

PGMA appoints Fondevilla as DA chief

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo appointed Atty. Bernie G. Fondevilla as the new Secretary of Agriculture, replacing Sec. Arthur C. Yap.

A fisherman's son from Corcuera, Romblon, Fondevilla was former undersecretary in charge of DA attached agencies and corporations, and concurrent DA chief of staff and executive director of the DA's National Agricultural and Fishery Council (NAFC).

President Arroyo swore him into office March 8, 2010 in Malacanang, along with other newly-appointed Cabinet members and top government officials.

Yap resigned to seek a congressional seat (3rd in Bohol in the May 2010 national elections.

He turned over the reins of the DA leadership to Fondevilla at simple rites March 10, before a jam-packed audience of DA officials and staff, agri-fishery sector leaders, and guests at the DA-BSWM Convention Hall.

(Pls turn to p2)



Agriculture Secretary Bernie G. Fondevilla (5th from left) receives the DA flag from former DA chief Arthur C. Yap, during the turnover ceremonies, March 10, 2010, at the DA-BSWM Convention Hall, Quezon City. Joining them are (from left): ass't. secretaries Brian Balingit, Clayton Olalia, and Dennis Araullo; undersecretaries Belinda Gonzales, Bernadette Romulo-Puyat, Segfredo Serrano, and Salvador Salacup; and Ass't. Sec. Preceles Manzo (partly hidden). Not in photo are Ass't. Sec. Eduardo Nolasco and Undersecretary Joel Rudinas.

DA allots initial P882 M for El Niño interventions

The Department of Agriculture has earmarked an initial P882 million to fund interventions aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of El Niño, particularly in hardly hit 14 provinces in Luzon and the Visayas, where estimated losses in palay and corn alone have reached more than P7 billion, as of February 22, 2010.

DA Secretary Bernie G. Fondevilla, who also chairs the inter-agency Presidential Task Force on El Niño, said the mitigation measures include cloud-seeding operations, provision of shallow tube wells (STWs) and water pump sets, monitoring of possible outbreak of pests and diseases.

He said government will also provide food aid to affected farming and fishing families under the Emergency Food Assistance

Program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). In this regard, the DA regional field units in El Niño-hit regions are already drawing up with respective local government units the master list of beneficiaries.

Other interventions include hiring El Niño farmer-victims as emergency workers to repair farm-to-market roads and irrigation facilities; and enrolling qualified farmer-victims in skills training programs of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

The cloudseeding operations are being supervised by the DA's Bureau of Soils and Water Management (DA-BWSM) in cooperation with the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Service Administration (PAGASA) and the Philippine

Air Force (PAF).

As of February 22, 2010, the DA Central Action Center (DACAC) said the estimated damage reached P7.02 billion.

(Pls turn to p6)

P860-M projects to benefit Mindanao farmers, ruralfolk

More investment opportunities await Mindanao farmers, ruralfolk and entrepreneurs, as the Department of Agriculture's Mindanao Rural Development Program (DA-MRDP) is set to construct this year more than P860-million worth of farm-to-market roads (FMRs), bridges, irrigation systems, solar driers, and postharvest facilities.

"We are frontloading these in infrastructure projects as these

(Pls turn to p13)

Instant agri info for only P7

Farmers, fisherfolk and the general public can now get instant, credible information by simply calling designated numbers, for a flat rate of a little over P7 per call, or by texting.

They can ask current prices of basic commodities, where to sell their produce, how to control crop pests and diseases, and for consumers where to buy cheaper vegetables, pork and chicken.

Such service is offered by the Department of Agriculture in partnership with the Philippine Long Distance

(Pls turn to p13)

Of legacy, touching lives

During his four and a half years of service as the country's 'food czar,' Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap has undoubtedly left an indelible footprint and legacy.

Lifting some attributes from the plaque of appreciation given him by incoming Sec. Bernie G. Fondevilla and members of the DA executive committee, during the March 10, 2010 turnover ceremonies, Sec. Yap is cited "for leading the country's agri-fishery sector to a renaissance from two decades of under-investment, allowing it to register uninterrupted growth for 16 quarters, thereby enhancing the productivity and incomes of small farmers, fishers and entrepreneurs, providing adequate and affordable basic food to consumers, and generating 2.2 million jobs from 2005 to 2009;

"For strengthening the country's food supply chain, providing stakeholders, particularly small farmers, fishers and entrepreneurs needed logistics and technologies despite the huge challenges of high food prices, fierce global competition, and adverse consequences of climate change; "For successfully steering the country through the 2008 global food crisis, which imprinted into the nation's consciousness the major and critical role of the food and agribusiness sector."

