



## Villar urges LGUs to allot funds for agri

Sen. Cynthia Villar filed a bill allocating 10% of local government units' annual development fund for the implementation of programs for agriculture and fisheries advancement.

The bill was among the first ten bills filed by Villar to push her legislative agenda in the newly-opened 17<sup>th</sup> Congress.

"This bill aims to make programs for the benefit of farmers and fisherfolks a priority among local government units, as well as continuity of agricultural programs. It will limit the usual practice of leaders to concentrate more on activities that will provide mileage for their political career," Villar said.

Senate Bill No. 318 or the Local Government Agriculture Development Act of 2016 seeks to amend several sections of Republic Act 7160 or the Local Government Code.

Under SB 318, each LGU shall appropriate no less than 20% of its annual internal revenue allotment (IRA) for development projects, provided that 10% of which shall be used for the implementation of programs, projects, activities and services for agriculture and/or fisheries development.

It also makes mandatory the appointment of city or municipal agriculturist in areas where livelihood is at least 50% in agriculture and/or fisheries.

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## Phl can be rice-sufficient, if done right

The Philippines can well produce all the rice it needs, but it should be done right.

"There is no doubt that we can attain 100 percent rice self-sufficiency. But we must do it right by using hybrids, balanced fertilization, adequate irrigation, mechanization and good crop management. For sure, we can even produce well beyond our needs," said Dr. William D. Dar, president of InangLupa Movement.

"The challenge is not really producing more rice, but producing it competitively versus other rice-exporting countries like Thailand and Vietnam," noted Dar, during his speech at the general assembly and national congress of the Philippine Science Journalists Association (PSciJourn), July 23, 2016, at the DA-Bureau of Soils and Water Management.

"Thus, the challenge for the Depart-



(Photo by AFP)

President Rodrigo Roa Duterte stresses a point during his first State of the Nation Address (SONA), July 25, 2016, as Senate President Aquilino Pimentel III and Speaker of the House of Representatives Pantaleon Alvarez listen intently.

## President Duterte to modernize agri, conduct nationwide soil analysis

The InangLupa Movement fully supports the policy pronouncements and directives of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, particularly in modernizing agriculture, which he enumerated in his 98-minute first State of the Nation (SONA), July 25, 2016, during the joint session of Congress at the Batasang Pambansa, in Quezon City.

President Duterte mentioned agriculture as part of the macro-economic

thrusts of his administration, highlighting that "road development shall complement thrusts to provide modern agriculture infrastructure by expanding and improving the construction and rehabilitation of roads and irrigation, and establishing modern harvest and post-harvest facilities to minimize losses."

He added that "we shall also conduct

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## SC reverses ruling on Bt talong

The Supreme Court on July 26, 2016, reversed its ruling that dismissed several petitions in support of field-testing for genetically-modified, pest-resistant *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) eggplant or talong in Filipino.

In an en banc session, the SC granted a motion for reconsideration that sought to overturn and set aside the court's December 8, 2015 decision.

The high court affirmed with modification the Court of Appeals' May 17, 2013 decision and September 20, 2013 resolution, granting Greenpeace Southeast Asia Philippines' plea for the issuance of a writ of continuing mandamus and writ of kalikasan against field-testing for Bt talong.

The SC said Greenpeace's plea should have been dismissed "for mootness in view of the completion and termination of the Bt talong field trials and the expiration of the Biosafety permits."

(By BM, GMA News)



InangLupa President Dr. William D. Dar is flanked by DA-BSWM OIC-Director Sonia Salguero and Philippine Science Journalists Association (PSciJourn) President Angelo Palmones.

ment of Agriculture is how to provide the needed logistics and technologies to bring down the high production cost. The farm gate price of palay of P14 per kilo is higher to P10 per kilo, which is the average in Thailand, or even P7 per kilo in Vietnam," said Dar.

(Pls turn to p2)

# Reinventing rice policy

By Dr. Cielito F. Habito

THERE'S SO much more to our rice policy than the rice industry itself. What we have persisting to the present harms not only consumers and the rest of our agriculture, but the industry and services sector along with it as well. And that means the entire economy.

What's this rice policy I refer to?

It's much more complex than meets the eye, but stripped to the bone, it's everything we do that ultimately makes rice so much more expensive to Filipinos than it is to our Southeast Asian neighbors.

