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DAMAGagri

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Weeds for you: The OFR
drug for success, *see story on p.18*

OFW couple finds hope in
ANYO loan program,
see story on p.24

Retired but not yet tired:
The story of Ms. Milagros
Buenafe, *see story on p.26*



All for one, Always number one!

VISION

A prime-mover towards a modernized and industrialized agriculture and fisheries sector.

MISSION

To provide suitable, timely, and innovative interventions for a sustainable agriculture in the Ilocos Region.

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D edication -	Serving with a heart
R esiliency -	Overcoming challenges
I ntegrity -	Valuing public trust
V igilance -	Responding to clients' needs
E xcellence -	Raising the bar



DAMAG AGRI


THE COVER

This quarter's cover features Ms. Lea Astrude, owner of the Our Farm Republic (front) and Ms. Nellie Pimentel, a beneficiary of the DA-IFED project (back).

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Contents

4	DA provides intervention to pest-affected onion Pangasinan farmers	12	DA-RFO1 kicks-off women's month celebration, launches e-Kadiwa
6	Sec. Dar eyes 'OneDARful' 2021	14	Balungao corn harvest festival held
7	MMSU to continue as a great leverage for DA's vision of a future agriculture	15	DA-RFO1 entry bags 3rd place in reg'l research symposium
8	Farmers get fertilizer reimbursement subsidy	18	Weeds for you: The Our Farm Republic drug for success
9	Ilocos Norte FCAs receive over 175M worth machineries	24	OFW couple finds hope in ANYO loan program
9	DA allocates 20M for marketing assistance	26	Retired but not yet tired: The story of Ms. Milagros Buenafe
10	DA-RFO1 funds 5M worth consolidation, trading facility in Ilocos Norte		
11	DA Ilocos inks pledge of commitment for BABay ASF		



DA provides interventions to pest-affected onion Pangasinan farmers

Giving hope to distressed onion farmers in Bayambang, Basista and Bautista in Pangasinan brought by the anthracnose and armyworm infestations in the area, the Department of Agriculture Ilocos Region provided pest control interventions such as copper-based fungicides, organic as well as biological control agents in an effort to salvage onion crops affected by said pests and still bring harvest to these onion producing municipalities.





As soon as the report of said pest incidence was relayed to the DA-Regional Office, DA-RFO I Regional Executive Director Nestor D. Domenden mobilized the Research group spearheaded by Regional Technical Director for Research & Regulations Dr. Jovita M. Datuin, together with Regional Crop Protection Center (RCPC) staff, to monitor and validate the report.

The incidence of infestation falls under moderate to severe infestation in the onion production areas in said towns.

Based on initial report gathered, a total of 410 hectares were infested with 160.1 hectares in Bayambang and 193.7 hectares in Bautista which translated to 21% of the total area planted with onion in both towns posing possible loss of harvest to about 502 onion farmers.

Mr. Bonifacio Bautista, an onion farmer in Bayambang, Pangasinan, one of the most badly hit farmers by the infestation who planted onion in his five-hectare farm area seeks for assistance as he projects major loss of about P800,000 to a million if he fails to harvest even on a break-even scale.

In Brgy. Quetegan, Bautista, Pangasinan, Mr. Rodolfo Cabag who planted onion in his 2.5-hectare farm foresee a harvest of only about 10 to 15 bags (@28-30 kg per bag) from his expected harvest of onion this January as most of his ready to harvest crops were already infested by armyworm.

Expecting around 300 bags of production per hectare in onion on a normal condition, farmers like Bautista and Cabag would incur about 97% reduction on their production due to the armyworm infestation.

“Luging-lugi po kami ngayon. Sana matulungan kami ng gobierno na makabawi at sana yong mga inutangan namin ay hindi na muna kami sisingilin. Sa susunod na lang na pagtatanim baka sakaling makabawi kami sa susunod na planting season,” appeals Bautista.

In a follow-up field monitoring made by the Integrated Laboratories Division headed by Dr. Gilbert Rabara, ILDC Chief, he recommended possible solution to address the pest

infestation in the area. One of which to change the cropping pattern like planting of vegetables and other high value crops to break the life cycle of the pests in the farm area.

Field sanitation, and the installation of pheromone lures including deep plowing of the field during land preparation were also recommended to properly manage the farm and prevent pest infestation like the armyworm.

The use of chemical insecticide is highly discouraged while biological control agents such as Nuclear Polyhedrosis Virus (NPV), metharizium species earwig, botanical insecticides are recommended to control the infestation.

One of the recommended input which is an 8-in 1 foliar fertilizer that also act as insect repellent, soil conditioner, growth enhancer, and as bio-fungicide and bactericide made out of kelp extract with no chemical mixture was given to the farmers by DA-RFO I so as to control the infestation.

As testified by some of the farmers who were able to apply this on their pest-infested crops, it showed promising effect according to the farmers as it was able to rejuvenate some of the crops and showed signs of recovery.

However, technical experts who were promoting said plant growth enhancer advised that to maximize the full benefit of the bio-control agent, this must be applied at the early stage of the plant like two weeks after planting to boost the immune system of the crop against pests.

Armyworm (*Spodoptera exigua* H.), locally known as harabas is a destructive insect pest that can rapidly proliferate in a very wide scale in a short period of time, mostly affecting onion plantations.

