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MANILA BULLETIN:

Nolcom delivers aid for storm victims in Batanes via cargo-sling operation

BY FREDDIE LAZARO
Nov 24, 2024 04:57 PM

TUGUEGARAO CITY, Cagayan – The Armed Forces Northern Luzon Command has successfully executed its first-ever cargo sling operation as part of ongoing relief efforts for typhoon-affected communities in Batanes.
Lt. Col. Jaime T. Ferrer, Nolcom spokesperson, said that Black Hawk helicopters from the 205th Tactical Helicopter Wing of the Armed Forces conducted the airlift using sling-load techniques to transport critical relief supplies from BRP Davao del Sur (LD-602), anchored off Basco, to the Basco Provincial Capitol Field.
The cargo sling operation highlighted Nolcom's improved operational capabilities.

The mission involves transporting approximately 300 tons of relief goods with several sling sorties scheduled over the next two days to ensure timely delivery.
Lt. Gen. Fernyl G. Buca, Nolcom commander, said that the operation reflects the command's increased proficiency in disaster response. "We will continue to conduct cargo sling operations until all the essential goods are delivered to those in need," he said.

Meanwhile, various groups, including the Solid North party-list, continue to bring aid for typhoon and flood victims in Region 2 or Cagayan Valley.
La Paz, Abra Mayor JB Bernos, president of Solid North party-list, said they went to Gattaran, Lal-lo, and Baggao towns and will also bring relief items to families in Buguey, Santa Ana, Aparri, and other towns in Cagayan.
"It is our responsibility to take care of our brothers/sisters in the North, whenever we can," Bernos said.

The Department of Agriculture in Region 2 reported that damage to agriculture caused by the three successive tropical cyclone and and flooding in Cagayan Valley region has reached P3.36 billion.

However, DA-Region 2 Regional Executive Director Rose Mary Aquino said that this figure is subject to validation.

https://mb.com.ph/2024/11/24/nolcom-delivers-aid-for-storm-victims-in-batanes

MANILA BULLETIN:

DA seeks release of seized frozen mackerel for relief efforts

BY JEL SANTOS
Nov 24, 2024 04:03 PM

DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. (JEL SANTOS/MB PHOTO)

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has called on the Bureau of Customs (BOC) to release 580 metric tons of confiscated frozen mackerel to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to bolster relief operations and food security.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. made the request in a letter to Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio on Nov. 18, citing laboratory tests by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) that confirmed the fish is safe for human consumption.

“Consequently, the fish products are deemed fit for immediate release and can be utilized to address food security needs, especially in relief operations,” Laurel said in a statement.

“This initiative would support the DSWD and the Department of Agriculture’s ongoing efforts to provide essential aid to victims of the recent typhoon,” he added.

The shipment, valued at ₱178.5 million and consisting of 21 container vans, was seized at the Manila International Container Port in early October for lacking sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances.

It was intercepted during a joint operation by the DA’s Inspectorate and Enforcement Office and the BOC.

Laurel stressed the urgency of distributing the fish to typhoon-affected communities, emphasizing its role in addressing immediate food security needs.

https://mb.com.ph/2024/11/24/release-of-seized-frozen-mackerel

MANILA BULLETIN:

Escudero: Renationalization of agri services will uplift, revitalize sector

BY HANNAH L. TORREGOZA
Nov 24, 2024 02:19 PM

Senate President Francis “Chiz” G. Escudero renewed his push for the renationalization of agricultural services to uplift and revitalize the country’s agriculture sector, by bringing back the control and supervision of agricultural facilities to the national level, particularly the Department of Agriculture (DA) and its attached agencies.

Speaking at the 25th Anniversary of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc. held recently, Escudero said he has been pushing to renationalize the agriculture sector which has been devolved to local government units (LGUs) together with the health sector.

Renationalization works by bringing assets or industries that were previously privatized back into government ownership.

“There are inconsistencies in the implementation of programs and policies that affect the agriculture sector in each locality,” the Senate leader noted.

“If you have someone with a background as a farmer then you can expect policies in favor of the sector. Otherwise, there is no guarantee that their interests would be prioritized,” Escudero said.

