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***Photo:* DA budget briefing**

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL
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DA chief wants fishing vessel upgrade

Big fleets equipped with modern processing and canning facilities can provide a great advantage for the Philippine fishing industry

Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary William Dar this week said the country's commercial fishing sector should upgrade all aspects of its systems and processes so that it can catch up with the other top tuna-producing countries.

Dar said it is important for fishing companies to particularly improve their fishing fleets to better navigate through the high seas, which would eventually help increase their productivity and profitability levels.

"Refleeting is the way forward and the best option so that the country's commercial fishing sector can compete with the rest of the world," said Dar as he laid down specific strategies on how the tuna industry can further elevate its game.

The secretary said the existing tuna fleets in the country are "limited" and the technologies used in most vessels are "below the standards of those from other countries."

Based on the industry records, a total of 1,957 fishing vessels are being operated by 270 registered fishing operators based in General Santos City, dubbed as the country's "Tuna Capital."

Of these vessels, only 141 are large purse seine vessels that can operate in the high seas.

Big fleets equipped with modern processing and canning facilities, Dar said, can provide a great advantage for the Philippine fishing industry. It is thus imperative we put our hearts and minds together to nurture and further the development of the tuna industry.

Hence, he directed the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to work with banking institutions like Land Bank of the Philippines and the Development Bank of the Philippines to explore lending windows for refleeting of current commercial fishing vessels.

Aside from refleeting, Dar enumerated other strategies to sustain the tuna industry. These include fishery industrialization; promotion of fishery exports; consolidation of small-and medium-sized fish farms; infrastructure development; higher budget and investment for Philippine fisheries; legislative support and commercial fishery roadmap development.

"Technologies and innovations will propel the sector to a higher level. If you don't use the most appropriate and sustainable technologies of today, the level of productivity that we so desire will be far-fetched," Dar added.

SECRETARY Dar said refleeting is the best option so that the country's commercial fishing sector can compete with the rest of the world.

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DA ambivalent on coco fund bill

by Korinah Saromines

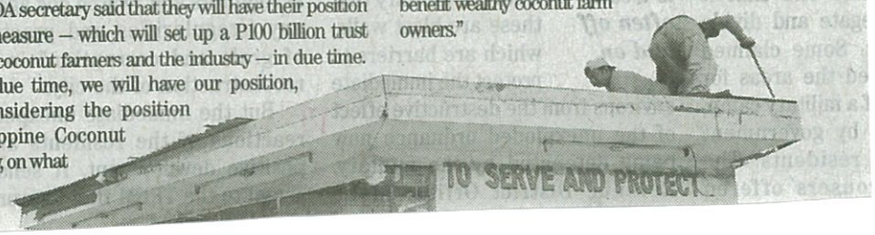
Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary William Dar revealed that he does not have an explicit support for the passage into law of the Coconut Levy Fund bill during the House hearing for the department's proposed P71.8 billion budget for 2020.

The DA secretary said that they will have their position on the measure – which will set up a P100 billion trust fund for coconut farmers and the industry – in due time.

"In due time, we will have our position, also considering the position of Philippine Coconut Authority, on what would be the better options for the bill," Dar said, adding that they will respond to what is the reason why President Rodrigo Duterte vetoed it.

"We will focus on that," he noted.

In rejecting the Coco Levy bill, the President noted the provision which does not provide limits against a land area entitled to the benefits of the trust fund may "disproportionately benefit wealthy coconut farm owners."



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New Zealand mulls onion exports to Phl

The Philippines will prioritize its local onion farmers as it demands balanced trade from New Zealand after the latter expressed interest in bringing in the commodity.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar recently met with New Zealand Ambassador to the Philippines David Strachan.

"While we are in a liberalized regime, we want to see balance in trade. We don't want to bring in imported onions if we have enough produce from our local farmers," Dar said.

"We understand our role under a world trade regime but we also need to consider the interest of our local farmers. We want them to be competitive, productive and prosperous at the end of the day," he said.

Onion is an important horticultural export of New Zealand, next to kiwi and apples.

Just last March, the Department of Agriculture suspended the importation of onions. The Bureau of Plant Industry also stopped issuing import certificates since October last year.

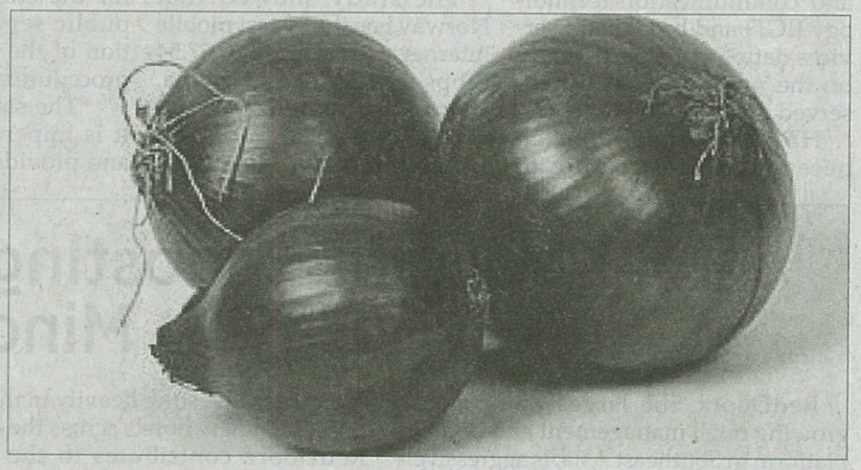
While Dar recognized the assistance that New Zealand has been providing the Philippines particularly on the dairy industry, he said there are measures that need to be considered in such a way that the local onion industry will not suffer.

"Free trade is the name of the game but at the same time, we need to manage it well that while trying to elevate the game, we are not putting down our local farmers to the point that they can no longer resurrect," Dar said.

Dar asked Strachan to help the country by sharing their technologies to enable local farmers to compete globally.

Last April, the country's production of bulb onion increased by about 70 percent of the total national requirement, satisfying household consumption for the first time.

The increase in the local onion production is the result of the expansion of planted areas in Nueva Ecija, Tarlac, Pangasinan, Mindoro, Iloilo and some parts of Mindanao where farmers are starting to plant in small areas. **– Louise Maureen Simeon**



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Tropang Bandera

BELLA CARIASO

Pagbaba ng presyo ng palay sa P7 kada kilo dapat aksyunan

LABIS ang pighati ng mga magsasaka sa patuloy na pagbaba ng presyo ng palay kung saan umabot na ito sa P7 kada kilo.

Kung palugi lagi ang mararanasan ng mga magsasaka, hindi na nakakapagtaka na tumigil na lamang sila pagtatanim at ibenta na lamang kanilang bukirin.

Nagte-trending din sa social media ang mga pighati ng mga magsasaka kung saan binatikos nila na masyadong abala ang mga opisyal ng gobyerno kaugnay ng transwoman na si Gretchen Diez ng SOGIE bill, gayong libu-libong magsasaka ang umaaray sa pagbaba ng presyo ng palay, na ayon sa kanila ay mas dapat bigyan ng atensyon.

Isinisisi ng mga magsasaka ang labis na pagbaba ng presyo ng palay sa pagpapatupad ng Rice Tariffication law at pagbaha ng mga imported rice.

Ayon sa mga magsasaka, mula P19 kada kilo noong isang taon, bumaba ito sa P15 kada kilo nang simulan ang implementasyon nito ngayong taon.

Noong Agosto, bumaba ito muli sa P10 kada kilo hanggang umabot sa P7 kada kilo.

Nag-alok naman ang Department of Agriculture (DA) ng P15,000 loan kada magsasaka, bagamat umalma lalo ang mga apektadong mga magsasaka.

Paano nga naman mababaon lamang sa utang ang mga magsasaka at ang kailangan nilang tugon mula sa gobyerno ay tumaas ang presyo ng palay.

Binabarat kasi ng mga traders ang pagbili nila ng palay sa mga magsasaka kayat kailangan na ang intervention ng gobyerno.

Nitong nakaraang araw inatasan ni Pangulong Duterte ang National Food Authority (NFA) na bilhin ang aning palay ng mga magsasaka para makaagapay sa epekto ng rice tariffication law.

Idinagdag ni Duterte na dapat ay magkaroon ng kasunduan sa presyo ng palay.

"But you cannot demand a price. You arrive at a compromise of how much you are willing to lose a little bit. Just to break even, as long as they won't be shortchanged for their efforts. They are compensated but do not demand a price that is unreasonable," sabi ni Duterte.