Bayambang and Bautista, two of the major onion-producing towns in Pangasinan, are most commonly affected by armyworm incidence.

Meanwhile, the town of Caba in La Union has also reported a total of 10.91 hectare by the same pests affecting 14 farmers in the area.

Sec. Dar eyes 'OneDARful' 2021

Department of Agriculture Secretary William Dar made a two-day fruitful visit to Ilocos Region as part of his itinerary as the Guest of Honor and Speaker of the Mariano Marcos State University's (MMSU's) 43rd Founding Anniversary.

Held on January 15-16, 2021 in Batac City, Ilocos Norte and in various towns of Ilocos Sur, Sec. Dar led the distribution of P28.7 million worth of various DA projects. Among others, Sec. Dar awarded the P5million worth cattle feedlot fattening projects for the local government units of Laoag City and Dingras, the P4million worth of massive malunggay seedling production project of MMSU in Batac City, Ilocos Norte and the P3.7million worth of farm machinery and equipment such as 1 unit 4-WD tractor for Pagudpud, Ilocos Norte and ten units pump and engine sets for 5 farmers' cooperative and associations in the province.

In support to the marketing program of DA through the Enhanced Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita of the Agribusiness Marketing Assistance Service, Sec. Dar also turned-over a check worth P5million each for the Nueva Segovia Consortium of Cooperatives and the Bacarra Zanjera Irrigators Multi-Purpose Cooperative

for the establishment of consolidation and trading facility for agricultural products.

The Bagnos Multi-Purpose Cooperative in Banna, Ilocos Norte has also received a mock check worth P1 million in support to its Food Supply Chain Project under the DA's Enhanced Kadiwa ni Ani Program.

In his message during the awarding ceremonies, Sec. Dar underscored the importance of converging the resources of the region, provincial, and municipal government to bring higher development in the agri-fishery sectors.

Through the provincial-led extension system, and with Ilocos Norte as the pilot province, Sec. Dar vowed to further institutionalize the program in each region which aims to develop potential commodity for every province to uplift and boost rural livelihood developments.

Introducing the 12 key strategies to further develop the agriculture sector in the region, Sec. Dar named the farm clustering and consolidation, the plant plant plant program or farm diversification, marketing and food processing support, Bantay

ASF sa Barangay or BABAY ASF program, infrastructure investments as well as strengthening of strategic communications as among the approaches to be implemented by DA to further enhance food security and sustainability in the country.

With the target of 2.5% growth in the agri-sector for 2021, Sec. Dar enjoined all government officials to work together to make 2021 as "ONEDarful Year" for all.

Meanwhile, as part of his itinerary, Sec. Dar together with DA-RFO I officials led by Director Nestor Domenden and Assistant Secretary for Strategic Communications Noel Reyes also dropped by at the San Juan Demo Farm to inspect the area for the establishment of DA-Ilocos Sur Research & Experiment Center and the Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College-San Juan Campus.

Sec. Dar and party also proceeded to Sta Maria, Ilocos Sur for the blessing and inauguration of Landbank Sta. Maria Agri-hub which shall provide financial and technical services to more than 10,000 farmers and fisherfolk in the municipalities of Sta. Maria, Burgos and San Esteban.

In support to the tobacco farmers, Sec. Dar likewise visited the National Tobacco Administration's tobacco demonstration farm engaging farmers with block farming at Brgy. Silag, Sta Maria, Ilocos Sur and conducted a consultation dialogue with the farmers.

From Brgy. Silag, Sta. Maria, Sec. Dar and party also went to Narvacan, Ilocos Sur for the visit to the NTA's Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita facilities that shall encourage farmers to venture into meat processing in order to supply the needed requirements of processed meat and meat products in Metro Manila. ###

With the target of 2.5% growth in the agri-sector for 2021, Sec. Dar enjoined all government officials to work together to make 2021 as 'ONEDarful Year' for all.

MMSU to continue as a great leverage for DA's vision of a future agriculture



BATAC CITY - "Refocus and strengthen various curriculum program, not only guided by employability of your graduates, but to produce human capital graduates who can contribute significantly in the transformation of the present agriculture to a modern, industrialized, and resilient Philippine agriculture."

Department of Agriculture Secretary William Dar stressed this in his message as the guest of honor and speaker during the Mariano Marcos State University's (MMSU's) 43rd Founding Anniversary held at the MMSU Teatro Ilocandia, Batac City, Ilocos Norte on January 15, 2021.

According to Secretary Dar, the MMSU's important role in furthering the country's goal towards food security and globally competitive agri-fishery

sector is important as it will not only develop a human capital but come up with innovations that could lead to creating the future agriculture 20-25 years from now.

"We are confident that MMSU will continue to be the great leverage and contributor to the DA in advancing our mandate for wider socio-economic impact," Sec. Dar added.

Having engaged with various research and development projects to raise farm productivity while introducing new and efficient agricultural practices and technologies, Sec. Dar called on the MMSU leaders together with the Ilocos Norte Provincial Government led by Governor Matthew Joseph Marcos Manotoc in the operationalization of the Ilocos Norte Agriculture and Fishery Extension System (INAFES)

especially in its planning and process of documentation.

"MMSU being a part of the ecosystem of INAFES must continue to deeply engage in making it possible that INAFES succeeds and will be the number one model in the country," Sec. Dar said.

