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## EDITORIAL

### Stubbornly high

Since last year, the government has been promising to bring down the retail prices of white refined sugar, agreeing with certain industry players that the prices are unreasonably high.

The sky-high sugar prices in fact fueled much of food inflation, with confectionery and sweetened beverages accounting for the biggest chunk. Food price spikes and the fuel price surge arising from Russia's invasion of Ukraine in turn drove the high inflation rate. In the fourth quarter of 2022, onion prices shot up into the stratosphere, pushing food inflation to 10.7 percent and contributing to the 14-year-high 8.7 percent inflation rate in January this year.

The start of the sugarcane harvest along with the questionable importation of 440,000 metric tons of refined sugar, awarded by the **Department of Agriculture** to just three favored companies – All Asian Countertrade Inc., Edison Lee Marketing Corp. and S&D Sucden Philippines – failed to bring down prices.

These days, domestic production is sufficient enough to bring down the farmgate price of raw sugar to P55 per kilo. The Sugar Regulatory Administration has suspended the release of 150,000 MT of imported sug-

ar because of the slump in the farmgate price. And yet sugar retail prices have stubbornly refused to soften. The SRA said retail prices have remained unchanged at P85 to P110 per kilo in the wet markets and supermarkets.

SRA officials said that at the farmgate price of P55 a kilo, the retail price should be only P80. Imposing a suggested retail price for sugar was discussed last year amid the food-driven high inflation, but retailers especially in the wet markets said they were buying at high prices from wholesalers. So who are the lucky folks who have been making a killing from what looks like price and supply manipulation? This question has been begging for an answer for many months now.

Since sugar prices began surging in late 2021, certain industry players have intensified their call for reliable record-keeping of production and an accurate inventory of the country's sugar stocks. Today, amid the low farmgate price and still-high retail prices, there is again talk of imposing a suggested retail price alongside conducting warehouse inspections. The problem clearly needs more decisive action. And it must go beyond the band-aid solution of providing highly subsidized sugar at Kadiwa outlets.





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## DA to expand adlay seed production

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

The Department of Agriculture (DA) plans to expand its seed production of adlay – popularly known as Chinese barley – in Northern Mindanao amid increasing demand and growing potential in the region.

The Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR) said DA-Northern Mindanao Agricultural Crops and Livestock Research Complex (NMACLRC) is working on expanding its adlay seed production due to increasing demand for adlay grits and adlay seeds.

In Dalwangan, Malaybal, Bukidnon, the NMACLRC reported to BAR that it currently maintains a two-hectare adlay seed production area aimed to further promote, distribute, and supply adlay grits and seeds to interested adlay farmers in the region this year.

Adlay varieties available in the seed production include Ginampay, Gulian, Kiboa, Tapol (glutinous) and dwarf.

Planted in June this year, Gulian, Ginampay, and Tapol varieties will be harvested in November while Kiboa in October.

According to NMACLRC, farmers preferred the adlay dwarf variety due to its shorter months of maturity of four to five months versus the six to eight months maturity of other varieties.

The dwarf variety also has one to 1.5 meters

height versus the other varieties with three- to four-meter height that results in lodging problems. NMACLRC sells adlay seeds at P200 per kilo and milled adlay grits at P180 per kilo.

To improve the region's adlay varieties, BAR director Junel Soriano suggested acquiring improved adlay lines from the Philippine Rice Research Institute for on-farm trials.

In 2010, BAR crafted and supported a research for development program to explore the potential of adlay.

As of March this year, the bureau supported a total of 61 projects that covered adaptability yield trials across specific locations; varietal improvement; food product enhancement; seed production and expansion; development of processing and postharvest technologies; marketing study; and commercialization implemented by different research development institutes.

DA-Northern Mindanao, in particular, has established seed production areas in different municipalities in Bukidnon, Lanao del Norte, Misamis Occidental, and Misamis Oriental.

Various adlay value-added products, such as wine, breakfast cereal, arrozcaldo, puto, cutchinta, espasol, adlay crunchy bar, and beauty soap were also developed.