This traces largely to how we restrict rice imports (which we can't even do right as large amounts consistently get smuggled in, anyway) by putting imports under the strict control of the National Food Authority—all in the name of pursuing rice self-sufficiency. While this would seem a noble objective, it's not only impractical but even harmful to us Filipinos at this time.

## Self-sufficiency

I must say at the outset that I have no doubt we can attain full rice self-sufficiency. The scientists have always been right: We can produce all the rice we need if we “do it right”—i.e., use the right combination of hybrid seeds, fertilization, irrigation and crop care.

The question is whether we should pursue it the way we've been doing, keeping it more inaccessible (translation: unaffordable) to poor and food-insecure Filipinos than it needs to be.

For sure, we can even produce well beyond our needs. But if we do, could we even export it without losing money on it, given international prices?

Here's where we need to listen to the economists and social scientists, too, because it's not just about production. It's about productivity, incomes and prices. As one writer recently put it, “[of] what use is a bumper stock if our people cannot afford it?”

## Comparative advantages

Consider these facts: Thailand has 11 million hectares of rice land to feed 66

### *Phl can be...(from p1)*

“This is the challenge we should surmount. Hence, government, LGUs and the private sector should unite if they really want us to be self-sufficient in rice in the text two years,” Dar noted.

PSciJourn is headed by former Agham party-list representative Angelo Palmones, who is a prominent broadcast journalist.

Dar also said that “food self-sufficiency does not necessarily make a country's people more food-secure. What counts is that people have the ability to obtain food, which means prices and incomes are key.”

(By Noel O. Reyes, InangLupa)



*Dr. Carlos Abon, of the Philippine-Sino Center for Agricultural Technology (PhilSCAT), reports the growth performance of a hybrid rice variety at its experimental farm in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, during a visit of Dr. William Dar (right) and Dr. Santiago Obien (middle), DA consultant on rice program.*

million Thais. Vietnam has 7.5 million hectares to feed 90 million Vietnamese. But we only have 4.5 million hectares to feed 102 million Filipinos.

Thailand and Vietnam have the Mekong River naturally irrigating their rice areas and permitting up to three crops a year. The Philippines (like Indonesia, the other major rice-importing country in the neighborhood) is an archipelago with no massive rivers running through it—and 20 or so typhoons hitting it every year.

Our own river systems, like the Panganga River and Cagayan River, irrigate our best rice lands in Central and Northern Luzon, but these are puny in comparison to the great Mekong River that runs across six countries. Any surprise that the two are the biggest rice exporters in Southeast Asia, while we and Indonesia are the top importers? That's why Malaysia never aspired to produce all the rice it needs, and put its money in things Malaysian farmers could get rich with—so they could buy whatever rice they need to make up for what they can't competitively produce.

## Higher productivity

The only way for us to go, then, is to achieve much higher productivity, at comparable cost, with emphasis on the latter. Otherwise, it makes no sense to insist on supplying all our rice needs if it means restricting imports, forcing ourselves to pay up to twice what we otherwise would, just so the domestic price will allow the “average rice farmer” to recover his costs. What harm has this longstanding policy brought us? Plenty.

It keeps more Filipinos than necessary below the poverty line, as rice alone is the single biggest item in the average poor Filipino family's budget (20-25 percent, studies say). When the official poverty rate went up again in 2014 to 25.8 percent, from 24.6 percent in 2013 (an additional 1.2 million poor), then

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsi Balisacan traced it, not to falling incomes, but to higher rice prices. It leads us to give higher and less competitive wages so that our workers could afford our primary “wage good,” rice. It makes

it harder in turn for us to attract more job-creating domestic or foreign investments, labor costs being higher than what they could otherwise be.

Hence, we continue to have 2.5 million jobless workers, even as millions have left to seek their fortunes overseas, away from their families.

Meanwhile, it renders too many Filipinos food-insecure, making our malnutrition rate twice as high as in our comparable neighbors. In turn, this affects our children's educational outcomes, ultimately leading to an inferior human resource pool with lower productivity. And there's much more. In sum, the effects are much more far-reaching than meets the eye, hurting the whole Filipino economy and society—all because of our distortive rice policy.

## Produce rice competitively

What do we do, then? Open up the floodgates to rice imports and forget about producing rice? Of course not!

We do have many rice farmers whose productivity and costs allow them to compete even at international prices. But we must strive to have many more, and that's precisely what the government ought to be pursuing and targeting, not simply to produce more rice at all costs.