Ipinagtanggol naman ni Duterte ang bagong batas sa pagsasabing ipinasa ito para mapagsilbihan ang mas mayorya ng populasyon.

"So the solution there is for us to buy it. Even if we lose money. That's why we collect taxes," dagdag ng pangulo.

Isinisi naman ni Agriculture Secretary William Dar sa mga sangkot sa hoarding sa pagbaba ng presyo ng palay.

"Even before the [enactment] of the Rice Tariffication Law wasn't there already a drop in palay prices? So somebody is taking advantage and we see to it that we will apply the full force of the law [on those caught] hoarding," giit ni Dar.

Kung hoarding ang totoong problema, dapat umaksyon na ang DA at iba pang kaukulang ahensiya.

Ang importante, mapataas ang presyo ng palay dahil kung patuloy itong mangyayari, wala nang magsasaka ang gugustuhin pang magtanim ng palay.

PEOPLES JOURNAL Tonight
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DA BUDGET BRIEFING -- House members led by Majority Leader and Leyte Rep. Martin Romualdez (3rd left), Deputy Speaker Rep. Aurelio Gonzales (2nd left), Committee on Appropriations Vice-Chairperson Rep. Luisa LLoren Cuaresma (4th right), Ilocos Sur Rep. Victor Savellano and Aklan Rep.Teodorico Haresco Jr. (2nd right) congratulate the Department of Agriculture family led by Acting Secretary William Dar (4th left), National Irrigation Administration Administrator Ricardo Visaya (left) and National Tobacco Administration Administrator Robert Lizardo Seares (right) after a successful Committee on Appropriations briefing on the 2020 budget of the Department of Agriculture and its attached agencies at the House of Representatives Friday night.Romualdez as well as the Majority and Minority congressmen have vowed to fully support the 2020 programs and visions of the DA. Photo by VER NOVENO

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DA BUDGET. **House members led by Majority Leader and Leyte Rep. Martin Romualdez (3rd left), Deputy Speaker Rep. Aurelio Gonsalez (2nd left), Committee on Appropriations Vice-Chairperson Rep. Luisa Loren Cuaresma (4th right), Ilocos Sur Rep. Victor Savellano and Aklan Rep.Teodorico Haresco Jr. (2nd right) congratulate the Department of Agriculture family led by Acting Secretary William Dar (4th left), National Irrigation Administration Administrator Ricardo Visaya (left) and National Tobacco Administration Administrator Robert Lizardo Seares (right) after a successful Committee on Appropriations briefing on the 2020 budget of the Department of Agriculture and its attached agencies at the House of Representatives Friday night. Romualdez and the Majority and Minority congressmen fully support the programs and visions of DA for the year 2020.** *Photo by Ver Noveno*

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P10 BILYONG TARIPA NAKOLEKTA MULA SA MGA IMPORTED NA BIGAS

NAKAKOLEKTA na ang Department of Agriculture (DA) ng halos P10 bilyong taripa mula sa mga imported na bigas mula nang ipatupad ang Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

Sa budget hearing ng DA sa House Committee on Appropriations, sinabi ni Agriculture Sec. William Dar na umabot na sa P9.2 bilyon ang nakolektang buwis mula sa mga inaangkat na bigas sa ibang bansa.

Dahil dito, inaasahan na aangat pa sa P15 bilyon ang makokolektang taripa sa rice imports hanggang sa katapusan ng 2019.

Pinawi naman ni Dar ang pagtaas ng presyo ng kada kilo ng palay kung saan sa huli ay mga magsasaka pa rin ang magbebenepisyo sa RTL sa ilalim ng Rice Competitive Enhance Fund (RCEF).

Ipinapangako kasi na sa ilalim ng RCEF, P10 bilyon kada taon na ayuda sa mga magsasaka ang ibibigay na apektado ng "birth pains" ng RTL.

Mayroon na aniyang paunang P5 bilyon na RCEF pero hindi pa ito naipamamahagi sa mga magsasaka dahil nitong Agosto pa lamang na-i-release ang special allotment release order (SARO).

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MGA NANG-IIPIT NG SUPLAY NG BIGAS TINUTUGIS NA NG DA AT DTI

KUMIKILOS na ngayon ang Department of Agriculture (DA) katuwang ang Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) para matukoy ang mga rice importer at trader na nag-iipit ng bigas.

Sa ngayon, mura ang farm gate ng palay pero sobrang mahal ng bigas.

Ayon kay Noel Reyes na tagapagsalita ni DA Secretary William Dar, malinaw na may nagsasamantala sa industriya ng bigas at ginagamit ang magandang layunin ng Rice Tariffication Law.

Isa sa nakikitang ugat ng problema ang mabagal o pang-iipit ng bigas ng traders na dapat ay kumakalat na sa merkado.

Sa ngayon, nasa 1.5 milyon hanggang 2 milyong metriko tonelada na imported na bigas ang naipasok na sa bansa.

Samantala, aminado ang Department of Agriculture na hindi nila mapananagot kundi mapagsasabihan lang nila ang mga masisitang nagsasamantala.

Gayunman, makikipag-ugnayan ang DA sa iba pang sangay ng gobyerno para mapanagot at hindi na makakuha ng permit to operate ang sinumang traders na lalabag.

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Para ipakitang ligtas ang pagkain ng karneng baboy

DA MAGSASAGAWA NG 'BOODLE FIGHT'

MAGSASAGAWA ng isang "boodle fight" ang Department of Agriculture (DA) para ipakita sa publiko na ligtas ang pagkain ng karneng baboy.

Gaganapin ito sa pasilidad ng Bureau of Soils and Water Management sa Quezon City, Lunes ng umaga.

Ayon kay Agriculture Secretary William Dar, isasabay na sa gawaing ito ang pag-anunsiyo ng resulta ng ginawang pag-susuri sa Europa kaugnay sa misteryosong pag-kakasakit ng mga baboy sa ilang lugar sa bansa.

Sinabi ng kalihim, mayroong dalawang (2) parte ang ginawang pag-susuri sa karneng baboy.

The Manila Times

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21 schools to teach farm mechanization

BY JAVIER JOE ISMAEL

SEN. Cynthia Villar said 21 schools located all over the country had been identified to teach farmer-trainors farm mechanization and inbred seeds production.

"We cannot expect the farmer to mechanize or to learn how to produce inbred seeds without education and extension program, so we are identifying the schools where we can teach, train the trainors and the farmer field school where the trainors will teach so that we can reach the farmers," Villar said in a recent hearing of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food.

The free training courses on rice crop production, modern rice farming techniques, inbred seed production, farm mechanization, and farm machinery servicing and maintenance are covered by Republic Act (RA) 11203 or the "Rice Tariffication Law."

Under RA 11203, the P10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) will have a P1-billion allocation for skills training of farmers and knowledge and technology transfer through farm schools nationwide.

RCEF allocates P5 billion for the procurement of farm equipment by the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech); P3 billion to the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) for the inbred seeds program; P1 billion for cheap credit facility; and P1 billion for skills development.

This portion for skills training will be divided among training providers such as PhilMech (P100 million), PhilRice (P100 million), Agriculture Training Institute or ATI (P100 million), and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority or Tesda (P700 million).

PhilMech and PhilRice will provide ATI and Tesda with a training module and will conduct the training of trainor classes.

ATI and Tesda, meanwhile, will promote the same training modules among farmers via Farmers Field Schools and Tesda Accredited Farm Schools in identified rice-producing municipalities.

The skills training program will include courses that will enable farmers to operate and maintain farm equipment such as tillers, tractors, seeders, threshers, rice planters, harvesters and irrigation pumps.

The machinery will be used for land preparation, crop establishment, harvesting and threshing, drying, and milling.

The identified schools are: Don Mariano Marcos State University in Batac City; PhilRice, San Mateo, Isabela; PhilMech and PhilRice, Science City of Muñoz; Villar Sipag Farm School, San Jose del Monte, Bulacan; University of the Philippines Los Baños, Laguna; Villar Sipag Farm School, Bacoor, Cavite; PhilRice, Sta. Cruz, Mindoro Oriental; PhilMech, Pili, Camarines Sur; PhilRice, Ligao, Albay; Villar Sipag Farm School, San Miguel, Iloilo; PhilRice, Murcia, Negros Occidental; PhilMech, Abuyog, Leyte; University of Eastern Philippines, Catarman, Northern Samar; Western Mindanao State University for Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay and the rest of the Zamboanga Peninsula; Central Mindanao University, Bukidnon; PhilMech, Cagayan de Oro City; PhilMech, Davao City; Villar Sipag Farm School, Davao City; Philmech, Midsayap, North Cotabato; and PhilRice, RT Romualdez, Agusan del Norte.

