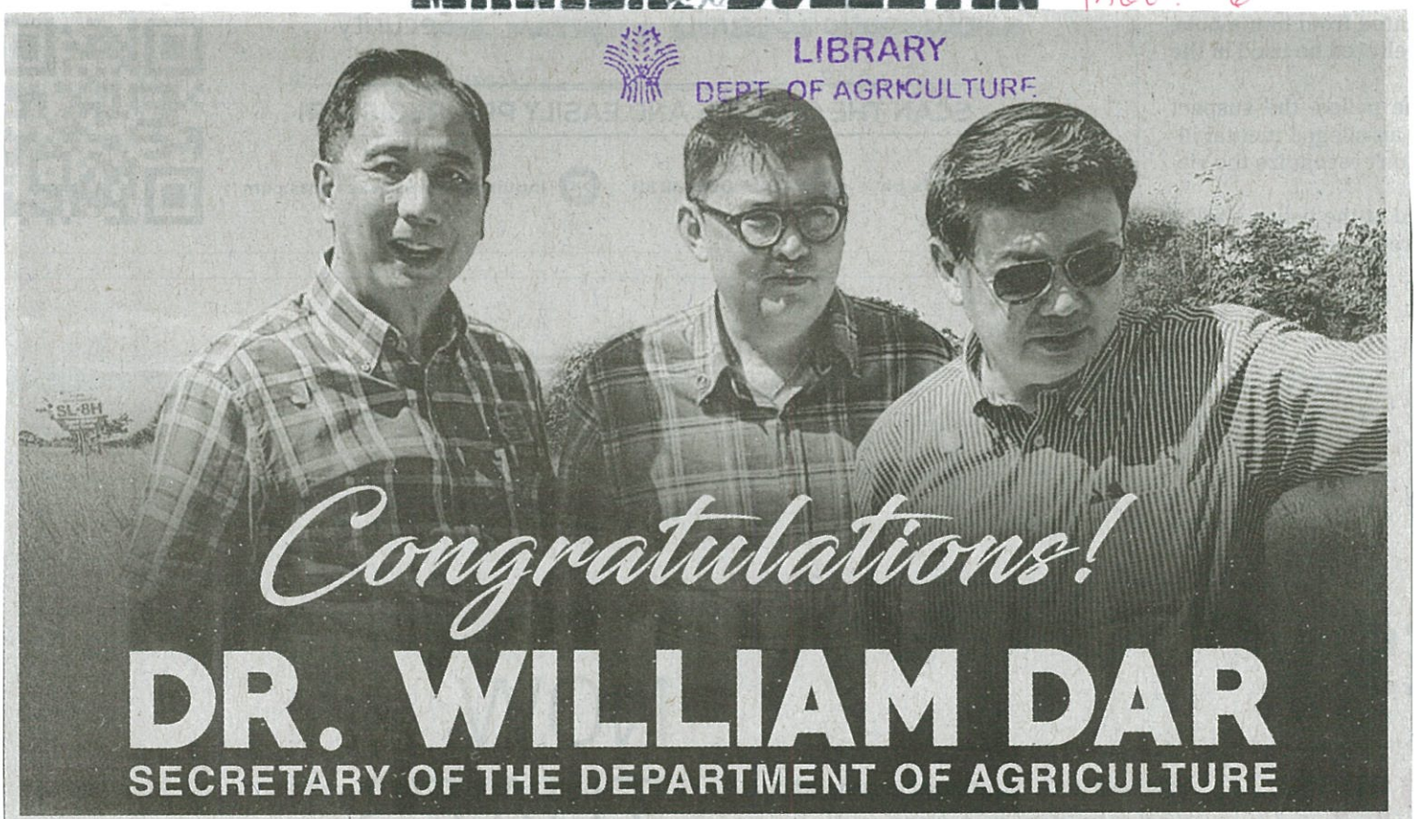

Congratulations!

DR. WILLIAM DAR

SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

"For the past three years, Dr. William Dar has been a staunch partner of Go Negosyo for its pursuit towards micro small, and medium enterprises development through our mentorship programs across the country. He has also been heavily involved in our agriculture-related programs such as the Kapatid Agri Mentor Me program which equips our farmers and other agri-stakeholders.

We believe that he will be an asset to the administration as it pursues inclusive growth for all Filipinos in all sectors. Go Negosyo and the Office of Presidential Adviser for Entrepreneurship are willing to work with Secretary Dar in his mission to alleviate our agriculture sector."

JOEY CONCEPCION
Presidential Adviser for Entrepreneurship and Go Negosyo Founder

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THE PHILIPPINE STAR
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Gov't eyes more private partners for irrigation

The Department of Agriculture is eyeing more partnerships with the private sector particularly on the construction of irrigation systems to cover the needed one million hectares in the country.

Newly-appointed Agriculture chief William Dar cited the need to elevate investments for the national irrigation system.

"We should be looking at opportunities to open this to the private sector under a build-operate-transfer scheme," Dar said in a weekly forum Wednesday.

"We will start the process this year, hoping this will eventually be put into action," he said.

Dar is proposing a Build Build Build mechanism to accelerate the development of the national Irrigation system.