To small farmers and fishers, these achievements simply translate to more harvests and more money in their pockets; and to

consumers, sufficient and affordable food on their table.

Secretary Yap -- or SACY as most if not all of DA family officials and staff call him -- has injected new vigor into the agri-fishery industry, turning setbacks into triumphs.

He has marshalled resources to intensify the implementation of government's *Ginintuang Masaganang Ani* (GMA) programs in rice, corn, livestock and poultry, fisheries, and high value commercial crops.

He likewise expanded access of smallholders to credit, technology and markets; and strengthened quarantine and product quality and standards system.

Building on the previous 'five-pillar' program (irrigation, postharvest facilities, RD&E, market access, and credit), President Arroyo took the cudgels and launched a more holistic program, aptly dubbed as FIELDS (fertilizer, irrigation, extension, loans, dryers and seeds).

As part of FIELDS, the DA has provided small farmers, fishers and entrepreneurs needed modern equipment and facilities -- from flatbed dryers, to rice and corn processing centers, to cold storage and freezers, via RORO vessels, and finally to the markets via the barangay bagsakans.

(Pls turn to p15)

PGMA appoints ... (from p1)

Yap is considered the longest serving 'food czar' under the Arroyo administration, and post-martial law years, having served two terms, for a total of four and a half years: August 2004 to July 2005, and from October 2006 to March 2010.

He distinguished himself by successfully implementing President Arroyo's centerpiece food security program, aptly dubbed as FIELDS (acronym for fertilizers, irrigation, extension, loans, dryers and seeds).

In his valedictory address, Yap thanked President Arroyo for choosing "one from the ranks to replace me in the Department."

He also thanked the DA officials and employees for helping him shepherd the Department through the numerous challenges that it has faced under the Arroyo administration.

During the turnover ceremonies, undersecretaries Segfredo Serrano and Salvador Salacup, DA region 10 director Lealyn Ramos, and staff members of the Office of the Secretary gave glowing testimonials about Yap's accomplishments, his skills as a crisis manager, his work ethic, and how he served as a boss, mentor and friend to many of the DA officers and employees.

Fondevilla likewise thanked President Arroyo and Yap for "entrusting me this great responsibility of being the next agriculture secretary."

He considers it an enormous challenge, saying: "I would not shy away from challenges... I'd take on this responsibility. I'm not perfect, but I believe God will give me the grace to sustain me. Most of all I have great people around me."

He assured the DA family and representatives of the private sector present during the gathering that he would continue Yap's programs, "strengthen our goals, and pursue some more, and innovate some more,

so we will ultimately realize our dream of making farmers and fishermen businessmen of their own selves, in their own right."

Please see excerpts of Sec. Yap's valedictory address and Sec. Fondevilla's acceptance speech on pages 8 and 9.

Before joining the DA, Fondevilla had honed his skills in several of the country's top law firms.

He started as a legal associate at the Santiago Nalus Law Office in 1990: associate lawyer at the Araulo Gruba Chua and Associates, where he handled mostly labor cases.

He also practiced law at the Azcuna Sarmiento Arroyo Chua Law Offices, where he gained extensive experience in, among others, mining law, criminal law, family relation cases; and litigation of cases involving labor disputes, real estate, trademarks and copyrights, government controls and regulations, and election-related suits.

In 2000, he became founding partner of the Fondevilla Jasarino Young Rondario and Librojo Law Offices, and a year later was made its managing partner.

He also served as president and general manager of Crystal Business Intelligence Systems Inc, sole distributor in the Philippines of products from Crystal Divisions, Inc., formerly known as Seagate Software, Inc.

In 2002, he was appointed president and vice chairman of the board of directors of the Food Terminal Inc.

In 2005, he was named executive director of the DA-NAFC.

Fondevilla is an active member of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines.

He obtained his Economics degree at the Ateneo de Manila University, and completed his law studies at the University of the Philippines.

He is a member of the church council of the Capitol City Four-square Church, and also a member of the national board and corporate counsel of the Church of the Foursquare Gospel in the Philippines.

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DA to continue pursuing measures to make farming profitable

The Arroyo administration will continue to pursue five major imperatives to make farming more profitable and globally competitive, amid the threats of climate change and liberalized global trade.