Villar clarified that despite the inclusion of four Villar Sipag Farm Schools in the list, the Villar Social Institute for Poverty Alleviation and Governance, a foundation run by the Villar Family, is not seeking accreditation from Tesda and would not be paid by public funds for the use of its facilities.

"We are offering the free use of our facilities to help reach more farmers as soon as possible," Villar said.

Farmers from 54 provinces are expected to be trained in two to three months with two sessions of two-week training programs in a month, Villar said.

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Sandiganbayan junks graft case vs ex-NIA exec

The Sandiganbayan Fourth Division has dismissed the graft case filed against former National Irrigation Administration (NIA) regional manager Julius Simbajon Maquiling after the prosecution withdrew the case for lack of evidence. The case stemmed from Maquiling's reportedly anomalous purchase of fertilizers and pesticides in 2009. From July to September 2009, Maquiling reportedly gave unwarranted benefit to 3K and C Enterprises, when he awarded them a P1.38-million contract to supply fertilizers and pesticides, despite a lack of public bidding. According to the prosecution, Maquiling allegedly resorted to an alternative mode of procurement, even though there was no justifiable reason for it. He also failed to obtain at least three price quotations from suppliers. However, the prosecution filed a motion for leave to withdraw on the grounds that the evidence was lacking to effectively prosecute the case. The antigraft court granted the motion.

—PATRICIA DENISE M. CHIU

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Sandigan OKs withdrawal of ex-NIA exec's graft raps

By ELIZABETH MARCELO

The Sandiganbayan has granted a motion to withdraw a graft case filed against a former official of the National Irrigation Authority (NIA) in connection with the allegedly anomalous purchase of fertilizer and pesticide in 2009.

The motion was filed by the Office of the Ombudsman after it found the pieces of evidence at hand were not strong enough to prosecute Julius Maquiling, former regional manager of NIA Northern Mindanao.

In an order promulgated on Aug. 16, the Sandiganbayan's Fourth Division directed the Bureau of Immigration to lift the hold order previously issued against Maquiling.

The anti-graft court also ordered the bail that Maquiling posted for his provisional liberty released.

Filed by the ombudsman in November last year, the case stemmed from the awarding of a P1.3-million contract to the 3K and C Enterprises for the supply of farm inputs between July and September 2009.

The ombudsman said no public bidding was conducted as required under Republic Act 9184 or the Government Procurement Reform Act.

The ombudsman said Maquiling resorted to small-value procurement without justifying such mode of procurement.

The Sandiganbayan earlier dismissed the perjury and breach of conduct charges that the ombudsman filed against Maquiling in September 2017.

The charges stemmed from the alleged failure of the accused to declare a trucking business in his statement of assets, liabilities and net worth for 2009.

The anti-graft court cited the inordinate delay in the ombudsman's investigation for the dismissal of the cases.

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Rice imports management key to stem falling prices

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The government is being urged to focus on the root cause of declining palay (unhusked rice) prices instead of relying on palliative measures that are either too expensive or ineffective.

The Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) said the drop in palay prices coincided with the inflow of large volumes of rice imports following the passage of the Rice Tariffication Law.

"Because of too much supply of imported rice in the market, local traders cannot unload their stocks at a profit. And they have to adjust their buying price from farmers so that they can compete with the cheaper imports. This explains why palay prices are falling down," FFF national manager Raul Montemayor said.

Palay buying prices have fallen to as low as P8 per kilogram and are expected to decline further as the main harvest season peaks next month.

Data from the Bureau of Customs showed that about 2.4 million metric tons had arrived as of July, equivalent to around 17 percent of the country's total consumption requirement for the year.

However, the Philippines only needs to import seven percent as the country is 93 percent self-sufficient already.

"There is already an excess supply in the market and this glut will become worse if more imports come in and coincide with the main harvest season," Montemayor said.

FFF has suggested that the government immediately impose special safeguard duties on rice imports, and avail of other trade remedies such as anti-dumping and general safeguards.

These measures will allow the government to temporarily impose additional duties on rice imports, thus making them more expensive.

FFF is also backing the stringent adoption of pest and disease and food safety controls on rice imports.

"The government must focus on the supply side, because that is where the problem is coming from. It must find a way to manage the inflow of imports until the supply glut disappears and farmers and traders are able to unload their stocks," Montemayor said.

"Our studies show that even with these measures, rice prices need not go up because imported rice will still be much cheaper even with the additional tariffs," he said.

FFF argued that increasing government's buying of farmers' palay would help but it would never be enough as long as cheap imports kept coming in.

The National Food Authority's current P7 billion budget is only sufficient to buy about 412,000 MT of palay at P17 per kilo, which is only two percent of the country's annual output and rice requirement.

"In 2018, farmers were enjoying very good prices above P20 per kilo even without NFA having to buy a single kilo of palay. Because there was a tight supply of rice in the market and the NFA ran out of stocks to control the market," Montemayor said.

"This shows that palay prices can be influenced through proper demand and supply management without government having to directly intervene in the market," he said.

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture is calling on individual farmers to enlist in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA) and join organizations to access agriculture-related

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programs and services including the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

Under the law, eligible RCEF beneficiaries include farmers, farmworkers, and their dependents who are listed in the RSBSA –an electronic database containing basic information of farmers and fisherfolks, and members of DA-accredited farmer organizations such as multipurpose cooperatives, irrigators associations and people's organizations.

"The program does not only aim to reduce the cost of production and increase farmers' yields, but it also intends to strengthen farmer organizations (FOs) through agro-enterprise and collective activities. We are partnering with local government units so they can guide the farmers on RSBSA registration and membership to existing or new FOs," the DA said.

To register in the RSBSA, an individual must be 18 years old, Filipino citizen, and must be a farmer, farm laborer or worker.

The RSBSA forms can be acquired through the city or municipal agriculture office or online through the DA website.

"Getting enlisted in the RSBSA and accredited by the DA would mean that the recipients of the program are legitimate farmers. We can avoid (political) entities from interfering in RCEF, and we can be sure that there is equal distribution of the resources," the DA said.

The accreditation also provides easy access for the farmers and their groups to become partners of the DA in its agriculture-related initiatives.

Created through RA 11203, RCEF is a new government program, which aims to help farmers through the P10 billion fund covering seed, machine, credit and extension support to improve the competitiveness of Filipino rice farmers.

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NIA pushes adoption of diversified cropping

The National Irrigation Administration is pushing for the adoption of diversified cropping in national and communal irrigation systems as part of efforts to address climate change.

In a recent memorandum circular, NIA said it would start the adoption of diversified cropping starting the dry season of 2020 for national and communal irrigation systems.

NIA said it shall ensure the continuous and bountiful harvest and that interventions, whether technical or procedural, be adopted to mitigate or lessen the effects of climate change, particularly, in the supply of irrigation water.

"The adoption of this procedural intervention, the diversification of crops, is deemed vital in securing the profitability of our Filipino farmers," it said.

The memorandum enumerated the factors that must be considered in crop selection including the suitability to present soil condition, such as soil texture, soil acidity and soil fertility.

It also includes the adaptability to existing climate condition in the area, the high productivity potential and high tolerance to pests and diseases, the knowledge in cultural and cultivation requirements, crop profitability, and the availability of market for farm produce.

The irrigation agency emphasized that crop diversification provides numerous agricultural and economic benefits to the farmers. Aside from improving and breeding new crop varieties, it enhances the resistance of plants to various weather conditions.

"It will increase crop portfolio, so that farmers will not be dependent on a single crop to generate their income. When farmers only cultivate one type of crop, they are exposed to high risks of unforeseen climate events that could severely impact agricultural production," NIA said.

Meanwhile, NIA and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources inked a memorandum of agreement for the effective management and development of the 143 watersheds supporting the national irrigation systems in the Philippines.

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Family first

Did you know that the biggest bus conglomerate in Southeast Asia is based right here in the Philippines?

The Yanson Group of Bus Companies, composed of six subsidiaries, has over 4,000 bus units plying routes in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao and employs 18,000 workers. Established in 1968, the group provides transport services to 700,000 passengers a day and has annual revenues of about P15 billion.