He further underscored that with the full support of DA to the university, this vision will be transformed into action by putting up climate resilient topics, the best of technologies, and precision and digital agriculture.

MMSU is the academic counterpart of Ilocos Norte, one of the pilot provinces identified under the Province-led Agriculture and Fishery Extension System (PAFES).###

Rice farmers get fertilizer reimbursement subsidy

A total of 103,726 rice farmers received from the Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Office I (DA-RFO I) their fertilizer subsidy reimbursement amounting to Php206,662,275.

From among the four provinces in the region, only the province of Pangasinan has completed the payment to 45,988 farmer-beneficiaries. The provinces of La Union (8,971 farmers with total reimbursement of Php14, 199,932), Ilocos Sur (29,681 farmers with a total reimbursement of Php47,096,415) and Ilocos Norte (19,086 farmers with total reimbursement of Php40,511,988) are still on the process of distributing the transaction codes which the recipients will use to claim the reimbursement at MLhuillier, the official partner money remittance of the DA in the program.

The fertilizer reimbursement scheme is part of the Rice Resiliency Program of DA to help farmers reduce their cost



of production and as a way to lessen the impact of the pandemic in their livelihood.

To avail of the fertilizer subsidy program, farmers who planted inbred rice

variety must buy four bags of fertilizer (two bags inorganic and two bags urea) while five bags of fertilizer (two bags inorganic and three bags urea) for those who planted hybrid rice variety.###

Ilocos Sur research satellite station soon to rise

Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Office I, thru OIC-Regional Executive Director Nestor D. Domenden inks Usufruct Agreement with Philippine Fiber Industry Development Authority (PhilFIDA) Executive Director Kennedy Costales and Region I, 2 & CAR Regional Director Edel Dondonilla for the establishment of DA-RFO I's Ilocos Sur Research & Experiment Center (ISREC) at the 16.57 hectare PhilFIDA property in San Juan, Ilocos Sur.

Also present during the signing was DA-RFO I Research Division Chief Ms. Consuelo N. Belarmino and designated ISREC Chief Ms. Josefina Bueno.



In photo: ISREC Chief Ms. Josefina Bueno, Research Division Chief Ms. Consuelo Belarmino, RED Nestor Domenden, PhilFIDA Executive Director Kennedy Costales, and Region 1,2,& CAR Regional Director Edel Dondonilla

Ilocos Norte FCAs receive over 175M worth machineries



Batac City, Ilocos Norte - Over Php 175 Million worth of machineries were distributed to 64 Farmers' Cooperatives and Associations (FCAs) of Ilocos Norte through the DA-Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) on February 3.

The 172 units of distributed machineries composes 40 units four-wheel drive

tractors, 80 units hand tractors, two units walk-behind type mechanical rice transplanter, one riding type mechanical rice transplanter, 28 units rice combine harvester, 11 units rice reaper, eight units, rice thresher, and two units mobile rice mill.

Through these machineries, farmers are expected to save up to three percent

milling losses due to efficient and high recovery mechanized rice mills, about two to three percent postharvest losses with the two-in-one operation of rice combine harvester, and up to ten percent increase in yield with good crop growth and higher density planting using mechanical transplanters or precision seeders.

DA allocates 20M for marketing assistance

The Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Office I through the Agribusiness Marketing Assistance Division (AMAD) has allocated around P20million for marketing assistance to hog raisers and vegetable growers in Ilocos region to address the rising prices of commodities especially on hogs and vegetables in Metro Manila.

According to Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Division Chief, Ms. Wilhelmina Castañeda, out of the P20 million allocation, P10million shall be turned-over to the National Tobacco Administration's Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita Meat Processing Plant in Narvacan,



Ilocos Sur for their meat processing operation in order to supply needed requirements of meat products in Metro Manila.

For the other P10million allocation, DA-AMAD shall be partnering with

the accredited consolidators in the four provinces for them to buy directly from the farmer-producers pinakbet vegetables using the prevailing price in the market.

Among the identified consolidators are the Bacarra Zanjera Multi-Purpose Cooperative in Bacarra, Ilocos Norte, Nueva Segovia Consortium of Cooperatives in Caoayan, Ilocos Sur, the DA-AMAD in San Fernando City, La Union and the Alcala Livestock and Cassava Growers Association in Alcala, Pangasinan.

To cut some expenses on logistics in transferring these agricultural commodities, the DA-AMAD shall be shouldering the transportation of these commodities in Metro Manila.###

DA-RFO1 funds 5M worth consolidation, trading facility in Ilocos Norte

The Department of Agriculture Regional Field Office 1 has funded a Php5M worth Consolidation and Trading facility in Ilocos Norte which will be managed by the Bacarra Zanja Multipurpose Cooperative.

“Through this project, agricultural products of Ilocos Norte will be consolidated and marketed in Metro Manila and other established Kadiwa Market centers,” explained Ms. Wilhelmina Castañeda, DA-RFO1 Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Division Chief, during the groundbreaking ceremony on February 22.

This facility was subsidized through the Enhanced KADIWA ni Ani at Kita Inclusive Food and Supply Chain, a financial assistance program to develop Farmers and Fisherfolk Cooperatives and Associations (FCAs) as reliable and efficient food commodity suppliers not only in the region but including high demand areas such as Metro-Manila.

The program has three types of financial grants purposely for packing facilities, consolidation, and KADIWA retailing.

