



InangLupa

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"Nurturing an inclusive, science-based, resilient & market-oriented Philippine agriculture"

DA budget cut by P3.4B

The proposed budget of the Department of Agriculture (DA) for 2017 was cut by P3.4 billion (B), from P54 B this year.

When queried by congressmen during a budget hearing on August 25, 2016, at the House of Representatives, Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol could not explain why the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) has reduced funding for the DA.

The lawmakers said the reduction is contrary to the President Duterte's pronouncements that he would like the agriculture sector to grow since farmers are among the poorest sectors of the population.

Piñol told the House appropriations committee chaired by Davao City Rep. Karlo Alexei Nograles that funding for projects was slashed by more than P12 B, from P20.5 B to P8.4 B.

On the other hand, the allocation for programs increased by P7 B, from P19.9 B to P26.9 B, he said.

He said the rice production enhancement program would get an additional P2.6 B, from P7.1 B to P9.7 B; while high value crops would have P1.1 B more, from P2.9 B to P4 B.

Piñol submitted to the Nograles committee the allocations removed in the DA budget for 2017.

The biggest cut is P2.6 B, intended for "various programs recommended by local government units." It is in this year's DA budget, but was deleted in next year's proposed outlay.

Also scrapped were P489 million (M) for the "Soccksargen (South Cotabato,

(Pls turn to p6)

Develop north Luzon's agri and trim poverty

Despite being the country's leading food basket, four northern Luzon regions — Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Cordilleras, and Central Luzon — one-fifth of their population, mostly farm families, remain poor.

But they have a way out of poverty if they harness the potentials of their respective agriculture industry, according to former agriculture secretary William Dar.

"Poverty incidence in north Luzon remains high, ranging from 26.7 per cent (%) in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), 21.7% in Ilocos, 21.5% in

Cagayan Valley, and 15.8% in Central Luzon," Dar said at the 25th North Luzon Area Business Conference, held August 4, 2016, in Tuguegarao City.

"This is the stark reality despite North Luzon being the country's major producer of rice, corn, *bangus* (milkfish), and vegetables," added Dar, who is also the founding president of InangLupa Movement, Inc., a volunteer agri-fishery socio-civic organization.

The poverty incidence is based on the 2015 first semester figures gathered

(Pls turn to p6)



Senator Francis 'Kiko' Pangilinan (in blue shirt) served as keynote speaker at the 25th North Luzon Area Business Conference, held in Tuguegarao, Cagayan, August 3-5, 2016, where InangLupa Movement founding president Dr. William D. Dar (right) likewise served as one of the main speakers. The event was hosted by the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry-Cagayan Chapter. Insert shows Dr. Dar receiving a plaque of appreciation from Dr. Frank Villanueva, PCCI Regional Governor of Region 3.

Hi-value crops, not rice, key to agri success

Increasing rice production is not the key for the Philippines to become competitive in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

"While the Philippines can attain 100 percent (%) rice self-sufficiency, it won't make the country competitive in the Asean region because the farmgate prices of palay in the country remain high. Also, the country's neighbors have been earning dollars from ex-



porting high-value crops," said Dr. William Dar, who once headed the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), in India. He is also the founding president of the InangLupa Movement.

He illustrated how the Philippines can become competitive in the AEC by focusing on the development of high-value crops that made some neighboring countries more competitive in the farming sector, during a forum on the "Future of Philippine Agriculture: Thinking beyond 6 years," held on July 28, 2016, at UP Diliman, Quezon City.

Respected much for his views on the agriculture sector, Dar also presented a policy paper of InangLupa, entitled "Re-energizing Philippine Agriculture for the Asean Economic Integration," echoing the same sentiments.

(Pls turn to p6)

SC reverses ruling on Bt talong

The Supreme Court (SC) on July 26, 2016 set aside its December ruling that stopped the field trials of genetically modified eggplants and halted the issuance of new permits on genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

The Dec. 8, 2015 decision had demanded an overhaul of previous rules on GMOs, forcing the government to draw up new regulations earlier this year and triggering criticism from the scientific community.