Newly-appointed agriculture Secretary Bernie G. Fondevilla discussed the five measures during the 'Year-end Philippine Economic Briefing,' held March 3, 2010, at the Dusit Thani Hotel, Makati City. These include:

- continuous investments in infrastructure, as well as in equipment that increase farm and fishery productivity;
- implementation of a post harvest program that provides dryers, chillers and ports to minimize post-production losses of farmers and fisherfolk;
- strengthening of guarantee funds to extend loans and insurance to farmers and fishers;
- assistance for the dissemination and availability of information, and training for new and sustainable technologies and practices; and
- institution of policy reforms to promote sustainable agricultural and fishery technologies.

"The primary aim of government policies and programs in the agriculture sector is to make farm and fisheries producers profitable and competitive," Fondevilla said.

"Profitability and competitiveness drive investments on the supply side and enables welfare enhancement, inclusive of food security, of producers through livelihood security," he added.

He noted that the challenges constantly facing Philippine agriculture come from the biophysical environment, which has been exacerbated by climate change; and the economic environment, as shown by recent food and input price spikes in the face of the headlong march by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to further trade liberalization.

The areas of interventions that the DA has put in place to meet these challenges are spelled out, he said, in President Arroyo's agriculture development agenda, dubbed as **FIELDS**.

"FIELDS is grounded on a steadfast commitment to food

(Pls turn to p13)

Amended agri-agra law to raise additional P122-B in farm loans

With the recent signing of the *Agri Agra Reform Credit Act of 2009* (Republic Act or RA 10000), the Department of Agriculture estimates that up to P122 billion in additional loans could be made available to farmers, fishers, rural entrepreneurs, and agrarian reform beneficiaries for their respective agri-fishery production, processing, marketing and other projects.

In a report to Agriculture Secretary Bernie Fondevilla, DA Undersecretary Berna Romulo Puyat said the new law, signed by President Arroyo on February 23, 2010, repeals Presidential Decree 717 (Agri-Agra Law).

It mandates banks and financial institutions to lend 25%, specifically 15% for agri-fishery stakeholders and 10% for agrarian reform beneficiaries, of their loanable funds.

RA 10000 is the consolidated version of Senate Bill

3431 sponsored by Senator Loren Legarda and House Bill 6095, sponsored by Representative Abraham Mitra.

They chair the respective agriculture committee at the Senate of the Philippines and House of Representative.

The DA had strongly lobbied for the passage of the law under the watch of former Secretary Arthur Yap, who carried out such other measures as the DA-initiated Agricultural Guarantee Fund Pool (AGFP) to make available much-needed credit to the countryside.

For his part, new DA Secretary Fondevilla said he will pursue the same commitment with greater vigor and at the same time strictly monitor the banks' compliance with RA 10000.

"Apart from expanding agriculture-related alternative compliance, increasing sanctions for non-compliance and under-

(Pls turn to p14)



President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo hands over to Mayor Thomas Pua, Jr. of Delfin Albano, Isabela, a certificate of ownership of irrigation pump sets (inset), as part of government's interventions to farming communities adversely affected by drought due to El Niño. Assisting her is Sec. Arthur Yap.

PGMA distributes irrigation pumps in Cagayan, Isabela

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo distributed 500 irrigation pump sets in Cagayan (426 sets) and Isabela (74 sets), which are part of the 1,363 sets worth P35.6 million being distributed by the Department of Agriculture to El Niño affected farmers in the Cagayan Valley region.

The Chief Executive was in Cagayan and Isabela March 2,

AFTA to benefit hog, poultry industries

The slated major tariff cuts, ranging from zero to five percent for both processed and agricultural commodities, as called for under the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA), bodes well for the Philippine hog and poultry industries, along with other agriculture subsectors.

"AFTA can be viewed as an opportunity for increased market access of Philippine goods to its ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) neighbors," said DA assistant secretary Dr. Preceles Manzo.

With such significant tariff cuts plus the removal of non-tariff barriers, like quantitative restrictions on most manufactured goods and farm products, "the

(Pls turn to p14)

2010, for her fifth tour of the North Luzon Agribusiness Quadrangle Super Region. She was accompanied by outgoing Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap and incoming DA chief Bernie G. Fondevilla.

In Cagayan, she was joined by Governor Alvaro Antonio and other municipal mayors at the Florencio Vargas College in Centro Tuguegarao.