The Bacarra Zanja MPC is one of the three qualified beneficiaries in the region to spearhead consolidation of agricultural produce in Ilocos Norte given the cooperative's years of proven management experience.

“Malaking tulong po ito (pertaining to the consolidation and trading facility) sa munisipyo ng Bacarra at sa probinsya ng Ilocos Norte,” said Ilocos Norte Matthew M. Manotoc who also shared his goal to set Ilocos Norte as 'a little province that will soon feed the country.'

“The Philippines is now enduring a food crisis. I know that Ilocos Norte is not one of those feeling the crisis but I do believe that Ilocos Norte can be one of the solutions to this,” he noted.

As per PSA 2019 data, the province of Ilocos Norte tops the production on garlic, onion, tomato, and mungbean besides the only province in the region remaining free from the African Swine Fever virus.

“May we continue to supplement the nation's food supply and be a great assistance to the food security problems the Philippines faces,” he added.



Meanwhile, the municipality of Vintar was also awarded a Php6M worth Rice Processing Center 1 which will be operated by Alviar Multi-Purpose Cooperative and a Php7.2M worth Solar Powered Irrigation System which will soon benefit farmers of the Beng-bengcag Solar Pump Farmers Association, Incorporated. ###



Representatives from LGU Rosales, LGU Villasis, and LGU Dingras visited on Marh 9 the Department of Agriculture Regional Field Office 1 for the turn-over ceremony of check worth Php5M

each in support to the establishment of cattle feedlot fattening project under the Livestock Banner Program in their respective localities.



They were joined by DA-RFO1 Regional Executive Director Nestor D. Domenden and RTD for Operations Erlinda F. Manipon.###

DA Ilocos inks pledge of commitment for BABay ASF



LA UNION - The DA-RFO 1 signs its commitment in support of the "Bantay ASF sa Barangay Program" or "BABay ASF" during the campaign's virtual launching on February 23, 2021 which was participated by DA-attached regional and provincial offices from Region 1, 2, 3 and CAR.

Dr. Annie Q. Bares, Chief of the Regulatory Division spearheaded the pledge of commitment signing together with other officials and employees of the DA Ilocos Region.

Consistent with the mandates of the BABay ASF, the DA-RFO 1 has already conducted various activities from February 16-19, 2021 particularly coordinating with the Provincial Veterinary Office of Ilocos Sur for the establishment of a quarantine checkpoint in Candon City, distribution of disinfectants to Ilocos Sur and Ilocos Norte.

Funds amounting to P4.5 million under the GAA FY 2021 was also approved to support the program.

On March 3, 4 and 5, 2021, orientation on the said program and workshops viz-

a-viz the recovery and rehabilitation of the hog industry will be conducted in the provinces of Pangasinan, La Union and Ilocos Sur.

Under the BABay ASF, the main key strategies are the creation of task force/team, implementation of biosecurity measures and surveillance and disease investigation activities, strengthening of quarantine protocols to manage and prevent the spread of ASF, promotion and awareness campaign through quad media, repopulation/restocking, among others.

To date, a total of 53 cities and municipalities in the region are considered are infected (red) zones, 26 are buffer (pink) zones, and 46 remain protected (green) zones.###

The Department of Agriculture Regional Field Office 1 held on March 9 a meeting with the Technical Working Group (RTWG) of the Rice Program for projects to level off before implementing this year.

This is to establish project complementation, strengthen equity in intervention allocation, and avoid program duplication among agencies involved in the RTWG.

The RTWG is spearheaded by DA-RFO1 with members namely, Philippine Statistics Authority, National Irrigation Administration, Philippine Rice Research Institute, Philippine Center for Postharvest Development



and Mechanization, Agricultural Training Institute, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, Land Bank of the Philippines, Development Bank of the Philippines, Bureau of

Plant Industry – NSQCS, Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation, National Food Authority, and Provincial Local Government Units as counterparts in program implementation.###

DA-RFO1 kicks-off women's month celebration, launches e-Kadiwa

San Fernando City, La Union – The Department of Agriculture Regional Field Office 1 kicks-off on March 8, its celebration of women's month with the launching of e-Kadiwa and opening of Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita trade fair.

Bearing the theme “Juana Laban sa Pandemya, Kaya!” DA RFO 1 Regional Executive Director Nestor D. Domenden expressed his sincere acknowledgement of women's contributions during this time of pandemic.

“Sa gitna ng laban kontra COVID-19, nariyan din ang ating mga frontliners na mga guro, mga sundalo, pulis, at higit sa lahat ang mga kababaihang nasa sector ng agrikultura na tumulong na bigyang kasiguruhan ang sapat na pagkain para sa lahat ng mamamayang Pilipino,” said RED Domenden.

As of 2020, the current labor force participation rate for women in DA-RFO1 is 54.73%.

“Tayong mga kababaihan we should be glad that there is a special day given to us to recognize our contribution, our big role,” said Regional Technical Director for Operations Erlinda F. Manipon.

One of the highlights of the ceremony is the awarding of plaque to Ms. Milagros Buenafe, 83, who is the top 6 awardee in the national search for Outstanding Rural Women in 2019.

Buenafe is the owner-manager of the successful Binmaley Rural Improvement Club seafood products, a fish processing business in Pangasinan.