But, in a rare complete reversal, the high court unanimously granted the nine motions for reconsideration appealing the said decision.

It issued a new ruling dismissing "on the ground of mootness" the petition for writ of continuing *mandamus* and writ of *kalikasan* filed by Greenpeace Southeast

(Pls turn to p5)

How to entice the young into agriculture

Many people are worried that pretty soon nobody will be producing the rice, vegetables, fruits, eggs, meat, and fish that we eat because farmers are getting old and the young generation does not seem to be interested in farming at all.

Proof is the declining enrolment in agricultural courses.

At a round table discussion on the future of Philippine agriculture that we attended at UP-Diliman, we met Dr. William Dar, a multi-awarded scientist who had held top positions in the government and in an international organization. He is very much aware of the problem. The average age of Filipino farmers today is 57, he said. Really too old.

Young people shun farming because they perceive it to involve backbreaking toil and yet the income cannot compare with the income from employment in the urban areas.

So what can be done? Young people should be made aware that farming these days can be profitable and not necessarily back-breaking because of new science-based technologies that can make farming profitable and fun.

Making farming an honest-to-goodness agribusiness is the way to go to entice the educated young to venture into agricultural projects, according to Dr. Dar. This means making agriculture an industry that is undertaken for profit.

And how can we make farming profitable? One strategy is to diversify into high-value crops and farm animals. The strategy is to employ science-based technologies that will result in reduced cost of producing high-quality farm produce. Profits can be realized with creative production and marketing strategies.

Farm mechanization is another strategy to cut production cost so that the farmer becomes more competitive and his farm more profitable. Rice production cost can be substantially reduced through mechanization as per the study presented at the round table discussion by Rex Bingabing, outgoing

By Zac Sarian



Not only children but also adults enjoy feeding farm animals in leisure farms.

director of PhilMech.

For instance, he said that the average cost of producing rice in the Philippines is about P11 per kilo of palay. If a mechanical transplanter and a combine harvester are employed, the cost of a kilo of palay can be reduced to a little over P7. That's just a peso above the cost of palay production in Vietnam. Not bad at all.

In Taiwan, the government, in collaboration with the private sector, has been successful in attracting college-educated young men and women to put up their agri-related enterprises (a.k.a. leisure farms) in the countryside.

The leisure farms attract paying local visitors as well as foreign tourists. Among the attractions in the leisure farms are good food, enjoyable do-it-yourself educational and recreational activities, souvenir items, communion with nature, and more. Today, there are about 300 leisure farms that are members of the Taiwan Leisure Farm Development Association.

In the Philippines, a farm tourism law was passed during the last Congress. If implemented right, this law could go a long way in attracting local young entrepreneurs to go to the countryside to put up their own agri-tourism projects to create not only income for themselves, but to generate employment in rural communities as well.

Continuing education for agri extension

By Ernesto M. Ordoñez

For agriculture extension to be effective, the 3,000 extension workers currently under the local government units (LGUs) should be required to have continuing professional education.

This is important because our farmers and fisherfolk depend on the technology they receive from extension workers to compete against imported agricultural goods that increasingly flood our shores.

The Agri-Fisheries Alliance (AFA) in a meeting on April 16, 2016, with then presidentiable Rodrigo Duterte, cited the failure of agriculture extension as a major factor behind our agriculture decline.

Many of the agriculture extension workers devolved to the LGUs are being assigned by the mayor to do non-agriculture jobs.

Second, they are not equipped with the most recent technologies which they transfer to farmers and fisherfolk.

The first part of the problem was addressed by DA Secretary Manny Piñol at a July 6 meeting in Los Baños with Interior and Local Government Secretary Mike Sueno. Piñol and Sueno committed to give the DA more influence over LGU extension workers through a DA-DILG memo of agreement.