"We will discuss this with NIA, we will partner with them because they have the responsibility to develop our irrigation and they are not attached to us," Dar said.

"We have to consider that there is the private sector, why not (tap them) so government can redirect its investments for other priorities," he said.

Dar is supporting the solar powered irrigation system that was started by former agri chief Emmanuel Piñol.

"The concept is good and we want to strengthen that with the involvement of the private sector. Due diligence must be done properly, our bottomline is the water source, it should be available the whole months of the year," he said.

Since DA started the SPIS in March 2017, it has provided funding for 169 units of SPIS nationwide.

The SPIS, one of DA's flagship programs, aims to ensure sufficient rice supply in the coming years and could even result in surplus production in the country.

It used to be part of the 10-point priority agenda which aims to increase rice production by providing the water needed by farmers to irrigate their farms and enable them to plant and harvest at least twice a year.

–Louise Maureen Simeon

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Agri dep't urged to hasten release of farmers' fund

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The Department of Agriculture is being urged to immediately implement and release its proposed cash assistance to rice farmers to help ease the impact of lower palay prices.

Action for Economic Reforms (AER) is calling on newly-appointed agriculture chief William Dar to urgently work on his unconditional cash transfer plan to aid farmers in the continued transition due to the Rice Tariffication Law.

Dar is already studying a measure similar to the government's 4Ps-Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program as one of the immediate interventions apart from expediting the release of the P10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

AER president Jessica Cantos said the cash transfers have to be prioritized as an urgent short-term intervention to protect both the welfare of rice farmers and the law itself.

"Our problem is time. The money for cash transfers has not been allocated yet for this year's budget. The RCEF subsidy is rigid: the possibility of a cash transfer solely depends on how much tariff will be collected since only the amount in excess of P10 billion can be used for cash transfers," Cantos said.

"But this has to be done now to tide over farmers in the transition to RCEP going full blast. It principally intends to serve as a temporary and short-term mitigating measure in the transition period. This is urgent for both political and economic reasons," she said.

The group emphasized the need for a competent agri chief who will directly address the crises plaguing the agricultural sector, and take proactive measures to ensure the welfare of farmers.

"Hopefully he will do a much better job after our agriculture's lackluster performance coupled by the mismanagement of our rice supply that contributed much to inflation last year until the early part of this year," the group said.

Dar has proposed a new thinking strategy to advance the agriculture sector in order to achieve food security.

He said the strategy seeks to collectively empower farmers, fisherfolks and the private sector to increase agricultural productivity and profitability.

The Manila Times

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Agri policy needs better execution

ROUGH TRADE

BEN KRITZ

IN spite of the weather that had most reasonable people scurrying for the comfort of their homes, I had an opportunity to sit down with Finance Secretary Carlos "Sonny" Dominguez 3rd on Friday. It was a conversation about which much more will be written in the next couple of days, and among the topics that were discussed was the state of Philippine agriculture, or rather, agriculture in the context of the somewhat contentious Rice Tariffication Act, and the not-at-all contentious appointment of Dr. William Dar as acting Agriculture secretary.

Outside of the offices of the Department of Finance (DoF), there is a sense that whatever good intentions there were behind the liberalization of rice imports have gone astray, and the scheme should be reexamined. This paper has editorialized to that effect, and so have a couple of others, and depending on what currents of thought one swims in on social media, dissent against it among rice farmers and their advocates is shrill.

The problem, of course, is that liberalization has worked as it logically should: the rice supply has stabilized and retail prices have moderated to a tolerable level, but farmgate prices have tumbled. Farm incomes have dropped to worrisome levels, and it has been reported that about 40 percent of the country's millers have stopped or suspended their operations, finding it unprofitable at current wholesale prices.

There is no way around this conundrum — short of avoiding it altogether by reimposing a protectionist scheme — so one of two compensating solutions can be applied. The simplest one is to simply subsidize farmgate prices. That is being done to a modest extent in an indirect way through the fixed price at which the National Food Authority (NFA) buys rice for strategic stockpiles. The NFA, however, is of greatly diminished importance in the liberalization environment, so this does not have a significant impact. Subsidizing prices directly on a larger scale is not under consideration, but it is hypothetically possible. As the experience of countries such as Thailand has shown, however, subsidies can be a trap; modifying or removing them is politically risky.

The second way to counteract the ill effects of import liberalization is to provide support to growers in ways that help boost their productivity and improve their product. If domestic farmers can produce more, the increase in more accessible supply obviates the need for imports.

Likewise, if their products are of superior quality than what is available in the import market, they will benefit from higher demand. This solution is a market-driven approach, and is the one written into the Rice Tariffication Act — the P10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) paid for by the tariff receipts from imported rice and earmarked for various types of support to domestic farmers, such as seed, fertilizer, equipment and low-cost financing.

Secretary Dominguez has in the recent past publicly stated that the Rice Tariffication Act does not need to be reviewed in spite of its evident shortcomings, and he is actually correct. That agriculture policy should be market-based is a core perspective, not only his (he was at one time the country's Agriculture secretary, so has a credible basis for his views), but of the Duterte administration generally. That makes the Rice Tariffication Act, or something very much like it, a necessity, one backed by 100 years or so of economic history that demonstrates performance and market liberalization have a directly proportional relationship.