The group's subsidiaries are Vallacar Transit Inc. (VTI) which includes Ceres Liner, Ceres Tours, Sugbo Transit and Sugbo Tours; Rural Transit of Mindanao Inc. (Rural Transit, Rural Tours); Bachelor Express Inc. (Bachelor Express and Bachelor Tours); Southern Star Bus Transit Inc. (Southern Star); Ceres Transport Inc. (Ceres Transport); Gold Star Bus Transit Inc. (Gold Star); and Mindanao Star Bus Transport Inc. (Island City Express and Mindanao Star).

HIDDEN AGENDA

MARY ANN LL. REYES

VTI was the first company put up by Ricardo Yanson and his wife Olivia Villaflores. They began with the purchase of one jeepney and then went into jeepney assembly. But when the market was started to be flooded with Ford Fieras in the early '70s, the couple decided to diversify into a small bus line which plied the Bacolod City-Valladolid-La Carlota route (hence, ValLaCar) and named it the Ceres Liner, after the founder's younger sister. VTI now has 838 transport vehicles, operating and serving in the Visayas, as well as the Zamboanga Peninsula.

A nurse by profession, Olivia helped her husband manage the business from the ground up. She recalls how they hardly had enough money to buy food for all their children when they were starting.

For many years, everything was going smoothly for this family-owned and managed group. Until the patriarch Ricardo died in 2015.

According to news reports, Olivia was stripped of her own stake in VTI by four of her six children. It appears that she was previously made to sign documents stating that she was giving up her shares in the company in favor of her children.

She reminded her children about the hardship that they went through as a family before the success of their business split them into warring factions.

Already 85 years old, Olivia reminded her children that they are only stewards of the family business for the next generation.

Last July 7, 2019, four Yanson siblings, namely Roy, Ricardo Jr., Emily and Celina, in a purported special board meeting, unseated their brother Leo Rey as president of VTI. Leo Rey, was replaced by his eldest brother Roy but Leo Rey with the support of his mother, Olivia and sister Ginnette, refused to step down.

On Aug. 19, the stockholders of VTI, including the Yanson matriarch, elected a new set of board of directors who subsequently re-elected Leo Rey as president.

Leo Rey said claiming that his mother Olivia no longer owns VTI is wrong and it is only but fitting and proper that she be accorded respect and control over what she built over the years.

Unfortunately, the feud does not end here. VTI is also asking its former chief finance officer Celina, one of the siblings, to explain around P381 million in unaccounted funds as shown by an audit done by SGV.

Who is to blame

Rice is the most important good crop of the developing world and the staple food of more than half of the world's population, according to ricepedia.org.

For Filipinos, eating is not complete without rice. To quote an article from flipscience.ph, "for millions of Filipinos, rice is life. No self-respecting Pinoy would eat adobo or sinigang without it… It is a staple for breakfast, lunch and dinner… No Pinoy meal would be complete without it."

In the same article, it was noted that "low-income Filipinos consumed more rice, with families in the bottom 30 percent income group registering a percentage that was higher at 59.7 percent. For families in the upper 70 percent income group, the figure was at 38.8 percent." It added: "Lower-income Filipinos, especially those in rural areas, were dependent on these grain because other food items were not affordable enough."

So imagine how happy Filipinos became when rice suddenly became affordable, thanks to the new Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) that was signed by President Duterte last February.

Before the RTL, rice imports were controlled via a system of import quotas. But because these were no longer allowed under the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement to which the Philippines was a signatory, these quantitative restrictions had to be replaced with import duties or tariffs.

Now, cheap imported rice can be brought in by importers, provided they are willing to pay the duties, which are at 35 percent if sourced from ASEAN countries, and from 40 percent to 180 percent if imported elsewhere.

The new law also removed the rice importing function of the National Food Authority (NFA).

Unfortunately, any import regime has to deal with the age-old problem of smuggling and corruption.

During a recent Senate hearing, Sen. Cynthia Villar criticized the failure to stop cartels and hoarding, which she identified as the ones causing the artificial shortage and high prices of rice and other agricultural products.

She called on Agriculture Secretary William Dar to implement developmental measures to counter the operation of cartels and hoarders by improving the productivity and competitiveness of local farmers, even as she urged the Department of Justice and the Philippine Competition Commission to make an example of even just one cartel to show that the law is being implemented.

It was revealed that wealthy rice traders, particularly the so-called Binondo rice cartel, benefitted from the government's rice importation program, and not legitimate farmers' groups. At the hearing, it was disclosed that there are about 13 traders believed to be operating the biggest rice cartels in Metro Manila and controlling rice prices.

The firms were reportedly hoarding rice from the NFA to mix it with other rice types so they could resell it as commercial rice. The companies' warehouses are mostly based in Tondo.

Dar agrees that hoarding is causing the drop in the prices of palay in the market and not the implementation of the RTL. He said some millers and traders may have used the tariffication law to gain access and hoard supply of the grain.

According to some farmers, the price of palay has dropped to as low as P7 per kilo following the imposition of tariffs on the commodity, but Dar said the drop in prices of had started even before the RTL was implemented.

To address the stockpiling and hoarding, Dar said the DA and the Department of Trade and Industry would inspect rice warehouses and monitor market prices.

Dar added that they need to strictly implement anti-hoarding laws even as he asked millers and traders to start releasing their rice stocks and replenish their supply with palay and rice bought from local farmers.

For comments, e-mail at *mareyes@philstarmedia.com*

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We told you so

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

It is very tempting to say "We told you so" but pontificating is self-serving and will not bring us anywhere. Unfortunately, this is where we are as far as the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) is concerned.

We knew all along what was coming. The lifting of quantitative restrictions in the import of rice will allow the entry of more cheap rice from Vietnam and Thailand. This will depress the retail prices of rice and bring relief to consumers, poor and rich alike. With more moderate food prices the poor among us will be more food secure. There will be less pressure to raise wages and to that extent make our industries more competitive.

However as a result, the farm gate of palay will go down and the poor rice farmers will suffer grievous losses in income, as they are painfully going through now. The less productive rice farmers will not be able to compete and will cease planting rice thus further reducing our rice self-sufficiency index.

Dr. Roehlano M. Briones and his colleagues at the Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS) told us so in simulation studies they published as late as 2015. But the responsible people in government were in denial and did not do enough, if any at all, to help prepare our farmers.

PIDS is the country's leading think thank for all national concerns, including agriculture. It is administratively attached and partly funded by National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA).

What are our options

The first, most logical (but most unwise) is to repeal/amend the RTL. As a sovereign nation, we can do as we please. We can ignore our commitments as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) but our whole economy will suffer and in the end our non-compliance will cost us more.

The second option is to invoke provisions of the imports safeguards law (RA 8800) which authorizes the President in the national interest to temporarily re-impose import restrictions and further raise tariffs to protect our domestic economy. The President can do this immediately but this essentially returns us to the status quo and does not address the inherent problems.

Should we raise the rice tariff to say, 70-100%, there will be that much less incentive to import. The local rice supply will be steady and rice retail prices will remain high to the detriment of consumers. With elevated rice retail prices, the palay farm gate prices should return to normal and mollify the suffering farmers.

However, there is no assurance that palay farm gate prices will normalize. The palay farm gate prices drastically dropped with the massive entry of imports but the retail price has hardly moved. This disjoint between farm gate and retail prices is operating as well in coconut. Farm gate prices of whole coconuts have dropped 40% but the retail price of coconut oil has barely changed.

The only sure winners are the few privileged importers who are able to secure import permits from the National Food Authority (NFA) and the rice smugglers and their accomplices in the Bureau of Customs. The high tariff will help keep their nefarious profession very profitable and worth the risk.

The third option is for NFA to buy more palay from farmers and thereby essentially restore its rice trading function. Recall that the mandate of NFA was narrowed down to **buffer stocking** precisely to reduce its losses. However, in order for NFA to have a significant impact on the market it has to massively scale up its buying operations. At 20 million tons of palay total harvest and at ₱17 per kilogram farm gate price, the annual palay production is worth ₱340 billion. To be able to purchase, say, 15-20% of total palay trade, NFA will need ₱51-₱68 billion. The current ₱7-billion procurement budget of NFA is only good for 2%.

But even assuming NFA has the money (which it does not have), the government subsidy through price support for palay accrue for the most part to the traders and millers but not the farmers because immediately soon after harvest, the palay are already in the hands of the traders and rice mills. NFA does not have the personnel to go to the farms to buy palay directly from the farmers as traders do.