The 30,000 extension workers should be required to have annual continuing professional education. The DA will make the arrangements for this, while the DILG will ensure it happens.

If workers such as doctors, engineers, accountants and midwives are required to do continuing professional education, why not agriculture extension workers?

SUCs should be tapped

Last Aug. 13, the leaders from the AFA went to Los Baños for the board meeting of the Coalition on Agricultural Modernization in the Philippines (CAMP), a member of the AFA that represents the academe and science.

At that meeting, Danny Fausto from AFA sub-group Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc. (PCAFI) cited the untapped resources of the 118 state universities and colleges (SUCs) in the country

SUCs should be harnessed to bring the technologies to the extension workers and, consequently, to farmers and fisherfolk.

The SUCs know the agriculture conditions in their specific areas, and they are equipped to transfer the most appropriate technologies.

It is high time that all agriculture extension workers be required to take professional continuing education.

The SUCs should be harnessed to help provide this education with the DA's guidance.

(The author is chair of Agriwatch, former Secretary for Presidential Flagship Programs and Projects, and former Undersecretary for Agriculture, and Trade and Industry.)



InangLupa founding president Dr. William Dar is shown with the author, Zac Sarian, agriculture editor of Manila Bulletin, and Dr. Clarita Carlos, executive director of StratSearch. Dr. Dar presented at the StratSearch Foundation roundtable discussion, held on July 28, 2016, at UP Diliman, a paper on the Future of Philippine agriculture in the ASEAN Economic Community."

Israel to train 'Pinoy' farmers

Israeli Ambassador to the Philippines Effie Ben Matityau repeated his country's offer for a special on-the-job-training program for 540 Filipinos every year to study agriculture in Israel.

In a dinner reception hosted by the Department of Agriculture Region 6, in Iloilo, on August 22, the Israeli envoy said "we aim that every Filipino graduate of our program becomes quality managers and leaders in agriculture combining also the skills they learned here in the Philippines."

Israel is known all over the world as producer of quality agricultural products.

As ambassador to the Philippines since 2014, Matityau cited Iloilo fresh products as having potential markets in Japan, Korea, China and Taiwan.

He also the government of Israel implements a mandatory insurance system for farmers, providing them compensation for crop loss due to natural calamities.

In the Philippines, the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp (PCIC) is at the forefront of insuring crops of farmers against calamities and other losses.

The Israeli envoy also reiterated that his government provides Israeli farmers crop production subsidies and financial support to help them produce quality crops for both local consumption and exports. *(By Lydia C. Pendon, Sun Star Iloilo)*

Phl hosts climate forum

To fortify advocacy against the increasing socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities caused by climate change, the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) held a series of high-level activities, including the ceremonial turnover of CVF presidency from the Philippines to Ethiopia, at the Senate of the Philippines on August 15, 2016.

The Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM) is among the invited delegates of the Climate Change Commission (CCC) of the Philippines to witness its high-level policy forum and launch of the low carbon monitor during the Philippines' historic 18-month presidency of the 43 member-states, a group of countries that are critically affected by the adverse effects of global warming.

During the culminating activity held by the ministers of CVF member-countries, OIC Director of Climate and Water Department of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Dr. Mannava V.K. Sivakumar presented the impacts of climate change on agriculture and strategies to ensure economic development of agriculture sector.

Findings on the new research was also presented indicating development by emerging economies would be optimized if global temperature increase was held below 1.5°C.



Senator Cynthia Villar receives a token gift from Bureau of Agricultural Research director Nicomedes 'Nick' Eleazar at the launch of the Philippine Agriculture Research and Extension Agenda, on August 11, 2016, at SM Megamall. Also shown are Dr. William Dar, DA assistant secretary for Visayas Hazel Didulo (left) and BAR assistant director Teodoro Solsoloy (right).

Phl plans to import more rice

The Philippines plans to import an additional 250,000 tons of rice from either Vietnam, Thailand or Cambodia, to maintain a comfortable reserve stock ahead of the typhoon season.