The problem is not that rice liberalization isn't working or can't work; it is that the tool devised to carry it out is not being fully utilized. The P10-billion RCEF for this year was jump-started by a P5-billion deposit to the Department of Agriculture (DA), since the domestic farmers would obviously feel the impact of imports before the revenue was collected and made its way through bureaucratic channels. Unfortunately, only about P1 billion of that initial fund was spent, so most of the farmers it was supposed to help have been left out on a limb. Without fully utilizing the RCEF, no judgment can be made as to its efficacy, so calls to scrap or at least modify the liberalization scheme are premature.

With the change in management at the DA (which the DoF chief was instrumental in bringing about), agricultural policy will likely become a great deal more empirical and will certainly be more efficiently carried out. Straightening out the mess rice import liberalization has become for the domestic rice sector will be a good test of Dr. Dar's leadership, and will provide some insights into how effective further needed reforms — such as liberalization of the sugar industry — might be.

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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William Dar

After a brief stint as acting agriculture secretary during the Estrada administration, distinguished horticulturist Dr. William Dar is back at the helm of the Department of Agriculture. His appointment came as a surprise after President Duterte said he was inclined to pick a former general following the resignation of Emmanuel Piñol. But Dar is actually a general in his own right after serving as director general of India-based research institute International Crops Research for the Semi-Arid Tropics. Economic managers are banking on Dar's expertise and background to revive the anemic agri sector, which contracted by 0.24 percent during the first semester of the year. Dar is making his comeback count by ensuring that during his term, increase in farm production and profit will go hand in hand. To address the lack of water in some agricultural areas, Dar plans to construct irrigation systems for a million hectares. To do this, the new agriculture chief is proposing to tap the private sector through investments under the BOT (build-operate-transfer) scheme. But first, a year-round water supply must be assured in rural areas for the additional irrigation systems to work, Dar said.

THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

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Acting DA chief: Championing local farmers

His leadership will concentrate on finding more ways to further uplift Filipino farmers and fisherfolk – with the definitive goal of doubling their profits in the next five years

DA Secretary Dr. William Dar.

By Maria Romero

Unity towards a food-secure Philippines is now the battle cry of the newly-appointed Department of Agriculture (DA) acting Secretary Dr. William Dar.

On the day after his oath-taking on 5 August 2019, Dar said his leadership will concentrate on finding more ways to further uplift Filipino farmers and fisherfolk – with the definitive goal of doubling their profits in the next five years.

Dar, who served as DA Secretary from July 1998 to May 1999 under Joseph Estrada's presidency, said he wants the Rice Tariffication Law and the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to be properly instigated.

"To realize the vision of President Duterte for a food-secure Philippines and to double the income of farmers and fisherfolk, I propose a strategy built around eight paradigms that also make up the "new thinking" for agriculture," he said in a press briefing.

Dar thus recommends modernization and industrialization of agriculture; promotion of exports; farm consolidation; roadmap and infrastructure development; higher budget and investments for agriculture and stronger legislative support.

Modernization and the use of modern technology will cover all crops, including those with export potential in processed or value-added form like coffee, cacao, cassava, tropical fruits, and rubber.

Relative to that, there is also a need to expand crop manufacturing in the Philippines as about 80 percent of the country's farmlands are used to grow only three crops: rice, corn, and coconut.

"Agripreneurship should also form part of the paradigm to modernize Philippine agriculture, as farming and fisheries should be treated as business undertakings or industries. Agripreneurship is also one of the components to industrialize Philippine agriculture," Dar said.

"While productivity increase is a major objective, it is equally important to produce more income by value-adding, processing, manufacturing and developing markets for both raw and processed agricultural products."

To improve the quantity and quality of export products, Dar is pushing for the development of a systematic and long-term strategy in progressing and promoting exports of both raw and processed agricultural products to which the private sector's role will be crucial.

"At present, the Philippines only has two agricultural products that earn at least $1 billion per year in export receipts: bananas; and coconut products (mostly in oil form). Thailand has 13 types of farm exports earning over $1 billion each year, Indonesia has five, and Vietnam has seven," he explained.

Furthermore, the new agriculture chief also wants to promote and support farm consolidation arrangements to bring about economies of scale, particularly for crops that need mechanization and substantial use of technology.

These include block farming, trust farming, contract farming, and corporative farming which would make farming more organized.

High production charges, restricted cropping diversification, low productivity, low-income resistance and volatile commodity prices have been the cause of reduced income for farmer and fisherfolk.

The low use of inputs, poor soil health, and the effects of climate change were also identified as some of the factors that negatively impact local farmers.

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Landbank commits to double lending assistance to Cotabato

By **MARY GRACE PADIN**

State-run Land Bank of the Philippines has committed to more than double the number of farmers it will assist from the province of Cotabato as part of efforts to intensify support to the agriculture sector.

Landbank president and chief executive officer Cecilia Borromeo said the bank would increase the number of its beneficiaries from Cotabato to 70,000 farmers from the current 30,000 it is servicing.