The fact is, we only have until 2017 before we must open up rice trade and shift to import tariffs as our mode of protecting rice farmers. We are the last holdout still restricting rice imports, and are on the third and final extension on this from the World Trade Organization.

Meanwhile, we managed to set the highest rice import tariff of 35 percent in the Asean Economic Community, which takes effect once we open up.

Agriculture Secretary Manny Piñol's mission, then, is to make sure that by 2018, our rice farmers can compete at a price 35 percent higher than the import price. But we must eventually remove that 35-percent penalty on Filipino rice consumers, especially on our poor, as well—so the homework would not end there. (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*)

# DA to get back farm techs from LGUs

To boost the country's food production and agricultural programs, the Department of Agriculture (DA) wants to get 30,000 farm technicians assigned with local government units (LGUs) back to its workforce soon.

To effect the move, Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol said a memorandum of agreement with the Department of Interior and Local Government will be signed.

"This is expected to happen very soon after DILG Secretary Ismael Sueno, himself a former governor and real farmer, agreed to my proposal to enter into a tripartite Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the DA and the LGUs to re-assign thousands of farm technicians and extension workers back to the agriculture department as 'detailed' workers," said Piñol in a statement.

The farm technicians and extension workers were originally DA employees assigned to the provinces and municipalities, but were "devolved" to the LGUs upon the passage of the Local Government Code in 1991.

While the intent of the Code was noble, Piñol said, "their transfer to the LGUs effectively paralyzed the DA and caused a great disconnect in the implementation of the department's agriculture and fisheries programs because the technicians and extension workers were getting orders from the mayors and governors."

Besides, he said the LGUs "do not have enough funds to ensure that the technicians and extension workers would be able to perform their tasks."

"So, what eventually happened was that many of these agriculture workers stayed in their offices wearing crisp and dandy office uniforms, some of the women even wearing make-up and high-heels, instead of going to the fields. Some of them are assigned to do odd jobs like tax collectors, market supervisors, and even security officers, jobs totally unrelated to agriculture," he lamented.

## Wasted talents, skills

Piñol said this situation is "untenable" as "talents and skills are wasted."

"I presented the idea of the detail of the agriculture workers back to the DA during my consultations in Bicol, Samar, Leyte, and SOCKSARGEN region and the proposal was roundly accepted by the LGU executives," he said.

With this development, Piñol said the DA will shoulder the allowances, per diems and trainings of the agriculture workers and they will receive directives and orders from the DA regional offices.

"The DA could even give them back the privileges of having bicycles, motorcycles, or even 4-wheeled vehicles so they could do their job effectively," he said.

"Expect the farms and the coastal areas to be bustling with movement of agriculture and fisheries technicians in the days to come," he said.

(By Lilybeth G. Ison, Philippine News Agency)



Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel "Manny" Piñol awards to the Hybrid Rice Farmers Association of Maitum, Sarangani a power tiller with implements, worth P100,000, under the Masaganang Agrikultura sa Nayon (MANA) Rice Program, during the awarding of various implements and assistance, in General Santos City, on July 18, 2016. Piñol is urging all rice farmers to increase production to meet the rice sufficiency target of the Duterte administration come 2019. Also shown are Sarangani Governor Steve Solon (right) and Region XII Incoming Regional Director Milagros Casis (left), and OIC-Director Carlene Collado (2nd from left). (Photo by Alarico Nuestro, DA-AFID)

## Piñol eyes P40-B NIA budget

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol is proposing an additional P4 billion in the 2017 budget of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) to fulfil the commitment of the Duterte administration of free irrigation starting next year.

The NIA has earlier suggested a budget of P36.8 B for 2017 and if additional funding will be approved, the agency's allocation will amount to P40.8 B.

"By providing an additional funding, NIA will no longer depend on the collections from irrigation fees of farmers for the salaries of its officials and employees and for its operations," Piñol said.

NIA spokesperson Filipina Bermudez said the 2017 budget is allotted for the construction, restoration, and rehabilitation of irrigation projects and existing irrigation systems.

"The GAA (General Appropriations Act) for 2017 is not for PS and MOOE (personal services and maintenance and other operating expenses). It should be explicitly stated that part of the P40 B is for PS and MOOE," Bermudez said.

"Based on the assessment of NIA's finances, our current status without incoming ISF collection will be good up to September only," she said.

