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Govt to hike crops production via ₱523.57-M soil health program

PRESIDENT Duterte has approved the Department of Agriculture's (DA) P523.57-million national soil health program (NSHP) which seeks to rejuvenate the country's "degraded and sick" soils to increase crop production.

The DA said the NSHP is a three-year program that will be implemented by its attached agency, the Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM).

Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar said the NSHP was a "long-awaited" rejuvenation program that would enable farmers to produce "bountiful crops and earn more income for their families."

"As soil is the foundation of agriculture, we must therefore protect, preserve, and nurture it to sustainably produce adequate, affordable, and nutritious food for all Filipinos," he said.

Since returning from his stint as director general of the India-based International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Dar said soil rejuvenation has been one of his major advocacies in his second stint as the country's agriculture chief.

"Aside from water, healthy soil is the other key ingredient to attain sustainable crop production," he said.

"With the NSHP, we now have a science-based framework to rejuvenate our sick soils that will subsequently lead to increased crop harvests and farmers' incomes."

The four major components of the NSHP are: institutionalization of national soil monitoring and rejuvenation program; establish mobile soils laboratory to monitor soil health; strengthen partnerships with relevant agencies and organizations to sustain food security; and improve soil analysis for macro- and micronutrients, and develop manuals on the use of physical and biological parameters as indicators of soil health.

"The first component entails the adoption of a national soil database and monitoring system to rejuvenate degraded soils," the DA said.

"It also aims to enhance the capacities and efficiencies of national and regional soil laboratories through the acquisition of state-of-the-art equipment, upgraded laboratory facilities, and highly-trained technical staff."

The DA said the second component of the three-year program involves acquisition of modern mobile soils laboratories that will serve farms far from established DA-BSWM provincial and regional laboratories. This also entails training local government extension workers, farmer-leaders, and other stakeholders on the physical, chemical, and biological properties of soils.

"With these modern soil laboratories, farmers would have their soil samples analyzed in a matter of minutes, with the corresponding specific site and crop nutrient recommendations," Dar said.

The DA said the program's third component aims to strengthen partnerships between the DA-BSWM and relevant agencies and organizations to sustain food security efforts. The DA added that the fourth component entails the development of a "National Soil Kit" which would feature all possible properties of soil health (physical, chemical and biological indicators).

The DA said the NSHP was patterned after the soil rejuvenation program implemented in 2009 to 2012 by ICRISAT in Kartanaka, India, covering 3.3 million hectares.

Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas

The Manila Times

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Duterte OKs P523-M soil program

BY EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has approved the Department of Agriculture's (DA) P523-million National Soil Health Program (NSHP) aimed at rejuvenating the country's degraded soils and ensuring increased crop production sustainably.

"On behalf of millions of Filipino farmers, we thank President Duterte for supporting this long-awaited soil rejuvenation program to enable our farmers to produce bountiful crops and earn more income for their families," Agriculture Secretary William Dar said on Wednesday.

The NSHP, which is part of the government's goal of achieving food security, will be implemented by the DA's Bureau of Soils and Water Management (DA-BSWM) starting this year until 2023.

Aside from institutionalizing a national soil monitoring and rejuvenation program, the NSHP aims to establish mobile soils laboratories across the country to monitor soil health through the acquisition of state-of-the-art equipment, upgraded laboratory facilities and competent technical staff.

"With these modern soil laboratories, farmers would have their soil samples analyzed in a matter of minutes with the corresponding specific site and crop nutrient recommendations," Dar said.

The NSHP also aims to improve soil analysis for macro- and micro-nutrients, and develop manuals on the use of physical and biological parameters as indicators of soil health through the adoption of a national soil database and monitoring system to rejuvenate degraded soils.

Under the program, the DA-BSWM will be training local government extension workers, farmer-leaders, and other stakeholders on the physical, chemical and biological properties of soils. "Part of this is to empower rural-based organizations, particularly farmers' cooperatives and associations or FCAs (farmers' cooperatives and associations), which will serve as partners in implementing the national soil health program," Dar said.

Moreover, the Agriculture chief said the NSHP will work to strengthen partnerships between the DA-BSWM and relevant agencies and organizations to sustain food security efforts.

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■ Qualified farmers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs) in Bohol recently received their farm machines under Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund Mechanization Program. Photo shows some of the farm machines distributed at no cost to the FCAs in Bohol. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Bohol gets P209-M in farm machines

SIXTY-EIGHT qualified farmers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs) received P209 million worth of various farm machines under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund Mechanization (RCEF) Program.