Borromeo, who made the announcement during a recent caravan in Kidapawan City, said Landbank would expand coverage by going directly to individual farmers and fishers, including those engaged in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

"As we push forward with our aggressive thrust to promote greater financial inclusion, Landbank is continuously banking on partnerships with LGUs (local government units) to bring financial services closer to more unbanked and underserved Filipinos. We hope to replicate this event in other provinces," Borromeo said.

During the event, Landbank informed farmers about the Accessible Funds for Delivery to Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (AFFORD-ARBs), a direct lending program which caters to individual ARBs engaged in the production of rice, corn and high value crops, as well as the acquisition of small farm implements, such as hand tractors.

Also discussed was the Socialized Credit Program under the Sugarcane Industry Development Act (SCP-SIDA), a tie-up with the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) that aims to provide financial assistance to sugarcane farmers, block farms, planters' cooperatives and service centers.

Landbank also presented the Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (ACEF), another lending facility for farmers, fishers, MSMEs, cooperatives and associations for the acquisition and establishment of production, post-harvest, and processing machineries; equipment and facilities and farm inputs and improvements.

Landbank is currently the biggest credit provider to small farmers and fishers, and the biggest lender to LGUs and MSMEs among government financial institutions.

As of the end of June, loans extended to the agriculture sector reached P219.63 billion, equivalent to 27.45 percent of the bank's total loan portfolio amounting to P799.64 billion.

This makes Landbank compliant to the Agri-Agra Credit Law, which mandates banks to allot 25 percent of their total loanable funds to agriculture and fisheries.

As a result of its aggressive lending activities, Landbank reported a 35.8 percent jump in net income to P10.58 billion in the first half. This figure also exceeded the bank's P8.32 billion target for the period by 27.16 percent.

Landbank's assets likewise went up by 7.1 percent to P1.81 trillion. Total deposits increased by six percent to P1.59 trillion.

During his State of the Nation Address last month, President Duterte called on Landbank to boost its lending to the farm sector.

The Manila Times

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299 irrigation projects hobbled by delays – CoA

IRRIGATION projects with total contract cost of P20.7 billion incurred delays ranging from a day to about six years, the Commission on Audit (CoA) said in an audit report on the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) for 2018 and 2017.

Fifty-five of the 299 contracts pertained to NIA's central office (CO) with total contract cost of P17.63 billion. These suffered delays ranging from 15 days to 2,287 calendar days or six years.

Thirty of the contracts with total cost of P818.46 million pertained to NIA Regional Office (RO) 11. These 30 contracts incurred delays ranging from 58 days to 2,016 days or more than five years.

Forty-five of the contracts worth P366.33 million were projects of NIA RO 5. These contracts suffered delays ranging from one day to 228 days.

➤Irrigation A8

■ **IRRIGATION** FROM A1

299

Also among the 299 contracts were 16 contracts — with total cost of P241,599,764 — for NIA RO 2. These projects were "originally programmed to be completed in calendar year 2016."

Meanwhile, 27 contracts pertaining to NIA RO 1 incurred delays ranging from 33 days to 129 days. These had a total cost of P133.98 million.

Twelve contracts for Region 3 with total cost of P102.7 million suffered delays ranging from 24 days to 223 days.

Projects for Regions 9, 13, 6 and the Cordillera Administrative Region were also delayed.

Based on the audit report, the 299 contracts also included 75 contracts that pertained to the Agno River Irrigation System Extension Project, as well as eight contracts that pertained to the Balog-Balog Multipurpose Project.

The audit commission noted that "the delay in the completion of the contract works unduly deprived farmer-beneficiaries of the immediate use of the said irrigation facilities, and could further result in wastage of government resources when the unfinished/uncompleted contracts would eventually be terminated."

The commission said the 299 contracts also included 72 "ongoing contracts" totaling P13.99 billion, "which already incurred negative slippages ranging from" 0.11 percent to 87.84 percent in the CO and in three ROs.

Of the 72 contracts, it added, contracts totaling P9 billion that "have already incurred huge negative slippages ranging from 15 percent to 87.84 percent were neither terminated nor rescinded."

Based on the audit report, 43 contracts implemented by the CO and two ROs with total costs of P2.2 billion were terminated because of "the contractor's fault."

But it said "appropriate actions" against the contractors were not undertaken such as forfeiture of the performance security in favor of NIA totaling P472.067 million

REINA C. TOLENTINO

THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

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NFA on *palay*-buying binge

By Maria Romero

In an effort to curb the negative impact of the declining farmgate prices of paddy rice, the National Food Authority (NFA) has gone on a *palay* buying binge from local farmers.

NFA Administrator Judy Carol Dansal said the agency will continue to buy *palay* even during the lean months, which started in July and will last until September.

"We continue to focus on aggressive *palay* procurement from our local farmers as mandated by Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Liberalization Law, not only for buffer stocking purposes during calamities and emergencies but to provide a ready market for our farmers' produce and cushion the impact of the low farm gate price," she said on Friday.

According to Dansal, more local farmers are now directly selling their *palay* to NFA as they get to sell their produce at a fair and reasonable price. Moreover, the NFA offers them incentives.