"This means that without assistance from the national government for the fourth quarter, NIA will not have enough funds for regular operation and maintenance of irrigation systems including salaries and allowance of employees," Bermudez said.

NIA collects up to P2 billion in irrigation fees annually and relies on the fees for employees' salaries and allowances, as well as funding for operations and

By Louise Maureen Simeon

maintenance of existing irrigation systems in the country.

"This is the most ridiculous situation in Philippine agriculture where it is the farmers who are being made to pay for the salaries and wages of a government entity which is tasked for provide them with water so that they could produce food for the country," Piñol said.

Meanwhile, he has sought the support of the Senate and gained positive feedback from Senators Franklin Drilon, Loren Legarda, Cynthia Villar, Koko Pimentel, Alan Peter Cayetano, Manny Pacquiao and Kiko Pangilinan.

Piñol said the free irrigation is also being supported by congressmen from different provinces including Leyte, Samar, Biliran and Bicol region.

"I expect the free irrigation commitment of the president will sail through both the Lower and Upper Houses of Congress smoothly," he said.

Piñol said he will visit the Senate next week to seek additional support from other legislators.

Aside from hiking the budget, Piñol is recommending amending the charter of NIA in the long run so that "providing free irrigation to farmers will no longer be just a political decision of a president who cares for the poor but a policy of government."

To recall, President Rodrigo Duterte issued his first executive order early this month that reorganized the Office of the President, and reverted the NIA and Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority to the DA. (Philippine Star)

# Nobel laureates blast Greenpeace over GMOs

By Joel Achenbach, Bloomberg News

More than 100 Nobel laureates have signed a letter urging Greenpeace to end its opposition to genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

They ask Greenpeace to cease efforts to block introduction of a genetically engineered strain of rice that could reduce Vitamin-A deficiencies causing blindness and death in children in the developing world.

"We urge Greenpeace and its supporters to re-examine the experience of farmers and consumers worldwide with crops and foods improved through biotechnology, recognize the findings of authoritative scientific bodies and regulatory agencies, and abandon their campaign against 'GMOs' in general and Golden Rice in particular," they said.

The letter campaign was organized by Richard Roberts, chief scientific officer of New England Biolabs and, with Phillip Sharp, the winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine for the discovery of genetic sequences known as introns.

The campaign has a website, [supportprecisionagriculture.org](http://supportprecisionagriculture.org), that includes a running list of the signatories, and the group plans to hold a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington.

"We're scientists. We understand the logic of science. It's easy to see what Greenpeace is doing is damaging and is anti-science," Roberts told The Washington Post. "Greenpeace initially, and then some of their allies, deliberately went out of their way to scare people. It was a way for them to raise money for their cause."

Roberts said he endorses many other activities of Greenpeace, and said he hopes the group, after reading the letter, would "admit that this is an issue that they got wrong and focus on the stuff that they do well."

Greenpeace has not yet responded to requests for comment on the letter. It is hardly the only group that opposes GMOs, but it has a robust global presence, and the laureates in their letter contend that Greenpeace has led the effort to block Golden Rice.

The list of signatories had risen to 107 names. Roberts said that, by his count, there are 296 living laureates.

Nobel laureate Randy Schekman, a cell biologist at the University of California at Berkeley, told The Post, "I find it surprising that groups that are very supportive of science when it comes to global climate change, or even, for the most part, in the appreciation of the value of vaccination in preventing human disease, yet can be so dismissive of the general views of scientists when it comes to something as important as the world's agricultural future."

The letter states:

"Scientific and regulatory agencies around the world have repeatedly and consistently found crops and foods improved through biotechnology to be as safe as, if not safer than those derived from any other method of production. There has never been a single con-

firmed case of a negative health outcome for humans or animals from their consumption. Their environmental impacts have been shown repeatedly to be less damaging to the environment, and a boon to global biodiversity."

Greenpeace has spearheaded opposition to Golden Rice, which has the potential to reduce or eliminate much of the death and disease caused by a vitamin A deficiency (VAD), which has the greatest impact on the poorest people in Africa and Southeast Asia.

The World Health Organization estimates that 250 million people, suffer from VAD, including 40 percent of the children under five in the developing world. Based on UNICEF statistics, a total of one to two million preventable deaths occur annually as a result of VAD, because it compromises the immune system, putting babies and children at great risk. VAD itself is the leading cause of childhood blindness globally affecting 250,000 - 500,000 children each year. Half die within 12 months of losing their eyesight.