National Food Authority (NFA) Council chairman Leoncio Evasco has endorsed the import plan to President Rodrigo Duterte for approval, said Angel Imperial, NFA spokesman.

It will be the first rice import deal under the Duterte administration, which has vowed to make the Philippines rice self-sufficient within its six-year term.

The planned rice import could underpin Asian rice export prices, which have fallen in recent weeks following low demand.

Imperial said the imports would boost NFA's buffer stocks during the current lean harvest season that began in July.

Thailand is entering the typhoon sea-

son, which can disrupt production.

NFA's stocks were good for 25 days of national demand as of July 31, Imperial said, below the 30-day minimum requirement during the lean season.

A government source said the imports would be undertaken via a government-to-government deal, with rice suppliers Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia qualified to make an offer, and delivery expected to be completed within the third quarter.

"Reserves level (at NFA's warehouses) remains ample but this quarter is seasonally lean months. Farmers are (still) planting," the source said.

Overall rice stocks were bolstered by purchases by the previous Aquino administration — totaling 500,000 tons from Vietnam and Thailand last year, which arrived in the first quarter 2016 — to offset crop losses due to El Niño. *(By Enrico Dela Cruz, Reuters)*

"Under the Ethiopian presidency of the CVF will be vocal, visionary, visible and vigilant in our work to limit the rise of global temperature to 1.5°C," Minister of Environment, Forestry and Climate Change of Ethiopia Dr. Shiferaw Teklamariam Menbacho said.

As a response to the findings, Senator

Loren Legarda, chair of the CCC of the Philippines, said that bending the global warming curve to 1.5°C is a moral imperative because it means saving the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people and also ensuring the integrity of the ecosystems. *(By Amelia M. Fermia DA-BSWM)*



Senator Loren Legarda addresses the participants at a Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), at the Senate of the Philippines, on August 15, 2016.

Phl should invest more in S & T

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said investments in science and technology and innovation (STI) to boost the development of the country's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

"By increasing spending in science and technology, and innovation (STI), we can equip MSMEs with the technology that can create globally competitive products to meet the demands of the local and international market quality standards," said Socio-economic planning secretary Ernesto Pernia.

He said STI can support the manufacturing and industrial sectors to raise productivity, foster the creation of high-value products, and improve the quality of their products.

He also said government sees the potential of agriculture as one of the

country's major growth drivers.

"The government would put emphasis on science and technology (S&T), creating more jobs especially for our less skilled members of the workforce. With the help of S&T and research and technology, agriculture can be a lucrative industry that can foster food security in our country," Pernia said.

"Farmers with access to different varieties of seedlings and soil typing will no longer fear for their crops in the face of adverse weather conditions. Fishermen with knowledge of sustainable fishery need not fear about their catch during the dry season when fish tend to go deeper into the ocean," he added.

Pernia said NEDA fully supports the National Academy of Science and Technology's resolutions to harness S&T and R&D to reduce poverty and inequality. *(By Edu Lopez, Newsbytes)*

NEDA eyes policy change to allow commercial farming

Policy reforms would be implemented in land administration to pave the way for large-scale commercial farming, which is deemed productive and profitable for farmers, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia said.

"We are revisiting policies on agriculture and rural development, which has lagged behind amid consistent economic growth," said Pernia, who is also the director-general of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA).

Improving the productivity of the agricultural sector is expected to give the economy a significant boost and contribute greatly to the reduction of poverty in the regions, he added.

The economic growth of seven percent (%) in the 2nd quarter of 2016 could have been higher had it not been for the negative growth of 0.2% registered by the agriculture sector.

Pernia said the agriculture sector would continue to fall behind in productivity, as long as small parcels of land awarded to agrarian reform beneficiaries are not consolidated into plantation-size cultivation areas that can achieve economies of scale.

"One of the measures that we are trying to introduce in the agriculture sector is to consolidate lands. The

agrarian reform has resulted in small lots which are not economically productive," Pernia said.