The agri-trade fair was participated by 19 exhibitors namely Uncle Tom's Food Products, Farmer's Delight Food Products Manufacturing, Dapuyen's Vegan Delicacies, JB's Aqua

Farm and Seafood Products, Jomah's Special Banana Chips, Ann's Food Products, Familiar Table, CHADEL, Philippine Carabao Center, E.G Cruz Agri-Ventures Organic Farming, Rural Improvement Club Federation, Innovative Family Enterprise Development, Magnificent Fisherfolk & Payao Association, Ubagan Fisherfolk Association, San Pablo Multi-purpose Cooperative, National Food Authority, Alcala Onion Growers Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Caba La Union Farmer's & Fishermen Marketing, and John Escat Dressing Plant.

Meanwhile, the e-kadiwa market is an online platform to link producers with consumers. ###





Balungao corn harvest festival held

The Department of Agriculture in Ilocos Region through its Corn Banner Program recently conducted a field day on its 50-hectare model corn area established in Brgy. Rajal, Balungao, Pangasinan.

The project was established in September 2020, in collaboration with the Local Government Unit of Balungao, under the leadership of Mayor Ma. Theresa R. Peralta, other DA attached agencies and private corn seed companies. It aims to promote modern farm facilities in corn production while teaching farmer-cooperators new production technologies in corn through the clustering approach.

In his message during the field day activity, Field Operations Chief Dr. Florentino Adame, representing DA-RFO I Regional Executive Director Nestor D. Domenden, highlighted the importance of clustering and consolidation of farms in various priority commodities in the region as part of the component of the OneDA approach to address food security in the country.

The Mechanization Program which form part of the component of the 50-hectare model farm, according to Dr. Adame, is a great avenue for farmers to adapt farm technologies especially on the use of modern facilities and equipment such as the corn planter and harvester for a cost-effective corn farming techniques.

He likewise emphasized the importance of Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA) for farmers especially in availing of DA's interventions as this serves as basis of the DA in giving interventions such as production inputs like seeds, fertilizers, including assistance on farm machineries and equipment as well as capability trainings and seminars.

Finding hope on the repopulation program of DA on hogs, corn farmers will also benefit on this program with the expected increase in demand for corn feeds.

Dr. Adame also announced the conduct of a seminar-workshop for the

LGUs and corn farmers in the province to finalize their planting and harvesting targets.

Meanwhile, Balungao Mayor Ma. Teresa Peralta expressed gratitude to the Department of Agriculture in the Region for choosing the municipality of Balungao as a showcase of corn technologies through the corn model farm giving the town an opportunity to be known as one of the major corn producers in the region.

Atty. Marlyn Primicias-Agabas, former Pangasinan 6th District representative and wife of current Congressman of the 6th District of Pangasinan, Cong. Tyrone Agabas, also joined the DA and LGU officials during the field day where she reiterated the Congressman's full support on the development of agriculture not only for Balungao town but for the whole 6th district of Pangasinan.###





Dr. Jovita Datuin



Dr. Mary Jane Alcedo



Ms. Cathy Pastor



Ms. Jocelyn Tabali

DA-RFO1 entry bags 3rd place in reg'l research symposium

MMSU, Batac City – The Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Office 1's research paper titled: Enhancing Farmers' Adaptive Capacity to Climate Change Through Community-Based Participatory Action Research On Climate Resilient Agricultural Technologies: The San Emilio, Ilocos Sur Experience was awarded third place during the 32nd Ilocos Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development Consortium (ILAARRDEC) on March 16-17 via zoom.

The research was conducted in three barangays of San Emilio namely Kalumsing, Lancuas, and Sibsibbu from 2017-2019. In these areas, farmers are found to be vulnerable to climate change based on the Climate Risk Vulnerability Map of the Province of Ilocos Sur.

In past studies, smallholder farmers with minimal livelihood alternatives were identified to be very vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The 60 farmer-cooperators of this research belongs to this group.

Participatory Rural Appraisal was used to identify major climate hazards in the area - drought, typhoon, soil erosion, and landslides.

Climate Resilient Agriculture (CRA) technologies that could help farmers cope up with these climate risks were pointed out.

These were on the use of fermented feeds using locally available resources, use of Indigenous Micro-organisms (IMO) in crops and livestock production, crop-livestock integration, use of drought tolerant crops, use of stress variety of rice, root crop and fruit bearing tree production, use of organic fertilizer, drop irrigation, vermicomposting, mushroom production and value adding/commodity development.

The paper is authored by former AMIA focal person Dr. Mary Jane B. Alcedo, Dr. Jovita M. Datuin, Ms. Cathy B. Pastor, and Ms. Jocelyn Tabali. ###





IFED

Providing food for every Filipino family's table

At this time of pandemic, crops and egg production is an essential activity for households to have a ready food supply. The DA-RFO 1, through its Innovative Family Enterprise Development (IFED) Project, encourages farmers and their families to venture in poultry raising and backyard farming through the provision of free-range chicken and vegetable seeds. The project is initiated by the Research and Development Group in collaboration with the Local Government Units and farmers' cooperatives and associations in the region.



Weeds for you:

The Our Farm Republic drug for success



Not only flowers, weeds can also represent women. Meet Lea, the 'weedable.'

Owning a 5.6-hectare organic farm in Pangasinan, ex-politician Lea Astrud Santiago describes herself as ‘weedable’ redefining women’s role in agriculture as she shares her purpose in establishing and leading one of the best organic farms in Ilocos Region – the Our Farm Republic.