The scientific consensus is that that gene editing in a laboratory is not more hazardous than modifications through traditional breeding, and that engineered plants potentially have environmental or health benefits, such as cutting down on the need for pesticides.

A report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, released in May, said there is no substantiated evidence that GMO crops have sickened people or harmed the environment, but also cautioned that such crops are relatively new and that it is premature to make broad generalizations, positive or negative, about their safety.

**[Are GMO crops safe? Scientists weigh in, saying the focus should be on the plant and not the process.]**

Opponents of GMOs have said these crops may not be safe for human or animal consumption, have not been shown to improve crop yields, have led to excessive use of herbicides and can potentially spread engineered genes beyond the boundaries of farms.

Greenpeace International's website states that the release of GMOs into the natural world is a form of "genetic pollution." The site states:

Genetic engineering enables scientists to create plants, animals and microorganisms by manipulating genes in a way that does not occur naturally.

These genetically modified organisms (GMOs) can spread through nature and interbreed with natural organisms, thereby contaminating non 'GE' environments and future generations in an un-



*A worker tends to corn crops at the Monsanto test field in Woodland, Calif., on Aug. 10, 2012. Monsanto is the world's leading producer of the herbicide glyphosate and the largest producer of genetically engineered seed. (Noah Berger/Bloomberg News)*

foreseeable and uncontrollable way.

Virtually all crops and livestock have been genetically engineered in the broadest sense; there are no wild cows, and the cornfields of the United States reflect many centuries of plant modification through traditional breeding. Genetically modified crops started to become common in the mid-1990s; today, most of the corn, soybeans and cotton in the country have been modified to be resistant to insects or tolerant of herbicide, according to government statistics.

**[The 'GMO-free' marketing ploy]**

Opponents of GMOs have focused a great deal on the economic and social repercussions of the introduction of lab-modified crops. Greenpeace has warned of the corporate domination of the food supply, saying that small farmers will suffer. A Greenpeace spokesman Wednesday referred a reporter to a Greenpeace publication titled, "Twenty Years of Failure: Why GM crops have failed to deliver on their promises."

This debate between mainstream scientists and environmental activists isn't new, and there is little reason to suspect that the letter signed by the Nobel laureates will persuade GMO opponents to stand down.

But Columbia University's Martin Chalfie, who shared the 2008 Nobel in chemistry for research on green fluorescent protein, said he thinks laureates can be influential on the GMO issue.

"Is there something special about Nobel laureates? I'm not so sure we're any more special than other scientists who have looked at the evidence involved, but we have considerably more visibility because of the prize. I think that this behooves us, that when we feel that science is not being listened to, that we speak out."

Roberts said he has worked on previous campaigns that sought to leverage the influence of Nobel laureates. In 2012, for example, he organized a campaign to persuade Chinese authorities to release from house arrest the human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo. Roberts said he decided to take on the GMO issue after hearing from scientific colleagues their research was being impeded by anti-GMO activism from Greenpeace and other organizations. He said he has no financial interest in GMO research.

# DA-BSWM to set up database on small irrig'n projects

The Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Soils and Water Management (DA-BSWM) will put in place a database, worth P1 million, that contains the inventory of Small Scale Irrigation Projects (SSIPs) established all over the country.

The agency conducted last June an island-wide consultation workshop on the compilation and development of database in Davao, Cebu and Quezon city, attended by technical personnel from the DA Regional Field Offices, State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), and other stakeholders.

The workshop was conducted to get inputs from the participants which can be integrated in the database, that will serve as basis to locate the investments made by the DA-BSWM.

BSWM Director Dr. Silvino Q. Tejada said the database will be available for the public, and as a reference for re-

search and development conducted by researchers, State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), managers, policy makers and other stakeholders.

"Our goal is to continuously promote advancement in our projects for the sake of the future generations. Through the database, research and development studies and other related documents will be made available through web access by the stakeholders," Tejada said.

SSIPs are irrigation infrastructures with limited service areas, constructed within 180 days, in locations where permanent or continuous water sources are not available, and managed by individual farmers or farmers' groups.

The SSIPs include Small Water Impounding Projects (SWIPs), Small Diversion Dam (SDDs), Shallow Tube Wells (STWs) and Small Farm Reservoir (SFRs).