Since 1998, when he first served as representative of the First District of Sorsogon, Escudero said he has been pushing a measure seeking to renationalize the country’s agriculture sector.

Republic Act No. 7160 or the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, devolved agricultural and health services to the LGUs as part of moves to provide them with greater autonomy.

Cognizant of the feedback from stakeholders of the agriculture sector during consultations conducted during the review of the implementation of the LGC, Escudero said it is imperative to heed their strong desire to renationalize agricultural services in order to counter problems such as the entry of the African Swine Fever or ASF.

“May problema sa iba’t ibang polisiya kaugnay ng iba’t ibang regulasyon at pagbabawal na konektado sa mga bagay tulad ng ASF, mga regulasyon galing sa mga LGU na walang kontrol ang DA (There are problems about different policies when it comes to the different regulations and prohibitions in connection with problems like the ASF; regulations that come from the LGUs and which the DA do not have any control),” he pointed out.

He also cited Republic Act 8435 or the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997 which necessitates the DA’s full administrative control and supervision over all personnel in the field who are involved in agriculture and fishery.

Escudero also noted that agricultural extension workers or the people in the field could be better utilized to support the renewed push to revitalize the agriculture sector.

“In contemplating whether or not to revive renationalization, sana maging solusyon ng administrasyon na timbangin nila ‘yung renationalization ng agriculture sector muli para hawak ng kalihim ang lahat ng programang agrikultura (I hope the solution of the administration is that they consider the renationalization of the agriculture sector again so that the secretary holds all the agricultural programs),” the lawmaker said.

https://mb.com.ph/2024/11/24/escudero-renationalization-of-agri-services-will-uplift-revitalize-sector

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

PDI reporters earn recognition from CMFR, DA biotech program

By: Gillian Villanueva - @inquirerdotnet

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:44 AM November 24, 2024

RECOGNITIONS (L-R) Alden Monzon, Jordeene Lagare and Kathleen de Villa receive their trophies after winning in the 2024 Jose G. Burgos Biotech Journalism Award in this photo taken on Nov. 21. —Grig C. Montegrande

MANILA, Philippines — Reporters of the Philippine Daily Inquirer (PDI) were recognized for their work in two separate events this week.
Jane Bautista made it as one of the panelists in the 34th Jaime V. Ongpin Journalism Seminar (JVOJS), while Kathleen de Villa, Jordeene Lagare and Alden Monzon were among the winners at the 2024 Jose G. Burgos Jr. Awards for Biotechnology Journalism.

Organized by the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), this year's JVOJS recognized five journalists from print and online media platforms for the quality of their work in the context of best practice and media ethics, and featured them in a panel discussion on current issues affecting the media and its autonomy.

https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2008429/pdi-reporters-earn-recognition-from-cmfr-da-biotech-program

THE MANILA TIMES:

DA, academe teach organic farming

By Philippine News Agency
November 24, 2024

ILOILO CITY — The Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Central Philippine University (CPU) have collaborated on a series of events to raise awareness of organic agriculture as the nation celebrates Organic Agriculture Month this November.

"Our purpose is to promote the importance of organic agriculture, achieve food security, global competitiveness, environmental integrity and alleviating poverty," said CPU outreach program coordinator Dr. Joyce Wendam in an interview on Nov. 22.

Wendam said it is important that farmers are engaged in organic farming.

They are required to devote 7 percent of their production area to organic agriculture, but it is better if they go higher, she said.

"It is important that we promote the adoption of organic agriculture because of food safety, the sustainable livelihood of farmers, environmental protection, and then there is the promotion of social justice, and disaster risk and mitigating measures," she added.

The series of activities kicked off on Nov. 18 with the opening of a trade fair, while the highlights were from Nov. 20 to 22.

These included an organic research symposium for students and professionals, an organic quiz bee for students, a folk media (binalaybay and composo) competition for farmers, a poster-making competition and an organic cooking contest.

She said the activities engaged the students as one way of enticing them to choose agriculture.