Related to this option is the recent initiative of some provincial governments to buy and sell palay. This may look attractive and timely but it is impractical and unsustainable in the long run. Governments whether national (NFA) or local (LGUs) are never good at doing business. Worse, **and pardon the lack of faith**, this could be tantamount to decentralizing corruption.

The fourth option is direct payments or cash transfers to farmers as they do in the USA and Europe. The virtue of direct payments is there is less "leakage" compared with material input subsidies like seeds, fertilizers, chemicals and machines.

However in addition to the challenges of identification of bonafide rice farmers, which the Registry Systems for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA) is sorting out, the implementation cost could be prohibitive, unsustainable and unfair to non-rice farmers and fisherfolk.

With a physical area of three million hectares planted to rice, every ₱1,000 per hectare payout will require ₱3 billion. However, to be meaningful the

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payout per hectare should be at least ₱5,000 which is equivalent to ₱15 billion. But even now the bulk of the budget of the Department of Agriculture (DA) is already monopolized by irrigation development and the rice program. There will be hardly anything left for the other crops, poultry and livestock, and fisheries which have higher returns on investment compared with rice.

Thus at best, the direct cash transfer payments should be for a limited period, say, three years, to help make up in part for the rice farmers' lost income.

The fifth and probably the most honest and enduring option is to persevere with the RTL. For every change, there are winners and losers and the sooner we accept this fact, the more realistic our responses will be, however bitter particularly with regard to the losers.

As an agronomist, and as a part-time rice farmer myself, I see the challenge as a straightforward one: Rice farmers with reliable irrigation can hold their own against our competitors from Vietnam and Thailand. With an average yield of six tons per hectare and per kilogram cost of ₱8.00-₱10.00, our better farmers are competitive with our neighbors. A farm gate of ₱17.00 per kilogram is fair enough. A tariff rate of 35% should provide enough protection.

But not the farmers in the rainfed lowlands and uplands.

Thus, our response has to be twofold: 1) further intensify rice culture in the favorable areas with irrigation, and 2) divert the water-deficient rainfed lowlands and uplands into other higher value crops. In fact, assured of markets, the latter may be better off in the long run.

However in all instances, the farmers need ready access to affordable credit with which to obtain inputs and services to raise productivity. And for this, we have good news.

The recent pronouncement of President Rodrigo Duterte exempting Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) and Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) from the requirement to remit half of their earnings to the national treasury allows both government banks to aggressively lend to the agriculture sector **even at zero interest rate.**

For Land Bank this means it can afford to waive interests (up to ₱15 billion worth) on loans to small farmers and fisherfolk without jeopardizing its financial health as a universal bank. At 6% nominal interest, the loanable amount is ₱250 billion.

In the case of DBP, with reported annual income of ₱5.72 billion, it can afford to lend ₱95 billion at zero interest rate. But instead of lending to small farmers (which is not in DBP's mandate), DBP can extend these concessional loans to agribusinesses with which to finance contract growing operations with rice farmers, and achieve essentially the same objective.

Conclusion

Sad to admit but as far as this crop season is concerned, whatever we do now are too little, too late. The measures being talked about for the most part are palliative and will benefit only a fraction of the farmers. They do not address the underlying issues of lack of productivity and competitiveness.

For the immediate, we can help farmers with a cash payment of ₱5,000 per hectare, equivalent to ₱15 billion a year, say, for the next three years. This is nowhere close to what rice farmers deserve but this much we can afford. This is in addition to the subsidized farm equipment and seeds worth ₱8 billion a year provided under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

The real, long-term solution is for farmers to have regular, universal access to affordable credit with which to raise their productivity and competitiveness (inclusive financing). This could be jumpstarted by LBP and DBP through ZERO INTEREST loans using the earnings President Duterte generously allowed the two banks to retain. This should be good for at least the next two years under this Administration.

*****

Dr. Emil Q. Javier is a member of the National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) and also Chairman of the Coalition for Agriculture Modernization in the Philippines (CAMP).

For any feedback, email eqjavier@yahoo.com

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SAN MIGUEL FOODS PRODUCTS LIGTAS SA AFRICAN SWINE FEVER

TINIYAK ng San Miguel Foods na nananatiling ligtas ang kanilang mga produkto sa kabila ng napapabalitang pagkalat ng African Swine Fever.

Ayon sa San Miguel Foods, ang mga produkto nilang Purefoods Canned and Refrigerated Meats at Monterey Fresh Meats ay dumadaan sa iba't ibang masusing proseso upang masiguro ang mataas na kalidad at food safety.

Isang dahilan kung bakit ligtas ang mga produkto nila ay dahil 'grain-fed' ang kanilang mga baboy. Ang grain feeds na ipinapakain sa mga baboy ay gawa sa state-of-the-art feedmills ng B-MEG sa ilalim pa rin ng kompanya.

Ang mga hog farm at pasilidad ng kompanya ay sumusunod din sa istriktong animal health at biosecurity protocols.

Bukod dito, bago pa man madistribute ang mga produkto ay may kaukulang permit na ang mga ito mula sa Bureau of Animal Industry at National Meat Inspection Service.

Sinabi ng San Miguel Foods na sa kabila ng protocols na ipinatutupad ng ilang local government units (LGUs), nananatiling ligtas at available ang mga Purefoods Canned and Refrigerated Meats at Monterey Fresh Meats sa mga pamilihan katulad ng supermarkets, grocery stores, Monterey Meat Shops, at Monterey Community Markets.

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Advocacy group umalma

P1-B LOAN SA FARMERS 'DI SAPAT

Mula sa pahina 1

Ayon sa advocacy group Bantay Bigas, kung hahati-hatiin ang naturang pautang sa ilalim ng P10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) sa mahigit dalawang milyong magsasaka sa buong bansa ay lalabas na P500 lamang ang maaaring mahiram ng isang magsasaka.

"Sa P10 billion na 'yan, P1 billion lang ang loan para sa magsasaka ... 'Pag i-divide mo 'yan sa more 2.4 million na magsasaka natin, less than P500 ang puwedeng utangin ng ating mga magsasaka," wika ni Cathy Estavillo, spokesperson ng Bantay Bigas.

Bukod dito, sinabi ni Estavillo na maliit ang P10-B RCEF kumpara sa mga subsidiya ng gobyerno ng Thailand at Vietnam sa kani-kanilang mga magsasaka.

"Ang P5 billion po ay sa makina agad gagamitin. Hindi po ito ang kailangan ng ating magsasaka. Ang kailangan nila ay subsidized loan para matiyak na makakapagtanim pa sila," aniya.

Nauna nang inanunsiyo ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na maglalatag ang ahensiya ng P1.5-billion loan assistance program para sa mga apektadong rice farmers.

Sa ilalim ng Survival and Recovery Assistance Program for Rice Farmers (SURE Aid) program ng DA na nagsimula noong Setyembre 1, ang mga rice farmer na nagsasaka ng isang ektarya o mas mababa pa ay maaaring makaavail ng one-time, zero interest loan na nagkakahalaga ng P15,000 at maaaring bayaran sa loob ng walong taon.

PMRT

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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THE 'BIGGEST LOSER'

Globalization 4.0 blamed as culprit behind PHL's rice-price woe

By Cai U. Ordinario

THE agriculture sector is seen as the "biggest loser" under what is being dubbed Globalization 4.0, according to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS).

In a recent briefing at the launch of the Development Policy Research Month (DPRM), PIDS Senior Research Fellow Roehlano Briones said this is because the industry continued to enjoy "high tariff walls."

Globalization 4.0, Briones said, served as a "rude awakening" to everyone given the proliferation of technological and digital innovations that are fraught with volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

'Hard hit'

"AGRICULTURE will be hard-hit. Right now they are protected by very high tariff walls; even rice, which has recently been liberalized, is still being protected by a 35-percent tariff wall," Briones said.

The lack of openness in agriculture, he added, may prevent the sector from conquering challenges posed by Globalization 4.0, such as trade wars, cross-border diseases, and high inequality, among others.

This despite the observation made by certain sectors that the recent plunge in rice prices and concerns raised by farmers may buttress the belief that the Rice Trade Liberalization (RTL), which

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"We're just a few months off the implementation of the liberalization act so a lot of the dust is still settling but while that dust is settling, we're drawing conclusions...I think [such a conclusion could be] premature."

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became effective in March, could prove to be a mistake.

Let the dust settle

BRIONES, however, believes it is "too early to tell" whether the RTL is a failure. He added that the RTL has only been in effect for a few months and a lot of adjustments are going on.