The regional office also established partnership with the Hineleban Foundation based in Malaybalay, Bukidnon in marketing and distribution of adlay grains.





## Korean organization shares agriculture technology with local farmers

By YVETTE TAN

**T**he Philippines and Korea have always been on good terms. Many Filipinos have found good jobs in Korea, and The Land of the Morning Calm continues to share its knowledge and resources in different industries, including agriculture.

The Korea Program for International Cooperation in Agricultural Technology (KOPIA) Philippines Center is an organization that facilitates the transfer of Korean agriculture technology to farmers in developing countries with the aim of helping them increase their income. There are around 23 KOPIA centers around the world.

### Pilot villages

KOPIA Philippines Center, hereafter referred to simply as KOPIA, was established in 2010 inside Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) in Nueva Ecija, transferring to the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) in Los Banos in 2018. Its current projects involve training farmer cooperatives to produce crops as well as constructing relevant infrastructure such as greenhouses and post-harvest and storage facilities to enhance production and increase profits.

Dr. Kyu-Seong Lee, former International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) scientist and current KOPIA director, oversees the organization's latest project, the establishment of KOPIA pilot villages in Lucban, Quezon; Siniloan, Laguna; and Zaragoza, Nueva Ecija.

Working with farmers' associations, the LGUs, and some private entities, KOPIA built greenhouses and post-production facilities. They also engaged participating farmers in skills enhancement and financial literacy courses to ensure that the project will continue even after the organization turns it over to the stakeholders.



FARMERS HAULING a harvest of fresh lettuce. (Patrick James Alpay)

"LGUs who applied for pilot project [had] to prepare at least a one hectare area for good accessibility," Dr Lee explained.

As of the interview, the harvests have either been for self-consumption or have been sold to the community. KOPIA has also been working with Mike Caballes of Bukid Amara, who is introducing them to potential buyers, as well as conducting farming and finance classes for the farmers.

The biggest myth that Lee continues to dispel, even among longtime farmers, is that farming, even in a tropical country, is easy. "[It is believed that] if you throw a seed [anywhere], it will grow on its own," he said. "[But even] in tropical countries, [it is difficult to consistently] produce vegetables without a protective kind of cultivation."

### Mindset change

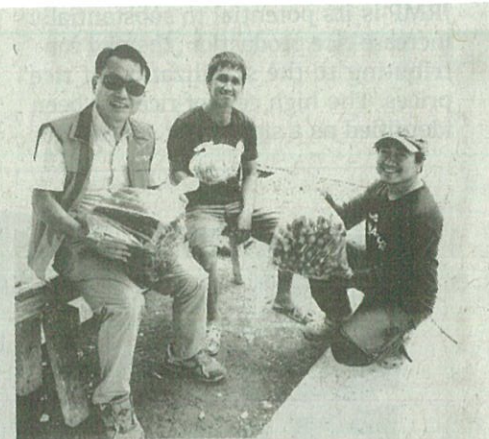
Lee stresses that KOPIA's mission isn't just to donate infrastructure and machinery and educate farmers on Korean agriculture technology, but to impart a

business mindset to the farmers as well. "I always [tell] our farmers [that] this is only not to gain income, but we also need to cooperate and [establish] good communities [so we can] help each other," he said. "Without cooperation, without self-help, without standing by each other, without loving each other in our barangay, you cannot work very well on the outside. So this is the baseline."

Cooperation, he notices, is a muscle that Filipino farmers need to practice. "... they are very good farmers individually, but [we tell them that] as soon as we have [a project together], we should not be individuals. That is why we are talking and emphasizing cooperation," he said.

Lee hopes to be able to set up at least 10 more pilot villages, and is trying to get the Korean government on board. The three pilot villages can be learning sites so that the model can be replicated nationwide. He added that in a way, projects like these are Korea's way of thanking the Philippines for their participation in the Korean War, where over 7,000 Filipinos served under the United Nations Command.