"We need economies of scale to produce enough rice and other crops. So land administration is going to be improved; titling would be done on untitled lots so these would be easier to consolidate," he said.

Several high value and staple crops used in the country are plantation crops or those that have huge export potential if cultivated on large tracts of land is it lowers the cost of production per unit.

Such crops include but are not limited to rice, sugarcane, coconut, coffee, bananas and rubber.

Pernia said consolidating small agricultural plots would attract more investors that have the financial and technical muscle to employ modern machinery and farming technology to attain greater productivity.

"If there is consolidation, there would be some investors coming in to make the farming enterprise more productive. They can employ modern machineries and large scale irrigation systems. We will make use of machineries, not carabaos," he said.

Businessman Manuel V. Pangilinan has repeatedly stressed the need for the country to pursue more agriculture activities at a large scale. *(By Czeriza Valencia, The Philippine Star)*

BSWM starts soil, fertility and crop assessments

In keeping with the Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol's order to complete the soil mapping analysis, the Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM) started to mobilize the DA-Regional Field Offices (RFOs) and Local Government Units (LGUs) for the Phase 1 implementation of the "National Soil Sampling and Testing for Fertility and Crop Suitability Assessment."

BSWM officer-in-charge Director Sonia M. Salguero manifested her full and active support to the programs of the new administration towards achieving "available and affordable food for the Filipino" by targeting the development of a web-based interface for enhanced access by farmers and other stakeholders of the color-coded maps.

"We need to extend our help to farmers and provide them with up-to-date and accurate data for them to easily determine what kind of fertilizers to apply and which crops are suitable to plant in their areas," Salguero said.

From 2010 to 2015, the BSWM with counterpart-funding support from the DA-RFOs and LGUs has completed soil fertility assessments, mainly covering rice areas, in 12 provinces, one municipality and one city, which are in regions 1 (Ilocos), 6 (Western Visayas), 7 (Central Visayas), 8 (Eastern Visayas) and 11 (Davao).

Further, during the same six-year period, the BSWM, with funding support from DA-RFOs and LGUs, undertook crop suitability assessment in six provinces, seven municipalities and four cities covering more than two million hectares.

The map outputs included suitability map for major crops in their locality such as rice, corn, coconut, banana, vegetables, pineapple, fruit trees and even agro-forestry.

"Sa misyon na ito, tungkulin natin ang makapagbigay ng tama at agarang aksyon para tugunan ang pangangailangan ng ating mga magsasaka sa tulong ng makabagong teknolohiya," Salguero added.

The top 47 major rice producing provinces were considered for Phase 1, however, eight have already been updated (2014-2016), thus the BSWM will undertake suitability assessments to cover the remaining 39 provinces. *(By Amelia M. Fermia, DA-BSWM)*



Dr. William Dar receive a check from Majella Villaroman, President and CEO of Phylife Corporation, as its donation for the advocacy of InangLupa on soil health campaign. Joining them are InangLupa vice president Sonny Domingo and Phylife officials.

SC reverses ... (from page 1)

Asia (Philippines) and *Magsasaka at Siyentipiko sa Pagpapaunlad ng Agrikultura*, among others.

Justice Bernabe penned decision

Associate Justice Estela M. Perlas-Bernabe penned the new decision, which replaced the one written by now-retired Associate Justice Martin S. Villarama, Jr.

The SC said it should have junked Greenpeace's case to stop the field trials of Bt eggplant, because the tests have been completed and terminated and the biosafety permits expired in 2012.

"These effectively negated the need for the reliefs sought by [Greenpeace and other environmentalist groups] as there was no longer any field test to stop," SC Public Information Chief Theodore O. Te explained in a briefing.

The new SC decision pointed out that Bt eggplant proponents did not go past field testing stage to commercial distribution. The lack of commercial propagation meant there was no after-effect that needed to be addressed.