"We're just a few months off the implementation of the liberalization act, so a lot of the dust is still settling, but while that dust is settling, we're drawing conclusions...I think [such a conclusion could be] premature," Briones stressed.

He said opening up agriculture sectors such as sugar can help make food manufacturers become more competitive compared to those based in Thailand and Vietnam.

Sweet remedy

BRIONES said food manufacturers are paying as much as 100 percent more than their counterparts in Thailand and Vietnam when it comes to their sugar requirements.

Earlier, Neda Undersecretary for Policy and Planning Rosemarie G. Edillon said she could not yet say whether the changes to be introduced through a draft bill to liberalize the sugar sector will be similar to what government did in rice.

> "We intend to enlighten our stakeholders on the various challenges that come along with this new globalization, notably the issues of rising protectionism, worsening inequality trends, worldwide economic restructuring, widening polarization, and proliferation of disinformation."
>
> **CELIA REYES**
> *Philippine Institute for Development Studies President*

Unlike the rice sector, very little study has been done in liberalizing the sugar industry, Edillon said. This is the reason the government is prioritizing research before drafting a bill.

"I think giving access to users to the most cost-effective sources... [is] really important for economic efficiency, at the same time, based on the method followed by the agri tariffication act and the latest rice liberalization act. You also [have to install] program safety nets for the adversely affected sectors. Certainly this cannot be ignored," Briones said.

"We anticipate already that they [farmers] will be on the receiving end of more cost-effective imports. So let's help them match the cost of production, remain competitive or even explore livelihood opportunities where they can better grow their profits," he added.

Consolation

IN terms of the winners of Globalization 4.0, Marie Sherylyn Aquia, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Multilateral Relations Division's chief, said this would have to be services.

Aquia said the Philippines is "very competitive" when it comes to services given the high level of education of Filipino workers and their English language proficiency.

Further, she said, the country remains in a demographic sweet spot owing to its young workforce.

Aquia said the DTI is responding to this through the QBO Innovation Hub which is a private partnership initiative of start-ups set up by the DTI, Department of Science and Technology, IdeaSpace and JPMorgan.

The hub offers classes and workshops as well as legal and corporate consultations to help start-ups and innovators grow their businesses.

"This is really an area where we can really excel in, trade in services," Aquia said.

The theme of the 19th DPRM is "Navigating the New Globalization: Local Actions for Global Challenges" or in Filipino, "Paglalayag sa Bagong Globalisasyon: Lokal na Pagkilos sa mga Pandaigdigang Hamon."

A series of activities is also slated for September to promote the DPRM, including the Mindanao Policy Research Forum and a press conference on September 10 in General Santos City in partnership with the Mindanao Development Authority and Mindanao State University, and the Fifth Annual Public Policy Conference (APPC) on September 19 at the Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila, which is the culminating activity of the DPRM.

"Through this theme, we hope to promote awareness of the changing face of globalization. We intend to enlighten our stakeholders on the various challenges that come along with this new globalization, notably the issues of rising protectionism, worsening inequality trends, worldwide economic restructuring, widening polarization, and proliferation of disinformation," PIDS President Celia Reyes said.

"We hope to encourage everyone to be proactive both in dealing with these challenges and in harnessing the opportunities of the new globalization through local actions that are guided by a shared vision of prosperity and inclusivity, unity, wider and deeper participation of all sectors of society, and adaptive, evidence-based policymaking," she added.

This year's DPRM celebration, spearheaded by PIDS, is supported by the Civil Service Commission, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, National Economic and Development Authority, Philippine Information Agency, Presidential Management Staff, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Health, Department of Trade and Industry-BITR, Asian Development Bank, Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Philippine Competition Commission, Department of Foreign Affairs Office of the Undersecretary for International Economic Relations, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Budget and Management, Climate Change Commission, Senate Economic and Planning Office, and House of Representatives Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department.

THE DAILY tribune

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Sustaining aquaponic systems through nitrification

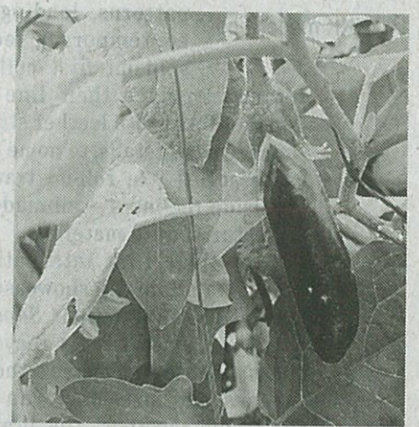
There is, however, a more sustainable way of removing ammonia from the system without wasting so much water. This is done through what is called nitrification

AgriFuture
Vincent Noel Aureus

Aquaponics is the convergence of aquaculture and hydroponics. The former pertains to growing of aquatic animals such as fish. The latter, on the other hand, refers to growing crops using water, thus, excluding soil from the process.

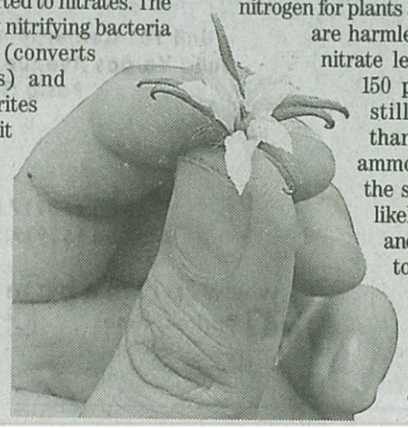
Much waste is produced by aquaculture in the form of ammonia which substantially comes from fish poo. Ammonia is toxic to fish and must be removed from the water. This is the reason why aquaculture uses a lot of water in its operations. Constant water change is necessary. Otherwise, the fish end up dead due to ammonia build-up.

There is, however, a more sustainable way of removing ammonia from the system without wasting so much water. This is done through what is called nitrification and this process is the key link which allows for the harmonious convergence of aquaculture and hydroponics.



BABY eggplant is growing well thanks to the nutrient-rich water of the aquaponics system.

Nitrification is the process through which ammonia is converted to nitrites. The latter is then converted to nitrates. The process is facilitated by nitrifying bacteria called Nitrosomonas (converts ammonia to nitrites) and Nitrospira (converts nitrites to nitrates). For a time, it was previously thought that Nitrobacteria was responsible for the final stage of conversion, though there is still debate as to which bacteria should be credited.



TOMATOES are very demanding when it comes to nutrient requirements.

Nitrates are an exceptional source of nitrogen for plants and, to a large extent, are harmless to the fish. If the nitrate level starts to exceed 150 ppm (though this is still definitely better than having fish-killing ammonia and nitrites in the system), the fish will likely suffer from stress and become vulnerable to illnesses. They may also perish in the process.

Excessive amounts of nitrates could mean that the number of plants in the system is too low. To fix the problem, just grow more crops or, better yet, add one or two more grow beds. If the high nitrate level persists, try harvesting some fish or reducing the total amount of feeds fed to the fish on a daily basis.

Nitrification also produces nitric acid. This is the reason why the pH of an aquaponics system that is working properly will tend to decrease with time. For example, dechlorinated tap water used by this writer for his system has an initial pH of around 8.2. After undergoing nitrification, the pH of the water has dropped to around 6.8 to 7. This is the ideal pH zone for fish, plants, and beneficial bacteria to flourish.

If the pH is not dropping, then the water could be "hard." Another possible reason is that nitrification process is not happening correctly. It may likely even mean that the opposite, called denitrification, is taking place. Nitrates are converting back to nitrites and then back to ammonia!

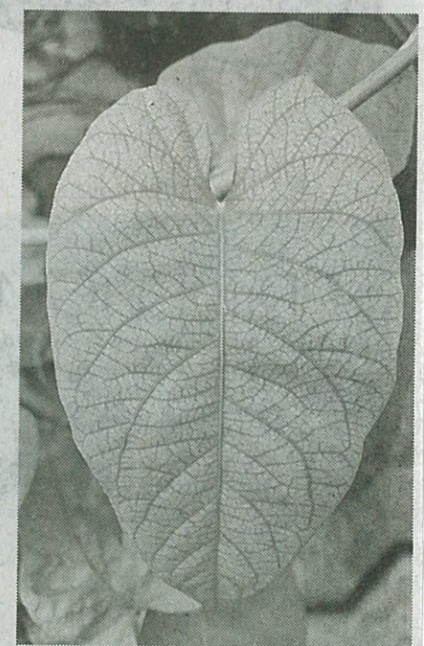
Nitrates are an exceptional source of nitrogen for plants and, to a large extent, are harmless to the fish.