The database on SSIPs will also in-



clude cropping intensity, rice productivity, farm income, employment, and landholdings for crop production.

The database is targeted to be completed by end of 2016.

"We strongly believe that the establishment of the SSIP database will improve and intensify our campaign for transparency, as our people will know where there is invested," Tejada said. (By Loraine Cerillo).

## Agri needs property rights reform

By Calixto V. Chikiamco

Agriculture Secretary Manny Piñol has said that to implement President Duterte's directive of producing affordable and available food, he will provide free irrigation, technology transfer, and improved market access to farmers.

While I have no doubt about the sincerity, determination, and competence of Secretary Piñol, providing irrigation and better support for farmers seem to be a replay of an old movie.

Every incoming administration promises "better support for farmers." This is not exactly the change in policy we have been promised. What agriculture needs is property rights reform. Only property rights reform will unleash a productivity revolution driven by increased private investments in agriculture.

What do we need to do?

First, the two million hectares in collective Certificate of Land Ownership Awards (CLOAs) must be broken up into individual titles. The DAR, in trying to claim accomplishments measured in hectares, issued collective CLOAs, i.e. one certificate of over hundreds of hectares covering many farmers, instead of

individual CLOAs.

In agrarian reform, we have fostered communism with collective CLOAs. Without individual titles, farmer beneficiaries have no sense of secure ownership to promote entrepreneurial initiative.

Agrarian Reform Secretary Rafael Mariano should make breaking up these collective CLOAs into individual CLOAs his first task, instead of fostering more uncertainty in the land market by pushing for a new agrarian reform law.

However, I don't disagree with Secretary Mariano's desire to give the land for free to farmer beneficiaries by relieving their amortization obligations to the Land Bank. Farmer beneficiaries are unable to pay them anyway.

However, to truly empower them, farmer beneficiaries must be given individual titles and be able to mortgage their land or lease them, unlike now when they can't go to a bank to mortgage their CLOAs or to sell or lease them (the DAR rules are fuzzy with respect to CARP beneficiaries' right to lease) within the 10-year amortization period.

To achieve agricultural productivity, we have to allow land to be consolidated, i.e. allow more efficient farmers to increase the size of their farms. This is the second thing that the Duterte administration must do to increase agricultural productivity.

Even socialist China, where all land is owned by the State and private property rights is a politically sensitive issue, is promoting land consolidation by giving farmers usufruct rights which they can lease to others. As National Scientist and economist Raul Fabella pointed out, leasing will not only act as a safety net to farmers but will also enable the market to determine who can make the land more productive.

The third property rights reform needed in agriculture is to remove the Commonwealth-era restrictions on agricultural patents. These restrictions consist of a prohibition to sell or mortgage the property within five years of awarding of the free patent; and more perniciously, a perpetual option for the farmer, or his heirs, to buy back the property within five years of its alienation or sale. These restrictions make agricultural patents unbankable and toxic to buyers who want to improve the property.

Change must come to agricultural policy. In China, a simple property rights (and capitalistic) reform -- de-collectivizing agriculture -- in 1978 started its agricultural revolution that underpinned its industrialization. In this country, we can't recycle old policies and hope government will do a better job. What Philippine agriculture needs is not more of the same tired formulas of government support, but property rights reform.

**Editor's Note:** The author is a board director of the Institute for Development and Econometric Analysis (BusinessWorld Online)

### Villar urges... (from p1)

The bill mandates the drafting of Local Agriculture Development Programs, focusing on areas identified as factors contributing to the competitiveness of the agriculture industry.

These include the availability and production of seeds, livestock, fingerlings and other farm inputs, mechanization and post-harvest equipment, irrigation system access and maintenance, marketing of products, credit, guarantee, and agriculture insurance, knowledge of better farming systems, and knowledge of organic farming, among others.

"If agriculture can grow at 3 to 4%,

the average for the world, poverty in the country would substantially be reduced. The growth in the Philippine agricultural sector was only 1.7% yearly for the last five years. At the moment, there is slow and inefficient delivery of government support to the agriculture sector, and very limited impact of such support," Villar stressed.

Historical records show that 70-80% of LGU's annual appropriations go to administrative and recurrent expenditures. The remaining 20% is competitively shared by capital expenditure, economic investments, human resource development and to research development.

## President Duterte ... (from p1)

a nationwide soil analysis to determine areas most suitable for rice farming to optimize production with the use of effective soil rehabilitation and fertilization."