“It’s weed, but it’s edible. At the same time, it has medicinal value. Why? Weeds are everywhere kahit hindi mo siya itanim. Kahit hindi mo siya alagaan, it will grow. Pursigidong mabuhay kahit anong sitwasyon. Kahit ang hirap. Kahit gusto ka nang tanggalin. Ipapakita ko pa rin sa iyo ang halaga ko. Bakit

mo ako tatanggalin? Damo nga ako sa iyong paningin, pero alam mo ba, marami akong halaga. Pwede mo akong kainin at pwede kitang gamutin. Gusto ko kagaya ako ng iba. I’m common but somehow kapag tiningnan mo ako ng maigi, pag binigyan mo na ako ng atensyon, may value ako. So I’m also special. And I’ll prove to you that I am,” Leah proudly likens herself to a useful weed.

After retiring from public service in Marikina City in 2010, she went home to her mother’s hometown in Pangasinan and decided to manage their own family’s farm.

Rural areas, where most farms in the country are located, supposedly should offer a less polluted environment. But with the conventional practices of farmers such as the use of chemical pesticide and insecticide applications, their health is also at risk.

“We were also conventional farmers before. Pero bakit ako babalik sa probinsiya kung hindi ko rin ma-eejoy at magkakasakit ako? Kailangan kong piliin iyong paraan ng pagsasaka kung saan mag-iimprove ang kalusugan ko, lalala. The only way to do that is through organic. Kasi kung



gagamit pa rin ako ng chemical, butas na ang bulsa ko, may sakit pa ako,” she said.

“Kelangan ibalik natin ang sustansiya ng lupa at yakapin natin ang sistemang farming with a conscience,” she continued.

Farming with a conscience

More than economic gains, this became Lea's primary advocacy after OFR was certified as a techno-demo farm on organic agriculture in 2012.

She took the effort to learn everything through training and seminars from both private and government institutions like DA, ATI, and TESDA which made her one of the government's caliber partners in influencing and schooling farmers and rural women including groups from other regions when it comes to organic agriculture.

“You're earning from something na ang ganda. Hindi ka kumikita na nagtuturo ka ng hindi maganda sa iba. You are teaching them to go back to basics. You're teaching them to go

back in loving the nature,” she shared adding that honesty and credibility is also necessary in farming.

‘What you plant you eat and what you eat you sell,’ she further highlighted.

OFR eventually became first in the country to receive a three-in-one title – as a learning site, school for practical agriculture, and a farm tourism site.

But more than the titles she earned for the farm, Lea emphasized the importance of knowledge sharing after immersing herself further in communities during her farmer field school training way back 2013.

“Na-mold ako na kapag farmer ka at sa palagay mo mainam iyong practice mo, huwag kang maging madamot. Huwag mong sabihin na ako lang ang the best. Ito lang ang best practice. I-share mo. Para ‘pag dumami iyon eh di ang galing. Mawawala na iyong ‘gawat.’ Wala ng magugutom. Pare-pareho na kayong may good harvest,” she said.





**Kelangan ibalik natin ang
sustansiya ng lupa at
yakapin natin ang sistemang
farming with a conscience.**

I wanted to live in a farm na kung saan anytime, any season, meron at meron akong ma-aani. If you are a farmer, dapat hindi ka nagugutom.

Gawat

Upon her return to Pangasinan, Lea heard of the Pangasinense word ‘gawat’ which means ‘hunger season.’ A time when farmers in their area don’t have anything to plant after harvesting rice or corn – their main crops.

Farmers are the producers of food yet they still go hungry. This realization then helped her identify her needs and wants in a farm.

“I wanted to live in a farm na kung saan anytime, any season, meron at meron akong ma-aani. If you are a farmer, dapat hindi ka nagugutom. Dapat marami kang pagkain. Enough (food) not just to feed your family, but to share with your neighbors and to sell,” she explained.

OFR’s first crops produced were her favorites such as tomatoes, cucumber, leafy vegetables, and over time, edible

flowers and weeds were included. A lot of people had asked her how to start a farm and as simple as it is, she advised them to plant what they love.

“Hindi ka pwedeng makinig sa iba na sasabihin sa iyo, eto ang itanim mo kasi ito ang uso ngayon. Ito ang mabenta. Hindi. Kasi kung may inaasam ka na bagay, like ako mahilig ako sa kamatis, I started doon sa gusto kong kainin kasi you look forward to harvesting it. So



Dapat marami kang pagkain. Enough (food) not just to feed your family, but to share with your neighbors and to sell.

kapag meron kang inaasam na kapag inalagaan ko ito, ito iyong makukuha kong bunga. It is going to make your work easier,” she shared.

What to see at OFR

Aside from its processed products such as pickled greens, wine, and the popular edible flowers and weeds among tourists, Our Farm Republic offers lush gardens of vegetables, herbs, and spices that were creatively landscaped using

recycled materials. OFR also has a rice area cultivated with pigmented rice and in some areas were grown fruit trees native to the country.

The farm is integrated with animal raising on native pigs, free-range chicken, goats, goose, duck, and tilapia production.

Harvests are regularly taken to Manila and some are sold at one of the malls of Dagupan City. Once tourism is in full swing, visitors are always welcome to

experience its ‘pick and pay’ scheme.