DAO 8 is valid

The high court added that it should not have ruled the Department of Agriculture's Administrative Order (DAO) No. 08-2002 as invalid.

The question of the order's constitutionality should not have been acted upon because "this matter was only collaterally raised" by Greenpeace in its bid to halt the Bt eggplant trials, Mr. Te said.

The court said further that "public interest" could not be invoked in order to exempt the case from mootness, because the regulations that governed the tests have been rendered obsolete. A ruling on the alleged hazards of Bt eggplant trials would thus be irrelevant to the new GMO rules.

To recall, the December SC decision led the government to issue Joint Department Circular 01-2016 in early March 2016, which the high court acknowledged "provides a substantially different regulatory framework from that under DAO 08-2002."

Moot and academic

The Greenpeace case was specifically limited to violations of DAO 08-2002, regarding the proponents' failure to conduct a valid risk assessment and inform the public of the field trials' hazards.

"The specificity of the Petition, which did not extend far enough as to enjoin the use of the results of the field trials

that have been completed, prevented it from falling under [the public interest exception] to mootness," Mr. Te said.

Because of the mootness of the case, the SC said it would not discuss the substantive merits of Greenpeace's case against the trials and the GMO rules.

Obstacles to research removed

The case was elevated to the Supreme Court by the Environmental Management Bureau, as well as the ISAAA, the University of the Philippines (UP) and the UP Los Baños Foundation, Inc. (UPLBFI). This was after the Court of Appeals granted Greenpeace's petition to stop the *Bt talong* trials in 2013.

Sought for comment, UPLBFI counsel Filemon D. Nolasco said by phone: "It's a good thing they saw the wisdom of the argument."

"At least, the obstacles to research have been removed. There is now the possibility to commercially propagate," he said.

Corn farmers, processors laud SC decision

Corn farmers and processors "welcome [d] with great relief" the new SC decision.

Philippine Maize Federation Inc. (PhilMaize) said the December decision had threatened corn farmers' welfare and disrupted the domestic supply chain.

"Kudos to [the high court] for upholding the tangible benefits that biotechnology brings to the Filipino people and our country's economy," said PhilMaize president Roger Navarro.

Following the December ruling, the Department of Agriculture, along with the Department of Science and Technology, Department of Health, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the Department of the Interior and Local Government issued a joint department circular to replace the DAO No. 8 issued in 2002.

In the Philippines, corn is the only GM crop that is so far allowed for commercial production. Filipino farmers grow two GM corn varieties—one that is resistant to the Asian corn borer and another pest that is tolerant of herbicides.

The bulk of the country's corn output is intended for animal feed production. About 70 percent of locally produced corn for feeds are genetically modified, according to the agriculture department.

Citing data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, PhilMaize said around 70 percent of the country's corn output—pegged at 7.5 million tons in 2015—was genetically modified. (By Vince Alvic A. F. Nonato, *BusinessWorld Online*; and Estrella Torres & Ronnel W. Domingo, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*)

DA, BSWM conduct soil analysis in Samar

The Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM) recently held an orientation and technical briefing on the Special Areas for Agricultural Development (SAAD) and soil sampling and testing for fertility assessment and crop suitability in Northern Samar.

The activities are part of the efforts of the DA and BSWM to fulfill President Rodrigo R. Duterte's promise of providing available and affordable food for the people and conducting a nationwide soil analysis to determine areas most suitable for rice farming to optimize production with the use of effective soil rehabilitation and fertilization.

Engineer Pablo Montalla, BSWM geomatics information division chief, said the Phase 1 implementation of soil testing will run from August 19 to September 8 in Region VIII, covering the provinces of Leyte and Northern Samar, and involving more than 35,000 hectares of agricultural land.

Northern Samar Gov. Jose L. Ong commended the DA and BSWM to develop the agriculture industry in Eastern Visayas and his province, which is among the 10 poorest in the country.