In her brief speech, the President explained that her regional visits were to assess the progress of her strategic plan to expand political and economic footprint to lift up all regions and not just Metro Manila.

"That is why we are investing billions of pesos to tie the nation together through a better, more modern transportation system, lift up our next generation with more schools to ensure a better education and keep our nation clean, safe and beautiful to tap the best of our natural beauty," she said.

Aside from the provision of water pumps, the DA and the provincial government of Cagayan have undertaken several El Niño interventions, which include:

- cloud seeding operations, as early as January 2010;

(Pls turn to p13)

From the Bureaus, Agencies

Selected developments on agriculture, fisheries, and agribusiness as reported by the DA-Bureaus, Attached Agencies and Corporations, and those published in national publications.

DA-NIA repairs systems, serving 200,000 hectares

The Department of Agriculture through the National Irrigation Administration (DA-NIA) has completed the rehabilitation and restoration of dozens of irrigation systems and facilities last year, servicing more than 200,000 hectares of farmland, and creating close to 100,000 jobs.

In a report to DA Secretary Bernie Fondevilla, NIA officer in charge Alex Reuyan said such accomplishment has brought the total area to 456,251 hectares served by national irrigation systems.

He said for 2010, the NIA targets to complete the rehabilitation and restoration of various national irrigation systems that serve a total of 368,000 hectares.

In 2009, with a fund of P8 billion, the NIA completed the re-

Land Bank lends P132.8 B in 2009

The Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) has loaned a total of P132.8 billion last year to farmers, fishers and other priority borrowers, 2.4% or P3.1 billion more than in 2008.

Land Bank president and CEO Gilda E. Pico said the total loans to its so-called priority sectors represent 68% of LBP's regular loan portfolio of P194.7 billion.

Its priority sectors include small farmers and fisherfolk, microenterprises and SMEs, livelihood, agri-business, agri-infrastructure projects, agri-environment-related projects, socialized housing, and schools and hospitals.

The total loans extended to each priority sector are: P22.6B, to small farmers and fisherfolk, up by P1.2B vs. 2008; P20.1B, to micro-enterprises and SMEs; P20.2B, to agribusiness enterprises; P24.3B, for agri-related projects of GOCCs; P26.2B, for agri-infrastructure projects of LGUs; and P15.5B, for socialized housing, schools and hospitals, and environment-related projects. (LBP)

habilitation of dozens of national irrigation systems and facilities, servicing 123,537 hectares; and restoration of other systems, covering 89,638 hectares.

With said efforts, Reuyan said the agency was able to generate 97,976 jobs, benefiting 79,758 farm households.

DA-ACPC credit program extends P1.2B loans in '09

The government's Agro-industry Modernization Credit and Financing Program (AMCFP) has generated a total of P1.197 billion in loans from January to December 2009, benefiting 25,883 farmers and fisherfolk nationwide.

The DA through the ACPC oversees the implementation of the AMCFP, which serves as the government's umbrella credit program for agriculture and fisheries.

In a report to DA Secretary Arthur Yap, Director Jovita Corpuz of the Agricultural Credit and Policy Council (DA-ACPC) said of the loans released through the AMCFP, P1.068 billion of which went to 15,174 borrowers under the Cooperative Banks Agri-Lending Program (CBAP).

She said the loan releases under CBAP comprise of program funds and counterpart of 27 participating cooperative rural banks (CRBs), which committed to leverage the P400-M CBAP fund by up to three times to finance more projects.

The remaining P129M was lent to more than 10,700 borrowers, who availed loans under the other four programs of the DA-ACPC: agri-fishery microfinance, P11M; agri microfinance, P61M; tobacco and rice, P25M; and tomato, P32M.

The Land Bank of the Philippines and the People's Credit and Finance Corporation (PCFC) manage the implementation of the first two programs (agri-fish-



President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2nd from left) lowers the time capsule during the groundbreaking of a sugarcane ethanol distillery in Brgy. Pabanlag, Floridablanca, Pampanga. Assisting her (from left) are Floridablanca Mayor Eduardo Guerrero, Pabanlag Brgy. Captain Ernesto Manansan, Central Luzon Bioenergy Corporation President Juan Catalan, DA-Region 3 Director Redentor Gatus and DA-PADCC President Marris Agbon.

P13.8-B sugarcane farm, bioethanol facility to rise in Pampanga

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo recently led some 2,000 residents of Barangay Pabanlag, Floridablanca, Pampanga, during the groundbreaking ceremony of a sugarcane bioethanol facility worth \$300 million or roughly P3.8 billion.