"Because of the Korean war 70 years ago, now they are the one with gratitude for the Filipino people," he said. "Then [Filipinos can] express [our] appreciation to [the] Korean people [by making] a successful project."



DR. KYU-SEONG LEE (left) and two farmers with a fresh harvest of French beans and Korean cucumbers. (Patrick James Alpay)

### Entrepreneurs in the making

In the end, the future of the Pilot Villages will depend on its members. "Whether they make sustainable villages... or not, this also depends on them. That is what I [keep] emphasizing," Lee stressed.

At the time of the interview, the pilot villages were about to transition to high value crops, but the members had not decided on which ones yet. Lee was very excited, especially since he had noticed big changes from when the project started to the present. "Definitely, there are very big changes. They (the farmers) are much [more] diligent. They have [a sense of] duty. They are really eager to do something. They have hope. Without hope they [would not]... voluntarily come to work."





## On DA-ATI 4A FBS prospective facilitators

THE DA-ATI Region 4A and Villar Foundation 21st farm business school (FBS) facilitators' training that I attended last month has provided me and the other 21 participants from Calabarzon and Bicol Region with valuable lessons about agri-business, especially for small farm owners. The training has also linked our group to the growing network of learning sites for agriculture (LSA) and farm tourism businesses in the country. I want to focus my comments on my newfound friends, who are ATI's prospective catalysts who would transfer their knowledge and skills to other farmers who intend to become agri-entrepreneurs in their respective communities.

The FBS training organizers must have carefully planned to bring together participants with diverse profiles to simulate a small community — often composed of senior citizens, middle-aged persons and young people. Our varied socioeconomic backgrounds enhanced the cross-fertilization of ideas during lively class discussions and group work. The senior citizens shared their wisdom, experiences and intentions to leave behind legacies for their families and communities. The younger participants presented innovative ideas and their digital skills and expressed their commitment to supporting our country's food security program. We had one thing in common: we all wanted our farms to flourish and to become ATI-accredited LSAs so



### VIEW FROM THE SOUTH

**DR. LALAY  
RAMOS-JIMENEZ**

that we could help other farmers become farm entrepreneurs. Over a brief period, our group has built a strong bond, sustained through a group chat (GC) about agricultural training activities and opportunities, farming inputs and technology, and developments in our respective farms and lives. We agreed not to discuss matters related to politics and religion because these topics are often divisive and stressful.

I noted that most of us were unaware of new laws, policies, programs, services and other opportunities in agriculture and fisheries, not until Sen. Cynthia Villar and the resource persons from DA and other government agencies mentioned these during the training. We were delighted to learn that there are large allocations for extension programs, including scholarships for training and financial support that could be accessed for farming businesses and LSA needs. There is, however, a need for us to understand the intricacies of the government bureaucracy and to carefully study and comply with its requirements and mechanisms to be able to obtain assistance.

Some of us, especially those who used to work in the private sector, were also unfamiliar with the tech-

nical services and other support from our local government units' (LGU's) municipal agriculture offices (MAO). Glaiza de Leon, an accountant and participant from Batangas, began farming last January and had used her personal funds for her farm's initial development. She only learned about the MAO's assistance from her informal discussions with other knowledgeable participants and from the ATI training organizers. After the training, Glaiza went to the MAO and was given organic fertilizers and technical advice. She was elated that her name was added to the MAO's list of farmers who will receive some farming inputs, including fingerlings, for the aquaponics farming method she plans to install on her farm. She learned about aquaponics technology from her FBS group when they developed a business plan for this farming method.

The successful owners of the LSA-accredited farms whom we visited for benchmarking and the integrated and diversified farm tourism enterprises that were owned and described by the ATI resource persons had served as models for aspiring LSA applicants like us. Mary Grace Capanzana, an agriculturist and participant from Quezon, commented that the foregoing proprietors were so encouraging, and they made her feel during their presentations that success could be easily obtained — as long as the FBS principles and guidelines would be systematically

observed. A review of the history of these flourishing LSAs and farm tourism businesses, however, indicated that their development was not a walk in the park.