A turnover ceremony on Wednesday was held at the New Capitol, Tagbilaran in Bohol. At least 9,000 Boholano farmers are expected to benefit from the machinery grants aimed at increasing the island province's agricultural production.

Speaking to Boholano farmers, PHilMech Director Dr. Baldwin Jallorina stressed the benefit of the Rice Tariffication Law through the provision of machinery grants to FCAs.

"This RCEF Mechanization Program and its farm machines are free and made possible through the passing of the RA 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law authored by our dear Sen. Cynthia Villar. Let us thank our dear senator for all her efforts for the Filipino farmers," Jallorina said.

Jallorina expressed optimism that the farm machineries will help curb postharvest losses, lessen the production cost and increase the profit of the farmers. He challenged the farmers to take care of the machines and share to all farmers so they can also encourage the next generation to farming.

"I'm hoping that you'll take care and share these to your fellow farmers so that we will succeed altogether and encourage our children and the next generation to embrace agriculture," he said in Filipino.

For his part, Agriculture Secretary William Dar assured the farmers that all the planned government support will reach the farmers to unlock the potentials of the agriculture sector in the province.

"There will be more (machineries) after this year and I assure you that all support meant for Boholano farmers for this year will be provided to you," Dar said in Filipino. **EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ**

Abante TONITE
MABILIS SA BALITA

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Villar hugas-kamay sa imported rice

Binuweltahan ni Senador Cynthia Villar ang Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) kasunod ng alegasyon ng kawalan umano nito ng aksiyon at pagsuporta sa Executive Order 135 na nagbaba sa buwis ng imported na bigas.

Sa ilalim ng EO na nilagdaan ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte noong Mayo 15, ibinaba nito ang taripa sa bigas sa 35% mula sa dating 40% para sa in-quota at 35% mula sa dating 50% para out-quota.

Sa kanyang liham sa FFF, sinabi ni Villar na masugid siyang tagasuporta ng local agricultural industry at laging niya tinitingnan ang kapakanan ng mga magsasakang Pilipino.

"By alleging that I have remained silent and thus supports the lowering of tariff on rice is unacceptable,' sabi ni Villar.

Nauna nang sinabi ng FFF na kinontra ni Villar ang panukalang tariff cut sa pagdinig ng Tariff Commission noong Pebrero 4.

Depensa ni Villar, nagbigay umano siya ng kanyang posisyon laban sa EO sa ilang mga pagdinig at pagpupulong kasama si Agriculture Secretary William Dar at iba pang opisyal ng ehekutibo subalit wala siyang nagawa.

Tungkol naman sa Senate Resolution No. 726 na humihikayat sa Pangulo na bawiin ang EO 135, na inihain ng mga minority senator, sinabi nitong hindi naman matalakay sa kanyang pinamumunuang Senate committee on agriculture dahil napunta ito sa committee on ways and means.

"I want to reassure our rice farmers that I will continue to take into the highest consideration their welfare in the exercise of my functions," sabi pa ni Villar. **(Dindo Matining)**

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REGIONAL UPDATES

NATIONWIDE ROUND-UP

PCA lacks personnel to implement projects under Coco Levy act

THE PHILIPPINE Coconut Authority (PCA) said it does not have enough manpower to implement different projects under Republic Act No. 11524 or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act, according to its top official. PCA Administrator Benjamin R. Madrigal, Jr. said during a virtual roundtable at Lido on Wednesday that the PCA currently has around 500 plantilla personnel, which is 61% of the 826 available positions. "The current PCA is not as big as it was back in the day. This is a 500-something personnel agency which will implement different projects under the law," Mr. Madrigal said. "We are compensating the PCA's lack of personnel with partnerships among different government agencies, local government units (LGUs), and leaders of coconut farmer organizations," he added. Mr. Madrigal explained that the law provided for the designation of different government agencies with the corresponding projects that match their mandates. Among the more than 10 implementing agencies include the Department of Public Works and Highways for infrastructure development, the Commission on Higher Education for scholarship program dedicated to coconut farmers, and the Cooperative Development Authority for organizing coconut farmer organizations. This set-up, however, is likely to overwhelm farmers due to the number of implementing agencies, according to former agriculture secretary Leonardo Q. Montemayor. He suggested closer collaboration between the PCA and local government units to tap more resources and personnel support. "They (local governments) will welcome the PCA if ever the agency reaches out to them and to other groups related to the coconut sector," Mr. Montemayor said. "The PCA should also target the LGUs with the impending implementation of the Mandanas ruling which will increase the internal revenue allotment of LGUs next year," he added. Signed by President Rodrigo R. Duterte on Feb. 26, Republic Act No. 11524 permits coconut farmers to utilize the taxes collected from them during the Marcos administration. The said taxes were diverted towards the procurement of corporate assets for the gain of Marcos' associates. The funds will be used based on the Coconut Industry Development Plan. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

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Palawan farmer uses LandBank loan to put up small business

NARRA, Palawan—For the past 30 years, palay farmer Jessie Cabuhat has been tilling his own farm in Barangay Taritien, dreaming that one day, he will be able to set-up a small business of renting out farm machinery as an additional source of income for his family.