While a dropping pH level is a good sign that nitrification is happening, if allowed to trend downward, it may lead to big problems. For example, nutrient lockout may happen, fish and plants may die and the system will crash.

To maintain the ideal pH for the system, some practitioners add calcium hydroxide or calcium carbonate along with potassium carbonate or potassium hydroxide. Besides pulling the pH up, these additives also help supplement at least two of the usual nutrient deficiencies in an aquaponics system: calcium and potassium.

NITRATES are a good source of nitrogen which plants need to grow big and green.

RECENTLY transplanted kale and lettuce are growing well in the Deep Water Culture beds.



YELLOWING is a usual sign of nutrient deficiencies in plants.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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School-plus-home gardens seen to flourish in Busuanga

Busuanga Island can significantly benefit from school-plus-home gardens.

This was the consensus of a consultation with the local government, schools and tourism sector convened by the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) and the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) last July 29-31.

The workshop was conducted to gauge the interest and willingness of potential partners and the community to participate in the School-Plus-Home Gardens Project (S+HGP).

The S+HGP was piloted in six schools in the province of Laguna, with a model where harvests from the school gardens provided fresh vegetables for the school-based feeding program.

The model also extended the gardening-feeding linkage to the establishment of food gardens in the school children's homes.

More than just establishing home gardens, the parents developed a greater sense of responsibility to ensure good nutrition for their children while also saving on food expenses.

Moreover, S+HGP has garnered local and international awards for its emphasis on the multi-functionality of school gardens as learning laboratories for educating pupils, teachers and parents about sustainability concepts and interconnections of food and nutrition, organic agriculture, edible landscaping, climate change and solid waste management.

Agriculture is not a strong sector in the island primarily due to the poor quality of its soil.

Though rich in seafood, both Coron and Busuanga import most of their fruits and vegetables from neighboring areas. Consequently, they pay high prices for these produce, which adversely affect nutrition of poor families.

The island residents also pointed out that importation also increases prices of food in restaurants, an integral part of the booming tourism industry on the island.

It was reported during the consultation that for every peso earned from tourism in Coron, eighty centavos leave the municipality due to the importation of the produce.

SEARCA program head for research and development Pedcris Orencio said the consultation also indicated the support that could be extended to the S+HGP by various stakeholders.

Orencio said government agencies, through their local offices, could provide technical assistance on organic vegetable production and provide inputs such as garden tools, seeds, other planting materials and organic fertilizers.

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AGRI CONGLOMERATE REDESIGNS DAVAO'S REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY

A SCION of the banana-growing Floirendo family is redefining the real estate sector in the Davao Region by combining housing and commercial developments with agriculture.

"With our agricultural heritage through our sister companies, what we are trying to do is also see how we can find our niche and how we can differentiate ourselves from a lot of developers that are already doing business in Davao," says Ricardo "Cary" Floirendo Lagdameo, the chief development officer of Damosa Land Inc. which is the real estate development arm of the Anflo Group of Companies.

"We are a part of the Anflocor Group or Antonio Floirendo Corp. We are better known for our agricultural businesses. That's what Anflocor has been known for since the 1940s," Cary, who has been in charge of Damosa Land and Anflo Industrial Estate over the past six years, says in a briefing in Makati City.

"Technically, we started the business in 1949. The name Damosa actually stands for Davao Motor Sales. It was my grandfather's [Antonio Floirendo Sr.] first business way back after the war. It used to be a car dealership. Over the years, when we stopped selling Ford vehicles in the 1980s, we slowly transitioned it into a real estate business. It really took off around the early 2000s when we started with some roperties in Davao," he says.

"We started in the commercial and leasing businesses. We had commercial strips, we had offices and then over the last five to six years, we really grew the business and included residential projects, industrial parks, hotels and offices. We are proudly homegrown. We won't say we are the biggest real estate company in the region, but we are known for a lot of firsts. We were the first for example to put up a PEZA-accredited IT park in 2007 in Davao City. It is called Damosa IT Park. We have several locators there," says Cary, a 42-year-old father of two.

"We have the only agro-industrial park which is now operational. We also have a master-planned township which is predicated on agriculture. So these are some of the projects that we find interesting," he says.

Damosa is developing Agriya, an 88-hectare township in Panabo City, Davao Del Norte with agriculture as the main theme. Its sister company Tagum Agricultural Development Company Inc. operates one of the largest and highest-yielding banana plantations in the world.

"Agriya is an 88-hectare township but the main theme is agriculture. We have residential, institutional and commercial components, but as much as we can we put agriculture into the project," says Cary, a former investment banker who graduated from Ateneo de Manila with a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies in 1999 and took his MBA at Columbia Business School in New York in 2008.

"It is a self-contained, master-planned project. It will be the first of its kind in Davao del Norte and we would like to think in the Philippines. We will also be teaching students and children how to do backyard farming, how to do composting and basically how to live a sustainable life," he says.

"Everything that has to do with agriculture, we are trying to put into this project. If I am not mistaken, we are probably the first and only one that is doing something like this. For us, it is kind of in our blood, in our DNA which is agriculture. That's where we find our niche," he says.

"Speaking of agriculture, even our industrial park is actually an agro-industrial park. So all of our locators there, in one way or the other, are involved in agro-processing," says Cary.

Damosa's other projects include the 63-hectare Anflo Industrial Estate beside Davao International Container Terminal in Panabo, Damosa District, Damosa IT Park, Damosa Business Center, Damosa Gateway, Damosa Market Basket, Topaz Tower, Microtel Wyndham, Microtel Gensan, Seawind DamosaLand Condominium, Damosa Fairlane, Lanang Aplaya Resort, Valley High, McPod, Anflocor Offices and Naturetainment.

Under Cary's leadership, Damosa has successfully achieved an annual revenue growth of more than 500 percent from 2013 to 2018. Cary and Damosa received various awards such as best residential development in Davao for Damosa Fairlane in 2017, best condominium development for Seawind in 2018, corporate excellence award

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in 2018, executive leadership team of the year in 2018 and best office architectural design for Damosa Diamond Tower in 2019.

Damosa is set to inaugurate the 15-story Damosa Diamond Tower, the tallest office building in Davao, by the first quarter of 2020. "The architecture or exterior of the building is actually predicated on agriculture as well," says Cary.

Meanwhile, Damosa is investing between P3 billion and P4 billion in the initial phase of Agriya covering residential, agri-tourism, an agricultural school and a commercial strip. "The next phase keeps on evolving depending on how the first phase would do. We would be spending more in the second phase if the take-up for the first phase is good," says Cary.

"Right now, we are planning to do mostly house-and-lot selling. If the take-up is good and the price is good, there is even an opportunity to build something more. All our projects, across the group, are financed internally," he says.

Agriya will host the UP Professional School for Agriculture and the Environment, an agricultural campus to be run by UP Los Baños. It will also open an agri-tourism park later this year. "With our residential lots, we are encouraging our homeowners to grow all different kinds of produce for backyard farming," says Cary.

He says the take-up for the residential component has been strong so far despite the project's focus on the high-end market. "We are happy with the turnout because this is the first of its kind in Davao del Norte. We position the residential portion as more of high-end than what is being offered. Lately, we have been able to sell in the price range of about P15 million to P16 million [per house and lot]. It translates into about P15,000 to P16,000 per square meter," he says.

Damosa's homebuyers include business owners, executives of the big multinationals in the area, executives of Anflocor's business partners and locators in its industrial parks. "We try to really tap the market that is within our own reach," says Cary.

"This is just some of the examples of how we integrate agriculture with real estate," he says. "Basically I guess the common denominator with all of our projects is we really are a Mindanao development company. We have our roots there."