For instance, NFA buys a kilo of rice for P17 plus incentives of P3.00/kg for buffer stocking, P0.20/kg for drying and P0.20/kg for delivery and P0.30/kg for a cooperative development incentive fee.

As a result, the maximum buying price of rice from farmer organizations can go as high as P20.70/kg. For individual farmers, the price is pegged at roughly P20.40/kg.

Based on the latest figures by state-run Philippine Statistics Authority, the farm gate price of *palay* dropped by 0.1 percent to P 17.80 on the third week of July from P17.81 on the second week of July.

Meanwhile, reports from NFA field offices showed that the lowest farm gate price of *palay* was recorded in Northern Leyte at P14 per kilogram. In Pampanga, the price was logged at P15 per kilo while in was P15 per kilo in Aurora, Cavite, Sarangani, Tagum and Compostela Valley.

During the period from January to the first week of August, the food agency procured 5.8 million bags of the Filipino food staple. This was higher by 109 percent than the targeted 5.3 million bags for the period.

The agency will continue to buy *palay* even during the lean months, which started in July and will last until September.

"The month of August has just started but the NFA has already bought a total of 26,036 bags in the first week," Dansal said.

Nueva Ecija, Occidental Mindoro, Isabela, Bulacan, Northwestern Cagayan, Apayao, Tarlac, North Cotabato, Mamburao, Cayagan and Pampanga are among the provinces with high *palay* procurement record.

Dansal assured that the 303 NFA buying stations nationwide remain open to accept more *palay* deliveries from individual farmers and organizations.

As mandated by the recently enacted Rice Liberalization Law, NFA is not allowed to import rice as they are now tasked to ensure that the country has enough rice stocks especially during calamities.

LOCAL farmers prefer to sell their produce to the NFA which offers reasonable prices and various incentives.

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Nickel firm adopts innovative soil conditioning technology

Rio Tuba Nickel (RTN) has tapped the Department of Science and Technology's bioreactor that converts biodegradable wastes into organic fertilizers and soil conditioners.

A subsidiary of Nickel Asia Corp., RTN intends to extend the use of these organic fertilizers for the ongoing vegetable production projects in the IP communities in Rio Tuba that aim to cater to the growing demands for organic vegetables in Palawan.

DOST project supervisor Myra Tansengco said the bioreactor is intended to promote efficient solid waste management practices in the communities to comply with the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 or Republic Act 9003.

Almost 20 years after RA9003 became a law, the challenge continues to be on how to enforce proper waste segregation in the communities.

"We are banking on RTN's community relations competency. I believe that if the barangay folks can distinctly understand how wastes are converted into useful materials, waste segregation will be easy to enforce," said Engr. David Herrera, senior science specialist at the DOST.

RTN hopes the people in the communities can envision how their daily household wastes can actually help grow plants and help make soils more productive in the mine site in preparation for rehabilitation.

Materials to be fed in the bioreactor are biodegradable wastes from the communities, classified as – dry waste, wet waste, and animal manure. Efficient classification and segregation of wastes are critical to produce fertilizers and soil conditioners.

"RTN is proud to be first in the mining industry to run this bioreactor, it gives us the integrity to compel the community to segregate household wastes. We are committed to educate the barangays on how solid wastes from their homes and backyards, when handled properly, can contribute to the protection of the environment and help reduce environment degradation," said Wilbern Blitz Paeste, RTN's mining technology and geosciences coordinator.

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App to identify crab species launched

Crabifier, a mobile app that identifies mangrove crab species at the juvenile stage, was recently launched.

Developed by the Technologies for Biodiversity Use and Conservation (TechBiodive) Unit of the De La Salle University (DLSU), the mobile application aims to to help farmers maximize production in farms, reduce postharvest losses of juveniles, and potentially increase income by classifying the price of the mangrove juvenile crabs caught from the wild.

It is an output of the mangrove crab project, Integrating Genomics with Image Analysis and Geographic Information System Technology (GIS) for Improved Rearing of Mudcrabs funded by the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST-PCAARRD).

Crabifier will help the mangrove crab industry especially that 80-90% still depend on wild-caught juveniles from mangroves.

The mobile app was developed by integrating data from DNA markers, data with image analysis, and mobile computing through partnership with the Practical Genomics Lab.

Another mobile app, BioMon was launched to monitor biodiversity.

The data may be immediately downloaded to computers, bypassing the tedious process of encoding data, preventing data pile-up and encouraging immediate use of the data, especially for policy.

The information may be stored, shared and analyzed to draw maps for biodiversity distribution, evaluate threats, and establish relevant spatial and temporal patterns.

BioMon will allow local communities to actively monitor their own key biodiversity areas, as well as obtain and use crowdsourced data.