Lea still continues to adapt innovations in pursuing her ultimate dream for OFR to become a premier farm tourism site in the country.

Though challenges would always be around, nothing would stop a ‘weedable’ whose vision for organic agriculture in the country is more than just for her selfish pursuit. ###



OFW couple finds hope in ANYO loan program

Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are considered as the country's modern day heroes due to their significant contribution to the Philippine economy. Their remittances make up 9.2% of the country's gross domestic product.

However, as the global pandemic struck in the early part of CY 2020, many of these modern day heroes faced unemployment and repatriation due to COVID 19. Many were left unprepared of facing the future with no jobs and source of steady income.

Such circumstances brought OFWs like Engr. Ricardo Gasgonia, 48, and his wife Armie Reola Gasgonia, who both felt hopeless and worried of what life would be for them and their three children after being laid-off from his work as Mechanical Engineer in Fujaira, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"We were never prepared for this. Akala namin, it's the end of the road for us," Engr. Gasgonia told the RAFIS team in an interview as he recalls how the pandemic affected him and his family.

"Buti na lang, nandiyan ang gobierno upang tumulong para makapagpatuloy ng buhay at maka-survive," he added.

Spark of hope

Having been laid-off from his company, Engr. Gasgonia was left with no other choice but to go back home in the Philippines. But prior to his decision of leaving UAE together with his wife who also works as a teacher, a churchmate shared with them about the Balik Probinsiya-Bagong Pag-asa Program of the Duterte administration which encourages OFWs to access loans or credit assistance from the government for possible business venture.

Using the online platform, Engr. Ricky and his wife searched about the B2P2 program and came across the Department of Agriculture - Agricultural Credit Policy Council (DA-ACPC) website which led them to become aware about the AgriNegosyo (ANYO) Loan assistance program.

Without wasting time and opportunity, the couple immediately inquired on the needed requirements

to avail of the credit assistance with zero interest.

Learning about the requirements and process in availing said assistance, they sent letters thru online signifying their interest as borrowers under the program. They were then required to attend webinars and trainings to prepare them for their agribusiness venture.

Getting home in the Philippines amidst the pandemic where movement is restricted, Engr. Gasgonia busied himself reading agri-related IEC materials and watched other seminars online which gave him a better understanding on the new field he wanted to try which is in agriculture, a field very far from his engineering profession.

Being able now to manage their



Huwag ng matakot mag 'Balik Pilipinas' gaya namin. Napakalaki po ng potential kapag umuwi kayo, you just have to make the right choice. Ngayon ko naramdaman na sincere talaga ang ating gobyernong na matulungan tayo, lalo na ng DA, upang malagpasan natin ang dagok na dulot ng pandemya.

Faith Rice Mill (FRM) in Binalonan, Pangasinan, an investment they've made as OFWs for 15 years, gave them a new sense of purpose especially when their ANYO loan assistance was approved.

On January, 2021, the DA-ACPC through the SADECO lending conduit released their loan amounting to P300,000.00 which was used for the establishment of the FRM agricultural supply and area expansion for their rice mill.

"Kung naumpisahan lang sana namin 10 years ago, mas maganda," told Engr. Gasgonia referring to his agribusiness enterprise now which is the rice mill and agri-supply combined.

"Unti-unti kong natuklasan na ang saya pala dito sa pagsasaka. This is really something else. It is result-oriented. Magaan sa pakiramdam na yong negosyo mo ay nakakatulong sa iba lalo na sa mga magsasaka," he added.

Gaining confidence and enthusiasm to upgrade his business, he constantly coordinates with experienced individuals who have been in the farming business like leaders of

farmers' associations and cooperatives in Binalonan including the Office of the Municipal Agriculturist and the DA-PREC located in Sta. Barbara, Pangasinan.

Sharing his future plans, he wanted to upgrade the milling capacity of the rice mill from 1,000 kilograms per hour to one-tonner and would eventually move to a more strategic location like along the highway so that more customers would be able to conveniently access their business.

"Very promising po talaga ang agriculture business. Things are improving," Engr. Gasgonia said.

Asked if he would still go back abroad when given the opportunity, without second thought, he said he now prefers managing his own business.

"Hindi na. magnenegosyo na ako dito. If we had known this business sa agriculture ten years ago, ibang iba na siguro ang estado namin ngayon," he added.

Finding the freedom that he now enjoys having no boss to work for, Engr. Gasgonia is genuinely excited at his new found passion in agribusiness.

"Every day we are very excited. Narevitalize ako knowing I have my own business. I work at my own pace."

There is hope in the government

Grateful for the opportunity that the government has given him, Engr. Gasgonia shared some advice to OFWs like him to have hope in the government. "Huwag tayong mawalan ng pag-asa. Andiyan po ang gobierno na handang tumulong sa atin. It is not yet the end of the world dahil may pandemya."

"Huwag ng matakot mag 'Balik Pilipinas' gaya namin. Napakalaki po ng potential kapag umuwi kayo, you just have to make the right choice. Ngayon ko naramdaman na sincere talaga ang ating gobyernong na matulungan tayo, lalo na ng DA, upang malagpasan natin ang dagok na dulot ng pandemya," Engr. Gasgonia said as he added how this experience changed his mindset about the government. ###

RETIRED but not yet tired

The story of Ms. Milagros Buenafe

For many, retirement spells summer vacation on the beach, walking along with their dogs on the stretch of the shore line wearing a long beach gown over a hat; joining a cruise ship or maybe wandering in the malls, or even doing “APOstolic” mission.