"Our students are the successor generation. They have to succeed our aging farmers. The role of our youth is more on agri-entrepreneurship, so there will be value-adding and money in agriculture," Wendam said.

https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/11/24/regions/da-academe-teach-organic-farming/2010193

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Coffee and muscovado: Innovations to boost yield, quality

John Eiron R. Francisco
November 24, 2024

To most Filipinos, breakfast is not complete without a cup of coffee, be it black, with sugar, or with sugar and milk/creamer. The popularity of coffee encouraged pricey coffee shops to mushroom around town, offering a menu of special blends.

However, the coffee and sugar, specifically muscovado, production in the country are suffering with low yields and other concerns despite the acknowledged ideal conditions in the country for growing the two crops.

The Department of Science and Technology's Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic, and Natural Resources Research and Development (DOST-PCAARRD) is eyeing to increase the country's sugarcane and coffee yields, reduce fertilizer and labor costs, and improve the quality of these two commodities through science and technology (S&T) innovations.

In a webinar titled "Kape at Asukal: A Webinar on S&T-based Coffee and Muscovado Sugar Production and Processing Technologies" on November 6, DOST-PCAARRD Executive Director Dr. Reynaldo Ebora said the agency is set on a clear path for agricultural development from 2022 to 2028.

Central to their agenda is the implementation of technological interventions, resources, and policies designed to fortify the country's agricultural economy, such as in sugarcane, including muscovado, and coffee production.

Double yield for sugarcane

Sugarcane, a vital crop in the Philippines, ranks among its top five major agricultural products. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), its production reached nearly 21.7 million metric tons (MMT) in 2023, contributing an estimated P76 billion annually to the economy.

Ebora emphasized that the DOST-PCAARRD, through its Industry Strategic Science and Technology Plan Information System for sugarcane, has set ambitious targets: to double yields from 60 tons per hectare to 120 tons per hectare, while simultaneously cutting fertilizer costs by 25 percent and reducing labor requirements by 50 percent.

“We are happy to announce that through modern research, this objective is being fulfilled despite the challenges,” he said.

Among the innovative technologies are Nutrio, a microbial-based foliar fertilizer, and Automated Furrow Irrigation System (AFIS).

AFIS comprises a main controller, field control nodes, soil moisture sensors, water advance flow sensors, and other components to boost productivity and reduce production costs.

Field trial results from a 1.5-hectare farm in Floridablanca, Pampanga, demonstrated that AFIS led to taller sugarcane stalks, yields 58 percent higher compared to conventional furrow irrigation, while water savings reached 47 percent.

Additionally, sugar recovery per ton of cane was 1.98 Lkg/TC, compared to just 1.48 Lkg/TC in conventional irrigation. (Lkg/TC stands for 50 kg of sugar per ton of cane.)

Challenges in muscovado industry

However, Jhoanna N. Bolencis, head of the Technology Transfer and Commercialization Section in DOST Region VI, shared that the local muscovado industry faces several challenges.

Muscovado is a type of partially refined to unrefined sugar with a strong molasses content and flavor.

One major issue is the high production cost mainly due to its labor-intensive process. The traditional vat method for cooking adds to the cost.

Weather conditions also create significant difficulties. The peak milling season runs from October to March, but heavy rains, especially in October, often disrupt production.

“Rain is the enemy,” Bolencis explained, as it damages crops, delays production, and causes problems in drying bagasse, a by-product used as fuel in muscovado production.

The quality of muscovado sugar is another concern. When it rains, the moisture content increases, requiring longer cooking time, but resulting in darker muscovado. While it’s difficult to standardize the color, it is kept within an acceptable range.

Improving muscovado production

To help improve production, new crushing equipment has been introduced by the Science department that assists millers for more efficient process, although the old machines can still extract cane juice.

Additionally, there are ongoing studies on the authenticity of muscovado sugar due to reports of fake or reprocessed muscovado being sold in the market. Bolencis finds this concerning, as many people choose muscovado for its reputation as a healthier alternative to refined white sugar.

She warned that fake muscovado could harm consumers, as it may not provide the same benefits.