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THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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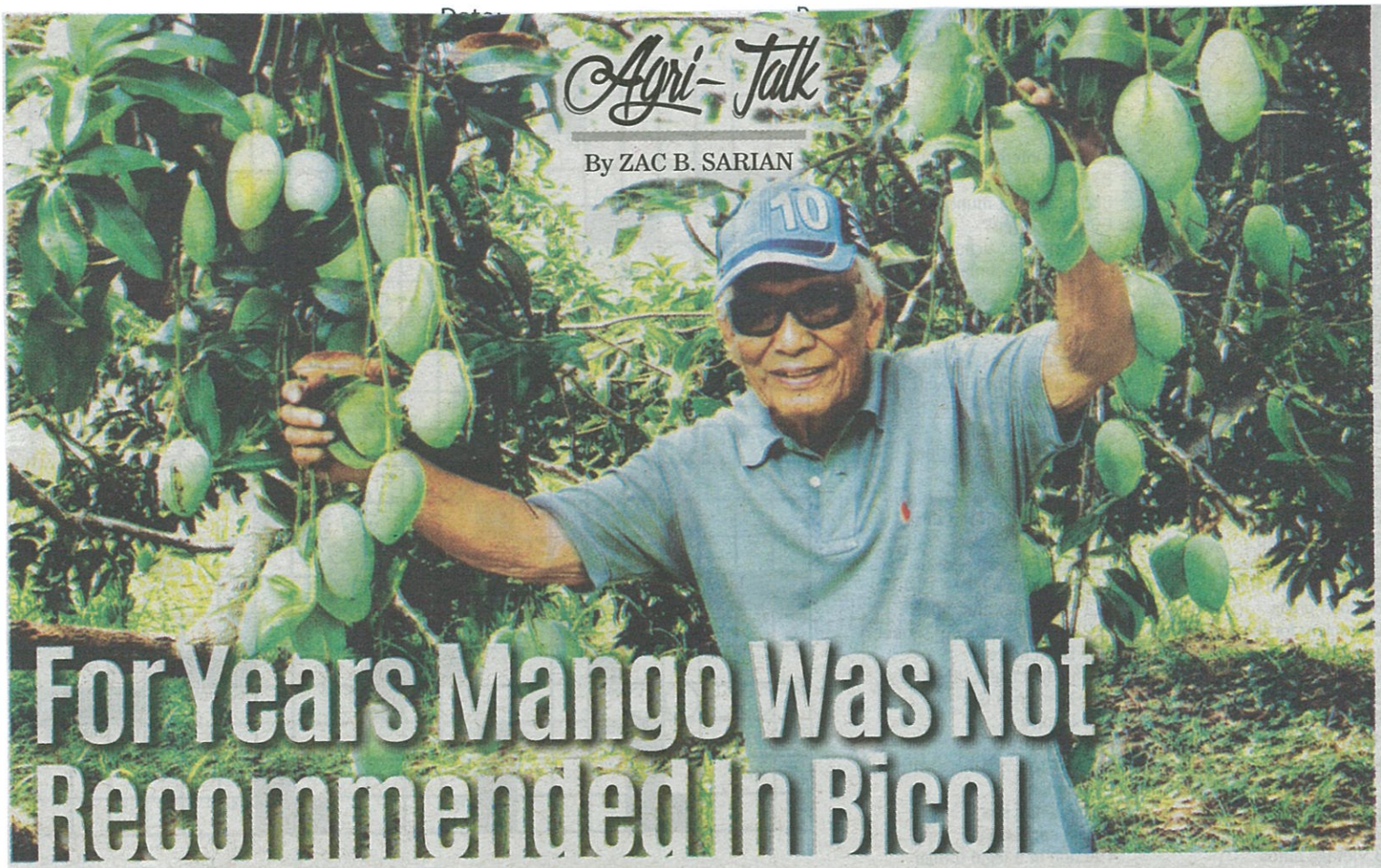
Agri-Talk

By ZAC B. SARIAN



For Years Mango Was Not Recommended In Bicol

(Memoirs of an Agri Journalist)

For many years planting mango trees in Bicol was never recommended by agriculturists because the region was known as typhoon belt and the trees would just be toppled by the strong winds. But today, there are commercial as well as many backyard plantings of carabao mango in that part of the country.

Well, we think *Panorama* played an important part. Here's how. In the early 1990s we attended a garden show in Naga City. As in every garden show, there was a commercial section where plants and garden supplies are sold. In the Naga garden show, there was a stall where a lady sold big beautiful ripe mangoes. We interviewed Mrs. **Patria Escaro** about her mangoes which we wrote for out column in *Panorama*. Since then, we became good friends and she often attended our *Agri-Kapihan* at the defunct Manila Seedling Bank in Quezon City.

We learned they had planted 500 grafted mango seedlings in their farm in Calabanga town, many of which were toppled by strong winds but they survived and are productive up to this day. The toppled trees are fruitful and are easy to harvest because the fruits are just a few feet above the ground.

We learned they had planted 500 grafted mango seedlings in their farm in Calabanga town, many of which were toppled by strong winds but they survived and are productive up to this day.

Where did the 500 mango seedlings come from? Well, it happened that a fruit trader owed the Escaro couple (**Marcelo** and Patria) a big amount. The trader had bought a lot of *dalandan* fruits on credit and for many years did not show up to settle his account. One day, to the surprise of the Escaros, the trader appeared with a truckload of grafted mango seedlings. He apologized that he did not show up earlier, telling them that instead of cash he thought of bringing with him the seedlings as payment for what he owed.