That dream became a reality in early 2020 through the assistance of the Land Bank of the Philippines (LandBank) under the Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (ACEF) lending program.

Facilitated by the LandBank Palawan Lending Center, Cabuhat was able to loan P1.4 million under the ACEF to purchase a DC70 PH Plus combine harvester in time for the harvest of the wet season.

Cabuhat has since been renting out the combine harvester to other farmers in the area and has been earning from it for nearly a year now. He is also using the machinery for farming his family-owned 6 hectares of rice farmland, and another 8 hectares which he is renting from his parents. Now, the farmer turned entrepreneur has also generated employment by hiring 4 additional employees to beef up his regular roster of 6 farm helpers.

Cabuhat said he is grateful to LandBank for offering a loan opportunity at a very low interest rate of 2 percent per annum. For him, the equipment rental business has significantly complemented his regular income, supporting his family's financial needs.

JESSIE CABUHAT, a palay farmer from Palawan, took out a loan from the Land Bank of the Philippines to put up a small business. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

"Thank you to LandBank as I was able to fulfill my dream of owning a rice harvester. It is certainly a big help not only to my family but also to my fellow farmers," Cabuhat said in Filipino.

The ACEF is a direct lending program administered by LandBank in partnership with the Department of Agriculture (DA), to provide timely and affordable credit to farmers and fishers, their cooperatives and associations, as well as micro and small enterprises (MSEs) to increase their productivity and income.

Individual farmers and fishers may use the loan to purchase farm inputs and equipment, or for farm improvements. For MSEs, cooperatives and associations, the loan may be used for the acquisition of machineries, equipment and facilities for agri-based production and post-production, as well as processing activities. As of April 30, LandBank said it has released under the ACEF lending program a total of P4.99 billion which benefited 39,502 farmers and fishers.

LandBank urges interested borrows to contact its nearest branch or lending center or call its customer service at (02) 8-405-7000 or at PLDT Domestic Toll Free 1-800-10-405-7000.

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PHL may export pork, beef to Japan—NMIS

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas @jearcalas

THE Philippines is now eligible to export pork and beef to Japan following its inclusion in Tokyo's list of certified countries that implement reliable Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) hygiene management.

The National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) said the Philippines was included in the list of the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) released last May 26. Citing Japan's Food Sanitation Law, only meat manufactured with HACCP-based hygiene management can be imported into Japan, according to the NMIS, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture.

"The Philippines has been exporting chicken meat to Japan, but as a result of this new recognition, we are now eligible to export beef, carabeef, pork, chevon, mutton, and their by-products to Japan," it said in a statement.

NMIS Executive Director Jocelyn A. Salvador said the inclusion of the Philippines in Japan's MHLW HACCP list shows that Tokyo can "rely on and trust" Manila's certification system.

"It also implies that the systems of certification of the Philippines are at par with the global standards," Salvador added.

Given the recognition, the NMIS said Japan will now automatically accept the certification made by the Philippines on its meat establishments "without a doubt."

The NMIS added that Japan's MHLW has already notified its respective quarantine stations to accept the health certificate issued by the Philippines for the different meat commodities.

Since 2003, the NMIS has been implementing the mandatory application of the HACCP program, an internationally recognized science-based and systematic system, in all licensed "AAA" meat establishments in the country.

The NMIS has jurisdiction over the accreditation and licensing of all meat and meat product exporters of the country. Under existing rules, only HACCP certified meat and meat products from "AAA" meat establishments are allowed for export.

The Philippines exported 340.467 metric tons (MT) of frozen chicken meat and meat products worth $1.08 million to Japan last year, based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data.

The country is keen on exporting more agricultural products to Japan under the Philippines-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement which entered into force in December 2008.

Manila has been pushing to lower the tariff imposed on Philippine banana exports to Japan. Currently, Philippine bananas are slapped an 18-percent tariff during the winter season and 8 percent during summer.

Japan is one of the largest export destinations and foreign investment sources of the Philippines.