Grace said it took them several years of hard work, determination, resilience, passion for organic farming, clarity of purpose, careful planning and implementation, and the ability to take risks, find opportunities, and face challenges — before their enterprises became profitable and sustainable. She is, however, optimistic that with their new FBS knowledge and skills, plus their determination, she and her batchmates will eventually manage sustainable farm businesses and LSAs. At present, Grace is still "nagpapaluwal" or using her family resources while reviewing her vision and goals for their family farm and attending more training activities on crop production and processing.

The other FBS training participants who have similar situations as Grace are Marie Anne Daplas, a business management graduate who has an orchard in Cavite; Nellie Maloles, a former OFW who manages a pig farm in Camarines Sur; Albert Lazaro, the retired dentist who has a farm in Mindoro Oriental; Lina Torres, a retired public school principal who has an upland farm in Quezon; and Lanny Asis, a retired Department of Agrarian Reform agriculturist who also has an upland farm in Rizal.

Some ATI FBS training participants' farms are most likely going to get accredited sooner than the

others, particularly those who had longer training on agro-entrepreneurship and agricultural production and other related courses from Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda) and those with new thriving businesses. There are three Tesda-trained participants who have farms in Quezon: a) Maria Bianky Eusebio, a Hotel and Restaurant Management graduate who is both a Tesda trainer and assessor; b) Madelyn Arce, a behavioral science major and a Tesda trainer who manages a family business and heads a rural women's association; and c) Ziebeth Conde, a health educator and also a Tesda trainer, and an agri-entrepreneur who operates an aquaponics farming system.

The following have started promising enterprises: a) Wilord Pasal, an agriculturist from Quezon, manages poultry and sells fresh eggs commercially; b) Michael Roxas, a foreign service graduate and retired tour operator, sells his farm's dragon fruits online and at the local market in Quezon; c) Eduardo and Irene Becerra, the retired balikbayan couple, manage an innovative cacao cottage industry in Batangas; d) Marinel Laestrella, a civil engineer, operates an amazing family resort in Cavite; e) Henry Jose Villanueva, a former government employee with Tesda training on organic agriculture, manages a rooftop urban garden and his parents' farm in Cavite; and Ernest Hader, who grows and sells organic vegetables and herbs from an

urban community garden in Laguna.

Our group was fortunate to have three very smart young men in their 20s who actively shared their perspectives about agri-entrepreneurship. Marione Calveen Gueta is a licensed food technology professional with a master's degree in food science and a 2022 awardee of the Young Farmers Challenge (YFC) Startup Program for his Layuan Nature Integrated Farm project in Sorsogon. The YFC is a three-year-old DA program that offers competitive financial grant assistance to Filipino youth ages 18-40 to engage in new agri-fishery enterprises. The award includes mentoring support, linking to markets and business networks, and other types of assistance to ensure that a project will be implemented successfully. Ralph Gonzales, a nurse, businessman and chairman of his village Sangguniang Kabataan, is currently developing his family's farm in Batangas. Derick Bautista, an agriculturist, manages three farms owned by a foundation in Laguna. He proudly informed me that his education was supported by DSWD's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps).

We are grateful to DA-ATI 4A and the Sipag Villar Foundation for their continued support beyond the formal training course. We are hopeful that we can join the 2,800+ accredited LSAs and farm businesses that are now making a difference in the lives of farmers and fisherfolk in our country.



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# 'KING OF FRUITS' RECLAIMS THRONE

Rising China, domestic demand for durian  
prompts Mindanao farmers to hike yield



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BY MANUEL T. CAYON

**D**URIAN now reeks of fortune. From a discouraging bottom-low farm-gate price every festival season of August, farmers now are returning to their farms in earnest.

From unkempt and weedy farms of yore when traders in shiny sedans and pickup trucks would force durian fruit farmers to sell their fruit for as low as P5 per kilo, lucky farmers now are keeping their farms clean and orderly, and some have been expanding, too.