Well, what could the Escaros do? It was better to accept the offer than nothing. After all, they had a big farm in Calabanga, Camarines Sur where they planted them. The trees thrived in the rich soil of Calabanga and produced a lot of fruits.

After the story was published in *Panorama*, the Escaros became some kind of a celebrity in their province of Camarines Sur. Whenever Mrs. Escaro attended our *Agri-Kapihan*, she was always very ecstatic telling about their mango farm. She said that after the publication of our story in *Panorama*, the provincial agriculture office erected big signboard declaring that the Escaro mango farm was a cooperator of the Department of Agriculture. Very smart guys, if you ask us.

About a year afer our article was published, Camarines Sur was ravaged by a strong typhoon. The province was given a P2 million calamity fund. And what did they do with the amount? The provincial government bought grafted mango seedlings which were given free to whoever wanted to plant mango.

Now you know how mango was finally accepted by agriculturists for planting in Bicol.

(Log on to: zacsarian.com for practical farming tips, ideas and interesting agri people. Email us: info@zacsarian.com)

Manila Standard

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SOLON PUSHES PROBE OF RICE CARTEL

By Maricel V. Cruz

THE Philippine Competition Commission will do well to investigate rice millers and traders for allegedly violating the Competition Act, a lawmaker said, claiming that they were abusing farmers by taking advantage of their dominant market position.

Assistant Minority Leader Stella Luz Quimbo—a professor and department chairman at the University of the Philippines' School of Economics and a member of the PCC prior to being elected to Congress—noted that inflation was down to 2.4 percent in large part due to the decrease in rice prices.

The price of rice decreased by about 2.9 percent since the Rice Tariffication Law came into effect.

However, Quimbo said that "while the price of rice we buy in the public market dropped by 2.9 percent, the price of palay (unmilled rice) sold by farmers to rice traders and middlemen plunged significantly more, by 17.48 percent. In short, the farmers are shouldering the substantial portion of the reduction in rice prices."

"That is just not fair," she added.

This unfair situation, Quimbo said, points to a conclusion that rice millers and traders are abusing their market position to the detriment of the rice farmers. "It is a clear violation of section 15(g) of the Philippine Competition Act; rice millers and traders cannot abuse their dominance and severely undercut the price of palay bought from farmers," she said.

"The Philippine Competition Commission should resolve soonest its investigation of rice cartels and file cases where necessary."

She cited Section 15(g) of the Competition Act which states: "It shall be prohibited for one or more entities to abuse their dominant position by engaging in conduct that would substantially prevent, restrict or lessen competition" by "directly or indirectly imposing unfairly low purchase prices for the goods or services of, among others, marginalized agricultural producers."

She said economic managers led by Finance Secretary Carlos G. Dominguez should be commended for their efforts to ease inflation, while the 17th Congress should be credited for passing the Rice Tariffication Act, which has helped reduce rice prices. "The administration's economic team correctly diagnosed the inflation problem—it was a food problem. Congress, on the other hand, came up with the right medicine—The Rice Tariffication Act."

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Not a season of good yield for some export crops grown in Mindanao

By Manuel T. Cayon | *Mindanao Bureau Chief*

DAVAO CITY—Contraction in crop production across the country in the second quarter has a more telling effect in Mindanao, where at least three major crop exports were planted to a wide portion of the island.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) placed the contraction at 5.7 percent, which affected total agricultural output during the period, as crops account for almost half, or 47.42 percent, of total output.

Total agricultural output declined by 1.31 percent on the same period.

Insufficient rainfall was blamed for the 0.76-percent contraction in production of coconut. In Davao region, lack of rain during the fruiting stage resulted in fewer number of mature nuts harvested, as it was also noted in the lesser nuts produced in another major producing region in Luzon, in the Mindoro-Marinduque-Romblon and Palawan area.

In the Caraga region in northeastern Mindanao, the decline was traced to low-buying price of copra, hence farmers refused to sell their produce.

Production of bananas dropped by 4.15 percent and the Davao region, the largest producer, reported lower production due to the occurrence of "moko" disease. Smaller bunches harvested were also blamed on insufficient rainfall during the fruiting stage, from March to May.

Further, smaller sizes and lower quality of fruits were reported in the plantations of South Cotabato-North Cotabato-Sultan Kudarat-Sarangani-General Santos City (Soccsksargen) region because of the dry spell during the first quarter of this year.

It's the same for coffee, as overall production declined by 6.32 percent. Alarming for the coffee industry was the reported cutting of old robusta coffee trees, as farmers shifted to banana. The Soccsksargen was one of the areas of attention given by the coffee industry, which has been scouting for more areas to plant and where some of the prime production areas could be found in this region and in the rest of Mindanao.

Aside from crop conversion, the Soccsksargen farmers also complained of smaller berries harvested due to dry spell.

However, production of pineapple was one bright spot for crop production in Mindanao, as production expanded by 0.69 percent. While bigger fruits were harvested in Bicol region, the Soccsksargen area said adequate fertilizer application during the crop growth stage and increased area harvested helped a slight increase in production.