Last year, the Philippines registered a trade surplus of $1.74 billion with Japan, higher than the P94.96 million posted in 2019, based on PSA data.

The Philippines's outbound shipments to Japan amounted to $9.9 billion last year, which is 7 percent lower than the $10.67 billion recorded in 2019. Imports from Japan to the Philippines, meanwhile, plunged by nearly 23 percent year-on-year to $8.15 billion.

Total trade between countries reached $18.05 billion last year, indicating a 15-percent decline from $21.25 billion in 2019.

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PLDT, Smart extend funding aid to farmers in Occidental Mindoro

PLDT and Smart are reinforcing their support for the rice farming sector, as farmers continue to face challenges in a long drawn-out COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the Buy Local Sustainability Fund, PLDT and its wireless arm Smart Communications, Inc., recently turned over P100,000 to 20 farmers supported by FarmVocacy in Barangay Kurtinganan, in Santa Cruz, Mindoro Occidental.

The funding aid aims to help support rice farmers in the next cropping season.

"Farmers are among the most financially challenged in the country.

They're often saddled with high-interest loans. We want to give them access to capital funding to help them jump start the planting season," said Stephanie Orlino, Smart Assistant Vice President for Community Relations.

Life is even harder for farmers who till the land on their own. Aida Papa has been exclusively carrying the load of managing her four-hectare rice field since her husband died seven years ago. The fifty-three-year-old farmer is also raising their only son on her own.

"It's very challenging to grow rice by yourself. I have to hire workers every step of the way and that adds up to my expenses," Papa narrated. To recoup some of the overhead, she rents out her tractor to other farmers in the community.

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Villar bats for PGS to spur organic farming

THE Participatory Guarantee System is a motivation to promote and develop the organic industry and a great help to small farmers producing organic products who cannot afford the expensive Third Party Certification, Senator Cynthia A. Villar said .

During the grand launch of PGS, Villar, chairperson of the Senate Agriculture and Food committee, said PGS is a low-cost guaranty system compared to Third Party Certification. It makes accessible and cheaper certification cost for organic produce.

"The PGS will cost not more than P2,000 per year per certification compared to the Third Party Certification of P150,000 per year," Villar said.

Saying more Filipinos should have access to healthy and safe farm products, Villar has pushed for a system of organic products certification which small farmers can also afford.

Apart from environmental protection, she said PGS promotes the use of natural and farm-based resources and inputs like organic fertilizer, which would yield to less input cost on the part of the farmers. "This means increased farmer profitability."

A locally focused quality assurance system developed and practiced by people engaged in organic organic agriculture , Villar said PGS empowers organizations and its members particularly the farmers and fisherfolk including the consumers.

The system also acknowledges the involvement of other sectors in the community as an integral part not only in verifying the integrity of the produce and products but also in providing the needed technical assistance for continual improvement of the system. **MRA**

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Axelum eyes more livelihood projects for coconut farmers

BUSINESSMIRROR FILE PHOTO

COCONUT products manufacturer Axelum Resources Corp. on Wednesday said it plans to establish additional livelihood projects for its farmers, including employable skills training seminars to harness the management acumen of cluster leaders and members.

Axelum also said it has conceptualized various social campaigns that maximize the agricultural potential of its area.

"We are fully committed to initiatives that uphold social welfare, particularly towards our often-neglected farming communities. With this certification, our customers can be assured that our products are backed by a supply chain that strongly adheres to the highest ethical principles, providing a conducive sustainable working environment that is free of exploitative labor and abuse of natural resources. In this respect, Axelum is truly proud to be part of such cause," Romeo I. Chan, the company's chairman and CEO, said.

In 2019, Axelum expanded its sustainability development platform by launching its Fairtrade program, primarily for the benefit of local coconut farmers.

Fairtrade International was founded in 1997 and is a nonprofit, multistakeholder association of 22 member-organizations.

It promotes a global system that connects farmers and workers from developing countries with consumers and businesses around the world to change for the better.

Fairtrade-certified companies undergo rigorous and independent audit screenings based on some guidelines, and compliant with the ISEAL Assurance Code, an international code for sustainability standards.

To date, approximately 1,000 farmers are enrolled in Axelum's Fairtrade program, organized into nine clusters from the municipalities of Medina, Magsaysay, Salay, Talisayan and Gingoog City in Misamis Oriental, Northern Mindanao. In terms of land area, more than 2,300 hectares of organic coconut farms are Fairtrade-certified.