Roderick T. dela Cruz

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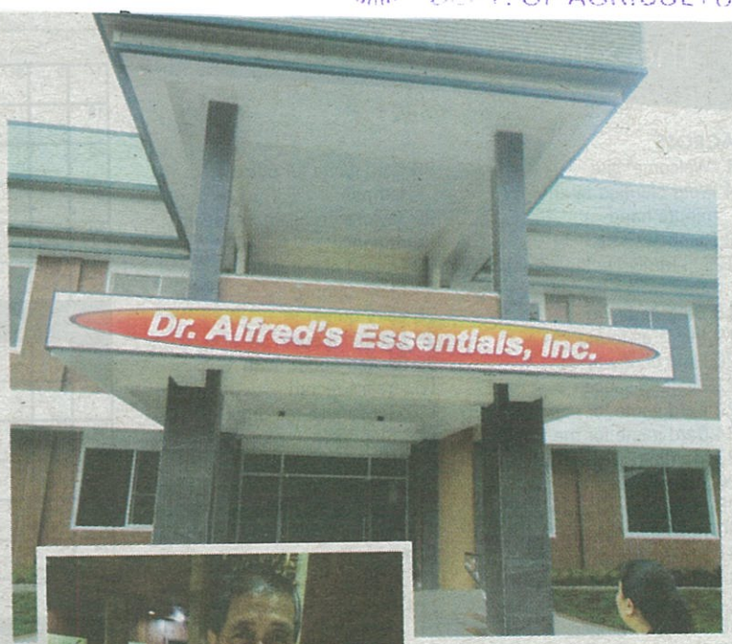
Agri-Talk

By ZAC B. SARIAN

SUPER SWEET MANGOSTEEN IN KIDAPAWAN

(Memoirs of an Agri Journalist)



MANGOSTEEN KING Alfredo Villarico is constructing a processing facility to affordable mangosteen capsule as food supplement and other high-value byproducts; and (inset) Dr. Villarico showing the plump aril of his super sweet mangosteen

Dr. **Alfredo Villarico** knew that we would be visiting him on August 16, 2019 in Kidapawan City as part of our invitation to the Kasadua Timpupo Fruit Festival, an annual event organized by the local government unit as thanksgiving for the bountiful harvest of fruits in that part of the country. Of course, many people know that Dr. Villarico, a 75-year-old medical doctor, is the undisputed Mangosteen King in the Philippines today.

We met Dr. Villarico for the first time more than 30 years ago when we conducted our Agri-Kapihan at the University of Southern Mindanao in Kabacan. From our first meeting we had learned that he was already an advocate of planting mangosteen for a number of good reasons. He was then phasing out his rubber plantation so he could plant mangosteen. He said that mangosteen was the easiest fruit tree to maintain, saying he had not encountered any disease and insect problems then in growing the fruit tree.

We met Dr. Villarico for the first time mo-
disease and insect problems then

We remember him telling us that he had problems with the rubber tappers who would be absent when they were most needed to harvest the cuplumps. He also phased out his *rambutan* because the trees needed to be sprayed with insecticide to protect the fruits from fruit flies and other insects. Being a doctor, he knew that chemical pesticides could endanger the health of his farm workers.

> 'Zac, my friends tell me that according to you the sweetest mangosteen you have tasted is in Thailand. You have to taste my mangosteen so that from now on you will say that the sweetest mangosteen is right here in Kidapawan.'

PREPARED TO CONVINCE US

Dr. Villarico received us at the huge family dining table late in the afternoon. After exchanging amenities, in our own language he said in effect: "Zac, my friends tell me that according to you the sweetest mangosteen you have tasted is in Thailand. You have to taste my mangosteen so that from now on you will say that the sweetest mangosteen is right here in Kidapawan."

He was prepared to convince us. He had a big tray filled with fruits of his new mangosteen selection. He asked us to eat all we can but if we encountered any seed, we should not keep it. He is not releasing any planting material yet until he has established a big plantation of the same.

How did we find Dr. Villarico's new mangosteen? Terrific, if you ask us. Our companions that included **Dax Avenido** of Nissan Philippines and **Gabby Gonzales** of ABS-CBN agreed a hundred percent. The *aril* (the white flesh) is so smooth and so sweet. It just melts in the mouth. Before that, on the land trip from Davao City to Kidapawan, we ate a lot of both the somewhat sour and what is termed as sweet mangosteen which were also from the farm of the good doctor. The new mangosteen is distinctly much sweeter than the two cultivars that Dr. Villarico had been growing the past many years. We immediately told him we will call it Dr. Alfred's Super Sweet Mangosteen.

In the course of time, there are variants that come out in the plant kingdom. Could it be the result of stress? Exposure to radiation? Climate change? We really don't know because we are a non-scientist. But variants do happen and it is fortunate that there is a Dr. Villarico who is observant. We have learned that in Thailand, farmers are keen in observing variants of their own plants with outstanding traits. Such plants could become a goldmine because the owner would not only make money from the fruits but more importantly from the propagations that are sold at a high price to interested growers.

Let's give Dr. Villarico a big hand for his Super Sweet Mangosteen. And an even bigger applause for putting up a new modern facility right in his farm in Kidapawan where he will intensify the processing of affordable mangosteen capsule as food supplement, mangosteen tea, mangosteen-coffee mix, mangosteen choco, mangosteen jam, and mangosteen soap.

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CEU BOARD MEMBER NAMED NATIONAL SCIENTIST

Dr. Emil Q. Javier, a member of Board of Directors of Centro Escolar University (CEU) now joins the roster of the country's National Scientists for his notable contributions in the field of agricultural science.

Through Proclamation No. 781, President Rodrigo Duterte conferred the title as National Scientist to Dr. Javier for his outstanding work and contributions to the global and national progress of science and technology through the establishment of the Institute of Plant Breeding in the University of the Philippines, Los Baños which developed high-yielding crops and disease-resistant varieties in the country and in Asia.

The proclamation further stated that Dr. Javier "led and promoted sound agricultural policies and programs, massive utilization of climate resilient and environment-friendly agricultural innovations, and improved governance and management systems to help improve the livelihood of Filipino farmers and fisherfolk."

Apart from being a plant genetist and agronomist, Dr. Javier was the 17th President of the University of the Philippines. He also served from 1981 to 1986 as chair of the National Science Development Board that evolved into the National Science and Technology Authority and is now the Department of Science and Technology. In 2005, he became the president of the National Academy of Science and Technology. Also, he worked as senior research fellow for the International Service for National Agricultural Research at The Hague, Netherlands and was appointed director-general of the Asian Vegetable Research and Development Center in Taiwan where he established vegetable research centers in Africa and Latin America.

He is joined in the CEU Board of Directors by another National Scientist, Dr. Angel Alcala in the field of marine biology and ecology as independent directors.

For more information about the University, please visit the official website at www.ceu.edu.ph. You may also follow CEU on Facebook at www.facebook.com/theCEUofficial and on Twitter at @CEUmanila, @CEU_makati05, and @CEUmalolos.

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SALAMIN NG DIWA

Ni Edwin Eusebio

MAGSASAKANG API!

Tunay na nakabibigla at ikaw ay Maluluha,
Kalagayan ng mga Filipinong Magsasaka ...
Nakapanlulumo at kaawa-awa...
Presyo ng Palay nila, Binabarat na Sadya.
Ang mga Magsasaka na laging nagagamit,
Sa pangangampanya ng mga Namumunong Switik.

Magagandang salita at pangako sa kanila'y isinasambit
Malayo sa katotohan ... Walang tulong sa Magbubukid.
Ang pagsasaka sa ibang bansa ay ikinararangal,
Magbubukid nila roon ay pinagpipitagan...
Bakit rito sa Bayan nating minamahal....

Magbubukid ay tila Aliping Sagigilid lamang.
Nasaan na ang pangako na Magsasaka ay tutulungan,
Bakit ang nangyayari ay Kabalintunaan...
Sa halip na ang Filipinong magsasaka ang ipakundangan

Rice Tariffication pa ang batas na pinagtibay...
Hindi nga ba ito ay nakapanggigigil?
Aangkat ng Bigas upang hindi raw kulangin.
Gayunman itatago at suplay ay pararamihin
Samantalang lokal na produksiyon ay hindi na pinansin.

Ano ang gagawin ng nagdarahop na mga magsasaka
Mamamatay na lang ba sa Gutom ang kanyang Pamilya?
Kaya nga Huwag na kayong magtataka...
Bakit kanilang mga anak ... mga bukid nila ay ibinenta.

Sinasamantala naman ito ng ilang mga Milyonaryong Ganid,
Bibilhin ang Lupain at ide-develop man din....
Wala silang pakialam, kabukiran ay Sesementohin...

Maging mga irigasyon na walang Silbi, paano ang gagawin. Hangang ang mga kabukiran ay patuloy ngayong ipinagbibili
Mawawala na ang kabuhayan ng Mga Magsasakang api....

Nadadama kong sadya ang Galit at Ngitngit...
Dahil sa kabukiran ako namulat....lumaki.
Huwag naman nilang yurakang labis ... ang sektor Nagpapakain sa nakararami..

❖❖❖

(Si Edwin Eusebio ay araw-araw na naririnig sa DWIZ 882 am Radio)