However, some are redefining what it means to retire.

They still choose to reinvent themselves and achieve the kind of fulfillment and meaning in their lives. They wanted to do more, looking

for more worthwhile activities with their desire to change the world and leave a legacy.

This may have been true in the case of Ms. Milagros Buenafe, 83, a former government employee from Brgy. Buenlag, Binmaley, Pangasinan, the owner-manager of Binmaley Rural Improvement Club (BRIC) Seafood Products.

Ms. Buenafe is a former Population Commission Officer of Binmaley town. A four-year Secretarial graduate who works as a



Bangus Sisig Spicy



Bangus Slopes



Marinated Bangus



Bangus Shanghai Roll



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Bingus Saig Original



Bingus Embudo



Bingus Bary



Bingus Jr

secretary of the then 3rd District House Speaker Perez, she now enjoys running her family's fish processing business and at the same time helping others become self-reliant individuals by sharing her knowledge, skills and resources on fish processing and sustainable fishing enterprises.

Humble beginnings

Aling Milagros' passion on fish processing started in 1989 after having attended a training on fish deboning sponsored by the Municipal Government of Binmaley through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

Seeing the potential of milkfish processing business as a profitable source of income for the group of women that she organized, she started her small processing venture in her backyard and sold the finished products to the nearest towns.

At first, success wasn't easy for Aling Milagro's business venture as it had its share of ups and downs. Without capital to start on, she led the members of the organization to venture into bangus retailing business by purchasing through credit from vendors in the local market. However, she ended up borrowing from '5-6' money lenders with high interest rates, making her family even more oppose to continue on with her milkfish processing business.

This discouragement from her family has not dampen the high spirits

of Aling Milagros. She went out from her comfort zone and asked for the assistance of BFAR together with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Science and Technology. Through these government agencies, she and her group was able to acquire financial assistance as well as tools and equipment for use in their fish processing business.

Her breakthrough

Aling Milagro's business breakthrough started in 2004 when she joined the agri-fishery trade fair sponsored by the Department of Agriculture in Ilocos Region where they could sell and exhibit their products.

Her attendance provided her the opportunity to expand her marketing linkages, thus creating higher demand on her products.

During the pandemic for instance, her products have reached to as far as Bulacan, Parañaque, Metro Manila, Makati and Antipolo due to the increasing numbers of resellers and retailers of her products.

Local malls, like the Robinsons as well as restaurants in Pangasinan signified interest to be supplied with her products too.

With the continuing demand of processed milkfish products, Aling Milagros was able to produce more value-adding activities as it now reached around 25 locally-made variants to include marinated bangus in three flavors (spicy, original and

sweet and spicy), deep smoke (spicy and butterfly style), relyeno, siomai, shanghai rolls, bangus sisig, bangus kilawin, bangus skin (chicharong bulaklak), bangus longganisa, bangus nugget and buttered bangus skin, among others.

At present, the BRIC Seafood Products is supplying around 10 tons of various processed milkfish to NCR and within Luzon area, and now expanding to tilapia and hito processing.

With the increasing demand of the seafood processed products, the 18 hectares fish cages of Aling Milagros' family may not be even enough to supply the needed raw materials. Nonetheless, she was able to establish better linkages to the owners of fish cages in the nearby towns where she gets the supply on a wholesale basis.

During peak season, particularly on the months of March, April and “ber” months where the demands of her products is higher, Aling Milagros provides job opportunities to mothers and young alike as she hires more than the regular employees on an on-call basis.

Her secret of success

Sharing the secret of her success, Aling Milagros identified hard work and perseverance as among her ways to reach her goal. Sharing whatever she has, especially her skills and knowledge in running the business paved the way for a meaningful success.

To do this, she conducts trainings and seminars for the mothers and the youth who are interested to learn the basics



Milagros Buenafe at 83, and definitely not yet tired.

of fish processing and seafood business operations for free.

Having blessed with 12 children, and now all professionals, Aling Milagros wanted to be remembered as the kind, generous and hardworking fellow who wanted to see her brand at the international market.

For now, she has been closely working with officials from BFAR and DOST in

tandem with the Pangasinan Development Entrepreneurs to prepare her way of exporting her products outside the country.

With the total net worth of P3M today, indeed, Aling Milagros' success has truly reinvented herself driven by her desire for a purposeful life after retirement. She is retired but definitely not yet tired. ###

thank you
retirees





Danilo Flores,
18 years in service



Cecilia Cabatu,
42 years in service



Gil Datuin (+),
39 years in service



Imelda Saladino,
35 years in service



Lolita Nones (+),
41 years in service



Leticia Romero,
46 years in service



Josephine Cabanban,
37 years in service



Ireneo Mandac,
37 years in service



Gilda Rodriguez,
41 years in service



Myrna Enriquez,
38 years in service



Nicanor Revilla,
37 years in service



Romeo De Mayo,
39 years in service



Daisy Abrigo,
33 years in service



Thelma Lictaoa
36 years in service



Teresita Peralta,
33 years in service



Nestor Burgos,
37 years in service

juana
laban sa pandemya,
kaya!



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