Muscovado sugar has lower sucrose content (85 percent to 95 percent) compared to refined sugar (99.9 percent). It also has lower glycemic index (between 55 to 65), while refined sugar has 65 to 70.

Muscovado, being unrefined, retains its natural molasses—which contains the minerals potassium, calcium, magnesium and iron. Also, the molasses slows down the digestion and absorption of sugars into the bloodstream, aiding for a stable blood sugar levels.

The refined white sugar has virtually no vitamins and minerals as the refining process removes the molasses and nutrients.

The United States Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service (USDA FAS) reports that demand for muscovado sugar is expected to rise in the Philippines, driven by an increasing interest in healthy and organic foods, and already rank as the eighth largest muscovado producer globally, contributing 0.8 percent to the total world output, while India leads with 71.3 percent share.

Asked about the assistance the Science department can offer to small muscovado millers, Bolencis said that the DOST provides step-by-step support.

These are basic food hygiene under the Food and Safety Consultancy Program, and the assistance with Good Manufacturing Practices to help producers comply with the Food and Drug Administration standards for packaging and secure a license to operate.

She emphasized that these support prepare millers not only to meet local standards but also to eventually enable them to export their products.

“There are three main buyers for muscovado: households, institutions, and the export market,” she shared.

Coffee growing in PHL

On improving coffee production, the goal, Ebora said, is to increase the yield from 0.54 kilograms of dried cherries per tree to 2.1 kilograms, while also enhancing the quality of local coffee to meet Grade 1 standards for green coffee beans and achieve a Q-grade score of at least 82 for cup quality.

Among the technologies for coffee developed by researchers are post-harvest machinery, such as the nondestructive moisture meter for coffee beans; a greenhouse-type solar dryer with a biomass-fired furnace designed for rainy or cloudy weather; and a village-level coffee depulper, Ebora said.

Additionally, molecular markers have been developed for pests, diseases, yield, and aroma of insect-resistant Arabica and Liberica varieties, which can be

used for future research, while efforts are ongoing to find faster methods in propagating coffee seedlings, he added.

According to the International Coffee Organization, global coffee production saw a slight increase of 0.1 percent, reaching 168.2 million bags during the 2022-2023 period.

However, consumption decreased by 2 percent, totaling 173.1 million bags. In its recent 2023-2024 report, coffee consumption is expected to grow by 2.2 percent, reaching an estimated 177 million bags.

Asst. Prof. Angelbert D. Cortez from the National Coffee Research, Development, and Extension Center at Cavite State University (CvSU) said during the forum that many coffee-producing countries, particularly those in the coffee belt, benefit significantly from the crop as a vital source of income.

The top five coffee producers, the USDA-FAS revealed, are: Brazil, Vietnam, Colombia, Ethiopia, and Indonesia. These countries account for around 39 percent of global coffee production. Brazil leads the market, contributing 66.3 million bags, reflecting a 6 percent increase from 2020 to 2023.

In contrast, the Philippines ranks 22nd in global coffee production, with approximately 450,060 metric tons, or 0.3 percent of the global share.

According to the USDA FAS, local coffee production decreased by 5 percent from 2022 to 2023, despite the country's ideal conditions for growing commercial coffee varieties, such as Arabica, Robusta, Excelsa, and Liberica. The country's low self-sufficiency rate at only about 15 percent in 2021—means that imports remain high.

Cortez said the government should work to expand this gap to 50 percent by enhancing local production—a goal aligned with the Science department's vision to increase yield through innovation.

He added that it is essential to expand the total land area devoted to coffee plantations, which involves increasing the number of coffee trees, boosting the yield of coffee cherries, and improving green coffee beans production.

On a local scale, the Philippines holds an advantage, as the USDA FAS mentioned, as it can cultivate viable coffee varieties commercially.

Among the varieties, Robusta dominates the production, contributing 73.3 percent, followed by Arabica at 19.8 percent, Excelsa at 6.1 percent, and Liberica at just 0.8 percent.

Coffee production varies across the country's regions. From 2019 to 2023, coffee production saw a modest average annual increase of 0.004 percent. In 2023, production rose by 0.2 percent.