"This event is an opportunity for the province of Northern Samar to increase its economic productivity by working hand in hand with the Department of Agriculture and BSWM. However, I don't know if I should say fortunately or unfortunately our province is included among the 10 poorest provinces. *Kaya tayo kasali sa mga ganitong programs ng bagong administration*," Ong said.

BSWM OIC, Director Sonia M. Salguero said Eastern Visayas has an estimated 22,000 hectares of rainfed areas, which could be developed for rice production.

"*Kami po ay pumunta sa lugar ninyo hindi para sabihing kayo ay mahirap. Ang aming programa na National Soil Testing and Mapping is not based on the criteria of being the poorest. Ang criteria po ay ang potential ng Region VIII na madagdagan ang inyong rice production*," Salguero underscored.

"*As I understand, mayroon po kayong rainfed area na about 22,000 hectares, and you are only cultivating irrigated areas of more than 2,000. Kung ito po ay mabibigyan natin ng karampatang suporta, hindi na po maghahanap si Secretary Piñol ng lugar na mapagkukunan ng bigas para sa lahat*," she added.

Salguero said the BSWM, with counterpart-fund support from the DA-RFO VIII and LGUs, has completed in 2014 the soil fertility assessment of Western Samar, covering more than 36,000 hectares. (by Amelia M. Fermia, DA-BSWM)



BSWM OIC-Director Sonia Salguero addresses participants during the orientation and briefing on Special Areas for Agricultural Development (SAAD), soil sampling and testing for fertility assessment, and crop suitability in Northern Samar.

Develop North ... (from page 1)

from the Philippine Statistic Authority (PSA), where the country's average was at 26.3%, with per capita poverty threshold at P10,969.

Of the four north Luzon regions, CAR had a poverty incidence of 26.7% in 2015, with a per capita poverty threshold of P11,017. It was followed by Ilocos (21.7%), with a per capita poverty threshold of P10,564; Cagayan Valley (21.5%), with per capita poverty threshold of P11,116; and Central Luzon (15.8%), with per capita poverty threshold of P11,567.

"There is big hope, however, under the Duterte administration, to further develop and modernize the agriculture and fishery industry in northern Luzon, and subsequently lift majority of farm families," said Dar, who hails from Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur.

"The Duterte administration should diversify northern Luzon's agriculture by sustainably producing more commodities and processed products for both local and export markets. This initiative would create more livelihood and employment opportunities, increasing the incomes of farm families, and lifting most of them from poverty," Dar said.

He suggested three major imperatives that should be pursued, namely: shift from mono-cropping to diversification and multiple cropping; intensify production and mechanization in irrigated rice areas to reduce production costs, and be competitive against Thailand and Vietnam; transform less productive upland and rainfed lowland areas into farms that will produce high-value vegetables, fruits, ornamentals, coffee, oil palm, rubber, cacao and hybrid coconuts.

"Given the rising shortage of labor, farm consolidation or clustering is a good mechanism to achieve commercial scale and productivity," Dar noted.

In fisheries, he said marine cage culture for high-value fish can be expanded beyond milkfish in western Pangasinan, he added.

He said farm diversification should be complemented with investments in infrastructure and transportation.

"Agriculture, rural infrastructure and markets are key to unleash the potentials of northern Luzon, and the country, in general," said Dar.

"These include irrigation, post-harvest and agri-processing centers, storage and warehousing facilities, farm-to-market roads, modern highways, airports and seaports, and local and export wholesale market center," he added.

He said transportation and movement of farm products to local and export markets are getting better and faster, with the extension of the NLEX to Pangasinan via La Union through TIPLEX, and Clark International Airport is getting busier, augmenting the Laoag International Airport.

In Cagayan Valley, the Tuguegarao airport and Sta Ana Port could be enhanced into international airport and seaport, respectively, Dar added.

Further, he said the old train system from Manila to La Union should be revived and modernized, and that a new

train system around Northern Luzon should be considered to connect major farm and fishery center with the major air and seaports and market centers.