The bright shining star here is the spark of hope created in April, when China officially opened its doors for the direct importation of the "king of fruits"—meat, pulp and thorns, all included.

The industry and the Department of Agriculture (DA) are yet to give an exact or even a ballpark figure on the income derived from the fruit export since April.

However, exporters and some growers who were lucky to ride into the exportation euphoria are keeping their fingers crossed for still better opportunities ahead, including increasing their production to fill an unmet demand from China, the world's largest market today.

### Invigorated

JOSE CUBOL rued the days when his durian trees were only wasting the space of his five-hectare farm lot to earn only as much as P40 per kilo of fruits during better days, but peak season of harvest from all the other durian growers was not one of them.

An abundant harvest may be good for Davao City, especially to mark the annual Kadayawan Festival, a festive season to commemorate the fruit harvest season.

For durian growers, a bountiful harvest of durian, even lanzones, marang and mangosteen, spells a bottom-line income of as low as P5 a kilo.

"On good days, especially during the first batch of harvest, durian would be bought at P40 a kilo direct from our farms. Frequently, it would be averaging at P20, or P10, and during the full fruiting season, for as low as P5," he said.

"Who would be happy with that?" he told the *BusinessMirror*.

Then, the farms were a messy sight of untended trees, tall weeds and clingy vines that form foliage that is not so pleasing to the sight.

In April and forward, a kilo of durian was fetching as much as P100 a kilo for the type A (good export quality), averaging a weight of two kilos.

The fruit that weighs upward of three kilos would be priced at P80, still qualified to be exported for the type B category or classification. Fruits weighing six kilos are classified as oversized and more than 6.5 kilos are called rejects, and have to be opened and their meat repacked in plastics to be sold locally or to Metro Manila.

"There was fruit reaching 18 kilos that was now entered into the books," Cubol said.

"It should be round, weighing between two kilos and 3.5 kilos. That's how we size up the fruits for export," he said.

The first shipment was rushed on a Holy Thursday after the General Administration of Customs



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of the People's Republic of China (GACC), the headquarters of China Customs, confirmed Beijing's approval to receive the durian from the Philippines. This, following a series of farm inspections here and business-to-business negotiations since December last year.

Abel James I. Monteagudo, director of the Davao regional office of the DA, said the initial shipment was bought at a farm-gate price of between P65 and P80, already a big improvement from the much lower buying price in the past decades, which could be as low as P20 on peak harvests.

The volume was accounted for mainly by Eng Seng group of companies, one of the city's biggest growers and consolidators, and the rest by the members of the Durian Industry Association of Davao City.

Emmanuel Belviz, president

of the association, said export activities have been going on as frequently as three or four times a week, because several individual growers or companies are exporting their products on their own.

One exporter he did not name was able to export as much as eight 40-footer container vans each week; and one multinational company, which traditionally exports bananas and pineapples, is already exporting four container vans of durian each week.

Two other big exporters and a small one each export two tons to four tons of durian.

## Expanding

NOT only are durian farmers returning to their durian farms and adapting the standard good agricultural practices, some are expanding their areas and putting up plant nurseries.

Cubol said he has acquired or rented some areas that now total 13 hectares, from only five hectares of his own.

Dario Divino, the designated focal person on industrial crops at the City Agriculturist Office, said that last year, 4,408 farmers planted durian as a crop to 3,388.65 hectares. They harvested 12,929.63 metric tons (MT) from 2,176.32 hectares also last year.

Belvis said the Davao Region has planted durian to 8,700 hectares; and Davao City growers annually produce 41,145 MT, accounting for slightly half of the country's production reaching 79,000 MT.

Besides Davao Region, Belviz said the other production area is in North Cotabato. Before durian, the Davao Region is known for its banana export to Japan, South Korea, the Middle East and China.

## Bright spot

RUBY BERNALES, another durian grower, said there are still durian farmers "who do not know proper handling." Before, she said, "we just harvest, transport them to the market, and it's done."

Belvis said many farmers are backyard growers of as many as only 10 trees. "We have to upgrade and help them appreciate entrepreneurship to increase income," he added.