InangLupa Movement founding president William D. Dar said "we will actively partner with the Department of Agriculture, under the leadership of Secretary Emmanuel Piñol, to attain a modern, industrialized, sustainable and globally competitive Philippine agriculture."

Since its organization in 2014, InangLupa has partnered with the DA in implementing Yamang Lupa program in three pilot sites in the Philippines, focusing on soil and community watershed technologies patterned after Bhoochetana in India.

"We are also heartened that a nationwide soil analysis would be conducted, which would serve as benchmark in rejuvenating our nutrient-deficient soils into productive and sustainable farms again," said Dar.

"I would describe President Duterte's first SONA as passionate, guided with a humane approach for development with focus on the poor," added Dar.

President Duterte said that "we shall strictly enforce fisheries laws, particularly on illegal fishing and promote aquaculture along river banks and in backyards."

### Other agri-related pronouncements

Below are excerpts of the President's other policy pronouncements related to agriculture:

- "We will continue and maintain current macroeconomic policies, and even do better. We will achieve this through prudent fiscal and monetary policies that can help translate high growth into more and better job creation and poverty reduction.
- "At the household level, there must be sufficient income for all Filipinos to meet the basic food and non-



Photo above shows dozens of farmers who are currently training on hybrid rice seed production, in Salvacion, Rosales, Pangasinan, conducted by the Philippine Sino Center for Agricultural Technology (PhilSCAT), in partnership with Prasad Seeds Philippines. The training will run for 17 sessions over a period of four months. Also shown are Dr. William Dar (4th from left), Atty. Exequiel Magsaysay of Prasad (right), and DA Ilocos Region director Valentin Perdido (left).

food needs for their families.

- "We shall continue attract investments that will generate thousands of jobs each year – jobs that are suitable for the poor and less skilled members of the workforce.

- "Reforms to ensure competitiveness and promote ease of doing business will be mandatory. Reacting to these needs, the restrictions on the economy will be needed to make more investments to come and to develop labor-intensive industries such as manufacturing, agriculture and tourism shall be pursued.

- "We must also invest in human capital and ensure equal access to economic opportunities.

- "When employment is not an option, for instance in extremely rural neighborhoods, entrepreneurship will be advocated.

- "We shall also enhance local business environment by addressing bottlenecks in business registration and processing, streamlining investment appli-

cation process and integration the services of various government offices.

- "Government Financing Institutions (GFIs) shall come up with out-of-the box financing packages to capacitate our small and medium entrepreneurs.

- "We will accelerate infrastructure spending by improving national roads and bridges and implementing the Mindanao Logistics Infrastructure Network and other road network master plans. We shall pursue inter-island linkage projects."

### Other agri-related directives

- Monthly rice subsidies for the poor will be provided through the DSWD

- Climate change agreements must not stymie the country's industrialization

- Mining projects will be allowed but must comply with standards

- Construction of rail systems north and south of Manila, Panay, Cebu City and Davao City; and Mindanao Railway. (By Noel O. Reyes, with reports from Manila Times)

## Piñol seeks update of 40-yr old soil maps

Agriculture Secretary Manny Piñol was shocked at the Department of Agriculture's use of 40-year old data on soil mapping and has ordered the Bureau of Soil and Water Management to submit a project proposal for a national soil testing that he wants done in 45 days.

"In the first briefing I received from officials of the Department of Agriculture, I found out that the soils analysis data used by the department in waging a war against hunger were actually gathered over 40 years ago," Piñol said. The briefing was meant to present the department's recommendations on dealing with climate change, indicating the areas suitable to specific crops.

"When the presenter started showing which areas would be suitable to rubber trees, I knew there was something wrong with the data. Indeed, when I confronted them with questions on the accuracy of their data, they ad-

mitted that these are based on soil samplings done in the late 1970s," Piñol said.

He could not stress the importance of national soil sampling enough. He said it is crucial in determining the crops suitable in a specific area based on soil components and fertility and it would also guide the department and farmers in determining the nutrients the soil needs.

"I would like everything to be completed in 45 days," Piñol said of the national soil sampling project. "What many have waited for 40 years to happen will have to be done within that short period of time because when the next planting season comes, I would like the farmers to be able to determine what crops to grow in their farms and what fertilizer to apply and use."

"Success in agriculture is all about correct data, right strategy, and immediate action," he added.

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