The total area planted to coffee also increased by 0.2 percent, while the number of bearing trees grew by 1.1 percent.

While the increase is small, it has the potential to significantly impact the local coffee industry, Cortez said.

R&D in coffee processing

Moreover, Cortez shared some of the technologies that CvSU—one of the

institutions in the country engaged in research and development of coffee—is using, including the cultivation of Liberica coffee plantlets through somatic embryogenesis.

He explained that cultivating Liberica presents unique challenges because it is a cross-pollinated variety, where the seeds from cherries cannot be used for planting.

“We need to plant from the stem cuttings taken from the mother trees to maintain the genetic diversity or characteristics of Liberica,” he explained.

Cortez highlighted the automated temporary immersion bioreactor system housed in a growth chamber. It helps control time, light, temperature, and humidity, aiding in the growth of tissue-cultured embryos.

Another is the Cellular Plant Tissue Culture Growth Chamber that is designed to create ideal conditions for growing tissue cultures.

CvSU also uses a portable automated coffee depulper, which helps remove the outer layer of the cherries before the next processing steps. A demucilager is used to speed up the removal of mucilage, reducing fermentation time.

Additionally, CvSU uses a hauler for hulling and a spray dryer for creating instant coffee. These technologies aim to produce locally made instant coffee, in addition to beans and ground coffee.

The roasting machine at CvSU can roast up to 10 kg of beans in just 20 minutes.

The center uses an in-site soil parameter estimation system with a near-infrared soil texture classifier, paired with a drone system. This technology helps monitor the soil’s nutrient levels and determines whether it’s suitable for growing specific coffee varieties.

According to Cortez, CvSU engineers are working to profile the ideal soil for cultivating different types of coffee across the country.

https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/11/24/coffee-and-muscovado-innovations-to-boost-yield-quality/

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Sustainable paper mulch developed for agri, reduction of plastic

Idohna Leah B. Jomao-as and Samuel Balmedina | S&T News Service
November 24, 2024

An eco-friendly material was developed that supports sustainable agriculture by helping improve soil health, enhance crop yield, and reduce plastic waste.

The paper mulch that the Department of Science and Technology's Forest Products Research and Development Institute (DOST-FPRDI) has developed is using waste materials that was designed to reduce reliance on synthetic and polymer materials in farming.

The Institute recently entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with JC Del Mundo Sustainable Farming School in Brgy. Bangin, Agoncillo, Batangas. The school serves as a demonstration farm to help train the barangay's residents interested in organic farming.

Currently, the paper mulch is being field-tested at the school, with preliminary promising results.

The paper mulch is made from locally sourced, biodegradable materials wherein 20 percent is from abaca stripping waste and 80 percent from old corrugated cartons.

It easily breaks down naturally into the soil, providing nutrients to crops while suppressing weed growth and pest inhabitation, conserving soil moisture and maintaining a stable temperature of 35 degrees Celsius (C) compared to synthetic mulch which temperature shoots up to 39°C to 40°C.

This contributes to better crop management and lessens the environmental impact associated with traditional plastic mulches.

DOST Secretary Renato U. Solidum Jr. said: “The paper mulch technology is one of the innovations that is set to address the increasing demand for sustainable materials and practices in agriculture in our country. It will particularly help address the rising concerns on plastic pollution and soil degradation.”

For his part, DOST-FPRDI Director Rico J. Cabangon said: ”The Institute is currently working with various agricultural stakeholders to conduct field tests and ensure the product’s adaptability to different farming environments.”

This innovative product is part of the Institute’s continued efforts to harness natural materials in creating environmentally friendly solutions. It is poised to contribute to more sustainable and productive agricultural systems in the Philippines.

The DOST-FPRDI is the research and development arm of the DOST and is part of the Philippine government’s efforts to build a strong science and technology ecosystem in the country.

It remains at the forefront of scientific research on wood and non-wood utilization and conservation, pioneering initiatives that promote the responsible use of forest resources while safeguarding the biodiversity.

https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/11/24/sustainable-paper-mulch-developed-for-agri-reduction-of-plastic/