"When we speak of farmers, they are the same, whether they are in the Philippines, Malaysia, or Indonesia," Belvis remarked. "However, in Malaysia and Indonesia, farmers return home in their Hi-Lux pickups, while Filipino farmers return home on their carabao."

Malaysia, Belvis added, "is known for its sustainability practices in agriculture, and Thailand, for its high-density farming."

Arlene Tiwan, agricultural technician from the Department of Agriculture's High Value Crops division,

announced the plan of the regional office to distribute 64,000 seedlings of the Puyat variety, the most in-demand variety for its meat volume per fruit and for its milder taste and acceptable taste register to first-time and non-durian eaters.

The seedlings will be given to farmers' associations to cover a total of 60,000 hectares. Free fertilizers will also be given as an incentive package for farmers to plant.

She said the regional DA office has given P50 million to durian planters from 2017 to 2021. For next year alone, the fund assistance is as much as P30 million.

Belvis said the new interest in durian came after the Philippines, Davao City in particular, broke through the China front door, and "there is now a huge market for durian."

"It is really a big challenge because the market for durian is not only local. We also have China now," he said.



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## NIA, foreign partner plan rice project in upper Pampanga River

WITH a goal of contributing to the achievement of rice security and resiliency in the country, the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) has inked a partnership with Ostrom Climate for a rice project in the upper Pampanga River.

The partnership was sealed through a memo-

randum of understanding (MOU) signed by NIA Acting Administrator Ed-die Guillen, NIA Senior Deputy Administrator Robert Suguitan, Ostrom Climate Solutions, Inc. president and chief executive officer Phill Cull along with International Land Use director Jane Boles Friday at the NIA Central Office.

Eyed for implementation until December 2028, the Climate-Smart Rice Project in Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation System (UPRIIS) is seen to increase water productivity in the national irrigation systems (NISs) while reducing carbon emission in irrigated rice cultivation.

NIA said it will also promote a wide-scale and sustained adoption of alternate wetting and drying (AWD) technology in irrigated areas throughout UPRIIS with the provision of capacity-building activities and financial incentives with farmer-partners.

*Joel dela Torre*





## TECH-AIDED VEGETABLE GARDENS ON BUILDING ROOF-DECKS

# ROBINSONS OFFICES, FARMTOP TAKE URBAN AGRI TO NEW HEIGHTS

Doing its share to help the country achieve food security while addressing environmental challenges, Robinsons Offices, one of the country's leading providers of quality, flexible workspaces, has partnered with lifestyle brand FarmTop for the development of "sky farms" or soilless vegetable gardens on building roof-decks.

The joint initiative promotes technologically enhanced but sustainable agriculture. It also adheres to the "Farm-to-Plate" concept where produce are grown as close as possible to where they are consumed, typically within a 5-kilometer radius, to minimize the carbon footprint that traditional farm-to-market routes would typically entail.

The project envisions the setup of strategically located sky farms atop office buildings around the country, where crops are cultivated through hydroponics or soilless farming in a controlled environment. The

method, which also does away with conventional pesticides, is also described as "post-organic" as it reduces the risk of attacks from soil-based pests and weeds.

Company officials led by JG Summit president and chief executive officer Lance Gokongwei formally unveiled the project's first rooftop farm—and enjoyed its first harvest—on Oct. 10 at Robinsons Cyberspace Alpha in Ortigas Center, Pasig City.

### Creating jobs

Each rooftop farm would be designed to produce as much as five tons of vegetables a month, said FarmTop president and CEO Danny Dy, and that the yield could hopefully find a market—condominiums, offices, schools, hotels and restaurants—within the vicinity.

"By tying up with FarmTop, we are able to offer alternative means to healthy eating. We can provide the space, expand the market and create jobs for



**READY FOR HARVEST** Visiting the pilot "sky farm" on the roof-deck of the Robinsons Cyberspace Alpha building in Pasig City are (from left) JG Summit Holdings president and chief executive officer Lance Gokongwei, FarmTop president and CEO Danny Dy, Robinsons Offices senior vice president and general manager Jericho Go, and FarmTop vice president for finance and administration Lala Cruz Dy. —CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

urban farmers," said Jericho Go, Robinsons Offices senior vice president and general manager.