Among the key highlights of the Fairtrade system is the setting of a Fairtrade minimum price, which represents the base amount that producers are paid when selling their products through Fairtrade. In principle, this protects producers when market prices drop.

The Fairtrade premium is an extra sum of money paid on top of the selling price. This additional amount is collected and earmarked to fund cluster-initiated projects.

Axelum said it transacts with a well-known multinational consumer giant for its desiccated coconut products under Fairtrade prices. Based on Fairtrade terms, Axelum allocates a portion from each product sold as Fairtrade Premium, which is then deposited to an independent bank account directly accessible to farmer clusters. *VG Cabuag*

The Manila Times

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SM Foundation ramps up collaboration program

THE SM Foundation Inc. (SMFI) continues to work on creating models for agriculture collaboration and helping to advance sustainable farm and fishery development through multi-stakeholder approaches.

SMFI's Kabalikat Sa Kabuhayan on Sustainable Agriculture program (KSK) has evolved through the years since its launch in 2007. It has branched out to rural areas advocating urban farming, which became an alternative livelihood source to marginalized Filipinos living in the metro.

SMFI also partnered with the Department of Agriculture, Department of Social Welfare and Development, local government units (LGUs) and various nongovernment agencies as part of its goal of institutionalizing partnerships to uplift the economic status of rural communities and increase farmer incomes.

SMFI also strengthened its partnership in 2019 with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda), which provided scholarship grants focusing on agriculture production to almost 1,500 KSK beneficiaries nationwide.

Tesda's partner schools also served as advisors or "Big Brothers" of the participants. The program eventually created a new path wherein beneficiaries, aside from establishing their own agri-enterprises, are able to land green-collar jobs.

As the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic heightened, KSK program implementation was reprogrammed conform to rules and regulations imposed by the LGUs and the national government's Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases.

Together with its partners, SMFI strengthened its regional execution by utilizing digital technology to virtually coordinate with local-based partners.

Despite the pandemic, SMFI was also able to implement its sustainable agriculture program in more than 30 sites nationwide, providing 1,300 local farmers with competitive skills that were certified by Tesda.

KSK's Big Brother Schools in Dinalupihan, Bataan and in Kapangan, Benguet also extended their help in spreading social good. D'Planner Farm School, for example, shared harvested crops to communities and frontliners. In Kapangan, produce was either sold or shared within the community. St. Isidore Learning Center and Castro Tomas Farm Schools bought produce from participants for distribution in villages (barangay).

The program also opened local agri-enterprise opportunities for KSK farmers. It was able to provide grants to qualified participants that can be used for agri startups. They were also provided additional training to further their business acumen.

To provide markets for KSK farmers, partnerships were also forged with with SM Markets, SM Supermalls and SM Development Corp.

Through a multi-stakeholder approach, the KSK initiative was able to pool resources that enabled the program to scale up, reaching more people and increasing the impact of interventions.

EJ GOMEZ

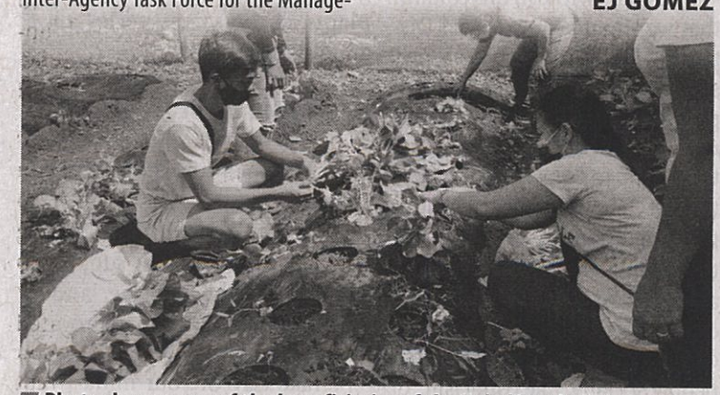

Photo shows some of the beneficiaries of the Kabalikat Sa Kabuhayan on Sustainable Agriculture program of SM Foundation Inc.
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Malaya
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Corn, wheat ease; soybeans post gains

SINGAPORE- Chicago corn futures inched down on Wednesday as the US dollar firmed, although concerns about dry weather impacting production in key US growing regions limited losses.

Wheat eased while soybeans ticked higher.

The most-active corn contract on the Chicago Board Of Trade (CBOT) lost 0.1 percent to $6.79-1/4 a bushel.

Wheat fell 0.2 percent at $6.83-1/2 a bushel and soybeans Sv1 were up 0.1 percent at $15.82-1/4 a bushel. – ***Reuters***