(By Noel O. Reyes, InangLupa)

Hi-Value crops ... (from page 1)

The paper said the prevailing agriculture policy in the Philippines is to address supply gaps and earn from the export market.

"The country's current strategy for agricultural development is highly conservative, prioritizing traditional crops, with production targets designed to close any domestic supply-demand gap. The policy is supported by trade measures to protect domestic markets with tariffs and non-tariff barriers.

The regime may be characterized as 'import substitution agricultural development,' the agricultural counterpart to the country's earlier adoption of import substitution with regard to industry," Dar said in the paper.

Competitive disadvantage

He said the Philippines will be hard-pressed to become competitive in rice production compared to leaders Thailand and Vietnam.

Thailand has 11 million hectares of land devoted to rice, of which 80 % is irrigated, while Vietnam has 7.5 million hectares, of which 100 % is irrigated.

On the hand, the Philippines has 4.5 million hectares, of which 69 % is irrigated.

Besides having less available land, the Philippines does not have the natural water system to support more rice production that Vietnam and Thailand have.

As a result, the farmgate prices of *palay* (unmilled rice) in the Philippines are P14-P15 per kilo compared to P10 in Thailand and P7 in Vietnam.

The Philippines is also behind when it comes to food exports in Asean, with \$6.7 billion (B) in 2014, Dar said.

On the other hand, Indonesia recorded \$38.8 B, Thailand \$38.4 B, Malaysia \$26.2 B, and Vietnam \$24.8 B.

To make the country competitive in the AEC, Dar said the Philippines should grow more high-value crops and accelerate agro-industry, noting that said initiative would "transform and upgrade agriculture from traditional farming to a globally competitive agribusiness sector."

Boosting agro-processing

Three phases must be done, according to Dar.

The first phase is to promote the planning of rubber, coconut, mangoes, coffee, cacao, banana, palm oil and other high value crops; second phase is to strengthen agro-processing and its linkages to production, strengthen supply chains, upgrade commodity clusters, and provide farmers access to technologies and finance; and to deepen the farming sector's participation in the Global Value Chain and present the Philippines as an agribusiness regional hub.

The Philippines can only boast of two export commodities with receipts, banana and coconut, reaching \$1 B a year.

Indonesia, however, earns \$17.5 B from palm oil exports alone, while Malaysia recorded \$12 B also solely from

DA budget ... (from page 1)

Cotabao, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, General Santos) integrated food production program" and P586 M for the "implementation of *Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan* (Pamana) program," whose beneficiaries are rebel returnees.

The DA's Philippine Rural Development Project (PRDP) also suffered a huge budgetary cut, from P9.1 B to P2.1 B.

Funding for farm-to-market roads was also slashed, from P7.4 B to P5.4 B.

Secretary to the Cabinet Leoncio Evasco, Jr. presented also the budgets of four agencies transferred by Duterte from the DA to his supervision. These are the National Food Authority (NFA), Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA), National Irrigation Administration (NIA), and Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority (FPA).

Evasco has recommended to the President the closure of NFA and NIA. (By Jess Diaz, *The Philippine Star*)

palm oil.

Furthermore, Thailand boasts of natural rubber exports, amounting to \$6 B and rice at \$5.4 B.

Vietnam has earned \$3.3 B from coffee beans, \$2.9 B from rice, and \$2.6 B from shrimps.

Dar said that because 80% of the country's nine million hectares of land is devoted to rice, corn and coconut, the Philippines had the highest rural poverty in Asean in 2014 at 40%.

Comparatively speaking, Thailand's rural poverty rate was 13.9% in 2013, Indonesia 13.8% in 2014, Malaysia 8.4% in 2009, and Vietnam 17.4% in 2010.

Dar said that compared to high-value crops, rice can be considered a "subsistence crop" because it requires a high level of inputs, and in the Philippines, and it is the traders that earn more from rice instead of the farmers. (By Conrad Cariño, *Manila Times*)

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