Mango also reported recovery from last year's production decline as it posted a 5.37-percent increase in second quarter. Good production in Luzon was traced to lesser occurrence of cecid fly pests and anthracnose disease but in Soccsksargen, more trees bore fruits as a result of sunny weather condition.

Production of abaca also inched up by 0.13 percent, the PSA data indicate. More stripping activities were observed in Caraga because of high demand from assemblers and in Zamboanga Peninsula, there were more harvesting activities because of the sunny weather condition. The increased production output was also noted in the Davao region as it traced to the increased number of bearing hills.

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Solon: Rice traders abuse farmers

THIS is the observation of Assistant Minority Leader and Marikina Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo, as she called for an investigation to determine how the government can stop this abuse.

Quimbo is urging the Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) to investigate rice millers and traders for violating the Philippine Competition Act, saying that rice millers and traders were abusing farmers by taking advantage of their dominant market position.

The lady solon, a former professor of economics in the University of the Philippines, noted that inflation was down to 2.4 percent in large part to the drop in rice prices, which dropped by 2.9 percent.

However, Quimbo said, while the price of rice in the public market dropped by 2.9 percent, the price of palay (unmilled rice) sold by farmers to rice traders and middlemen plunged significantly more, by 17.48 percent.

"In short, the farmers are shouldering the substantial portion of the reduction in rice prices. That's just not fair," Quimbo said.

"This unfair situation points to a conclusion that rice millers and traders are abusing their dominant market power to the detriment of our rice farmers. It is a clear violation of section 15(g) of the Philippine Competition Act; rice millers and traders cannot abuse their dominance and severely undercut the price of palay paid to farmers," the lawmaker explained.

Quimbo wants the Philippine Competition Commission to resolve soonest its investigation of rice cartels and open cases where necessary.

Jester Manalastas

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Farmers get short end of rice business

FARMERS are being abused by rice traders.

This is the observation of Assistant Minority Leader and Marikina Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo, who called for an investigation to determine how the government can stop this abuse.

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Section 15(g) of the PCA states that it shall be prohibited "for one or more entities to abuse their dominant position by engaging in conduct that would substantially prevent, restrict or lessen competition" by "directly or indirectly imposing unfairly low purchase prices for the goods or services of, among others, marginalized agricultural producers."

The solon said that economic managers led by Finance Secretary Sonny Dominguez should be commended for their efforts to ease inflation, while the 17th Congress should be credited for passing the Rice Tariffication Act, which has helped reduce rice prices.

"The administration's economic team correctly diagnosed the inflation problem – it was a food problem. Congress, on the other hand, came up with the right medicine – The Rice Tariffication Act," Quimbo stressed.

However, while consumers benefited from this measure, Quimbo pointed out that efforts must be made to study if the drop in rice prices caused thousands of farmers to stop food production.

She likewise called for an urgent review of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) and to determine if it was properly utilized for the benefit of small farmers.

Jester P. Manalastas, Jezreel Biscocho (OJT)

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Tataasan ng Landbank

PAUTANG SA FARMERS

TARGET ng mga opisyal ng state-owned Land Bank of the Philippines (Landbank) na mapataas ang pautang sa sektor ng agrikultura ng 15 percent taon-taon upang matulungan ang may tatlong milyong magsasaka sa pagtatapos ng administrasyong Duterte sa 2022.

Ayon kay Landbank President and CEO Cecilia Borromeo, asam nilang mapaabot ang agriculture loans sa P265 billion sa 2020, mas mataas sa P231.25 billion target ngayong taon kung saan layon nilang matulungan ang may isang milyong magsasaka.

"It's a consistent growth so by 2022, the portfolio of the bank to the agriculture sector will reached PHP350 billion and we should be able to assist at least three million farmers by then," aniya.

Ito ay makaraang atasan ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte ang mga opisyal ng Landbank na dagdagan pa ang pagtulong sa mga magsasaka dahil ito ay kabilang sa mandato ng bangko.

Ani Borromeo, sa kasalukuyan ay mayroon silang 44 lending centers sa buong bansa at layon nilang mapalaki ito sa 50 centers sa 2020.

Inaprubahan na, aniya, ng Board of Directors ng bangko ang pagbubukas ng mga bagong lending center sa Lanao del Norte, Quirino Province at Antique.

Binigyang-diin niya na tumatalima ang bangko sa Agri-Agra law, kung saan 27 percent ng total loans na nagkakahalaga ng P222 billion ang kasalukuyang nakalaan sa sektor ng agrikultura.

"We will, at the very least, maintain that share in the agriculture sector. It can be more depending on the economy," aniya.

Sa ilalim ng Agri-Agra law, ang mga bangko ay kinakailangang maglaan ng 10 percent ng kanilang pondo para sa agrarian reform credit (Agra) at 15 percent para sa iba pang agricultural credit (Agri).

Sa first half ng taon, ang bangko ay nagkaloob ng P744.5 billion na halaga ng loans sa priority sector, o 93.1 percent ng total loans.

Ang pautang sa maliliit na magsasaka ay umabot naman sa P 42.31 billion, habang nasa P14 billion ang ipinagkaloob sa maliliit na mangingisda at kanilang mga asosasyon. **PNA**