Robinsons Offices is a developer of premium, sustainable and future-ready offices under

Robinsons Land Corp.

FarmTop (Farm-to-Plate) is an enterprise and a lifestyle brand that promotes urban agriculture, utilizing rooftops to address the growing demand for fresh pro-

duce while reducing dependence on farmlands that are on a rapid decline due to climate change and wide-scale urbanization.

The partnership aims to raise awareness about a technology-based method of producing food. By cultivating seeds in trays and racks, soilless farming optimizes space and allows for more yield per square meter and a shorter growth time.

### Making farming sexier

Proponents hope that it would encourage the younger generation to become farm scientists by bridging traditional practices with modern innovations. "The goal is to control all our farm environment through [the] smartphone," Dy said. "We want to make farming more sexy."

FarmTop's approach, for example, involves educating farmers about cutting-edge techniques. Dy recalled how his company recruited some villagers displaced by the 2017 Marawi

siege, bringing them to Manila to learn about hydroponics. In a related initiative, a number of janitors and waiters who lost their jobs at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic were hired as riders for FarmTop deliveries.

"We want to veer away from just being a vegetable supplier," said Dy. "Our first advocacy is to rejuvenate the agriculture industry by producing more food as we increase the farms on roof-decks. The second is providing a healthy alternative. On our FarmTop website, chefs and regular customers have shared ways on how healthy eating can actually be delicious."

Robinsons Land, on the other hand, has consistently supported campaigns and organizations promoting food security. One of them is Rise Against Hunger, an international relief network catering to the poor and most vulnerable with the aim of ending global hunger by 2030. —CONTRIBUTED



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## Searca holds photo contest on restoring agri-ecosystems for climate resilience

**P**HOTOGRAPHERS from Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, are invited to join the 17th Photo Contest being initiated by the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) with the theme "Regenerating agri-ecosystems, lowering global boiling."

Searca Director Dr. Glenn Gregorio said the competition draws inspiration from United Nations (UN) Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who declared: "We are past the era of global warming, and we are now experiencing global boiling." This declaration on July 21 strongly underscores the gravity of the climate crisis, Gregorio said.

Gregorio elaborated: "'Global boiling'

2A M9 serves as a metaphorical depiction of the escalating climate crisis, and it resonates with Searca's pivotal mission to confront the urgent challenge of climate change and its effects on agriculture."

He said Searca is on the lookout for photos showcasing agricultural technologies and practices that combat climate change and alleviate the strain on natural resources.

"These images may feature farming methods that support recycling, waste reduction, and a minimal carbon footprint. Moreover, they could highlight sustainable approaches promoting water conservation, soil enhancement, reduced postharvest losses or the use of renewable energy," Gregorio explained.

Searca encourages submissions that capture farmers, farming families, researchers, inventors, students and youth actively engaging with these technologies and practices in the field.

The photographic subjects may include a wide range of agricultural activities, including crop cultivation, livestock management, and fisheries.

The competition is open to both seasoned and amateur photographers, who may submit an unlimited number of photo entries as long as they comply with the specified contest guidelines.

All photo submissions must be original, unaltered, unpublished in any prior competition, and free from digital enhancements.

191 "We invite passionate photographers to take this chance to demonstrate the potency of visual storytelling in tackling the worldwide issue of climate change," Gregorio said.

The winners will receive cash rewards of \$1,000 for the first prize, \$800 for the second prize, and \$500 for the third prize.

Moreover, special prizes include the Searca Director's Choice and the Philippine Department of Education Secretary's Choice, with each receiving \$500.

The winner of the People's Choice Award, determined through Facebook voting, will receive \$400.

All submissions must be uploaded to the Searca Photo Contest website by November 30, 2023.