It is a joint venture of a Korean company (Enviroplasma Co. Ltd.) and Filipino-owned Central Luzon Bioenergy Corporation (CLBC).

When completed, the distillery will process sugarcane stocks harvested from nearby farms, totaling 50,000 hectares. It can produce 500,000 liters of ethanol per day or 150M liters per year.

To date, this would be the biggest sugarcane production area

and ethanol distillery in the Philippines, as compared to the average plantation size of other bioethanol projects at only 5,000 hectares.

When in full swing, the project is expected to generate 40,000 jobs, construct some 3,000 housing units, including a 20-classroom school building, and a 30-bed community hospital.

This was one of the results of President Arroyo's state visit to the Republic of Korea last May 2009, together with Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap.

Enviroplasma Co. Ltd. specializes in the development of renewable energy technologies and processing facilities.

On the other hand, CLBC is engaged in the production, marketing and selling of hydrous and anhydrous bioethanol in the country.

The entry of Enviroplasma in the Philippines was facilitated by the Department of Agriculture through the Philippine Agricultural Development and Commercial Corporation (DA-PADCC), its agribusiness investment promotions and marketing arm. (Photo and text by Angelica Barlis, DA-PADCC)

ery and agri microfinance), respectively.

Agri-fishery projects being financed include production of rice, corn, vegetables, other crops; raising of tilapia, mudcrab, and seaweeds; and purchase of refrigerated vans and delivery trucks. (Adona M. Hamto, DA-ACPC)

DA-BAI sets up Ebola Reston lab, animal health info system

Reflecting its 80th anniversary theme, "Facing the challenges of emerging diseases and climate change," the DA's Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) has inaugurated the country's first *Ebola Reston* diagnostic laboratory and launched the Philippine Animal Health Information System (PhilAHIS), in fitting ceremonies on February 10, 2010, at the BAI compound, in Quezon City.

Outgoing Secretary Arthur C. Yap, in a speech delivered for him by Secretary Bernie Fondevilla, commended BAI director Dr. Davinio Catbagan, and the agency's men and women, who contributed their respective share in enabling the country's livestock and poultry industry register consistent growth and stability, even during the sector's most critical periods.

"Through your expertise and hard work, along with the strong support of industry stakeholders, LGUs and benefactors, you made these favorable conditions happen for the sector that accounts for more than a quarter of this nation's agricultural output," Fondevilla said.

The other highlights of the celebration included the: launch of the Philippine standards for live grading of cattle and carabao for slaughter; and the recognition of top performing arti-

cial insemination technicians, recognition of newly accredited breeder farms, and recognition of DA-Committee on Animal Welfare Institutionalized Member.

The Ebola Reston diagnostic laboratory has the capacity to conduct antigen and antibody detection of the *Ebola Reston Virus* (REBOV) through the enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay or ELISA.

Dir. Catbagan said the lab will provide vital support in the rapid diagnosis, active surveillance and monitoring of the REBOV in case it enters the country.

It will also play a major role in establishing the prevalence of REBOV in swine, and in understanding better the animal-human-wildlife interface in the occurrence of emerging diseases such as the Ebola Reston.

The laboratory was put up to the tune of P7.5 M (P1.5M from DA) and P6M from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), under the project, "Emergency Assistance for Early Detection, Response and Control of Ebola Reston Virus in Swine and Other Swine Diseases in the Philippines."

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) of the United States of America has also provided the initial reagents.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Ani-



Secretary Bernie Fondevilla (2nd from right) cuts the ceremonial ribbon during the inauguration of the DA-BAI's Ebola Diagnostic Laboratory. Assisting him are (from left): Representatives Vicente Crisologo (Quezon City) and Salvador H. Escudero III (Sorsogon), and BAI Director Davinio Catbagan.

mal Health Information Systems (PhilAHIS) is actually the expanded version of the previous Foot and Mouth Disease Information Management System (FMD-IMS).

Envisioned as the 'national reporting core for the livestock sector,' the PhilAHIS includes data on all other diseases reported from the field, including laboratory and quarantine reports, livestock and poultry production data--which can be accessed by the DA family agencies, regional field units, and local government units (LGUs).

The system is capable to store data for over 30 years, generate accurate data in min-

utes, handle other analytical tools and do modeling.

The system is currently supported by the Sub-regional Environmental Animal Health Management Initiative (SEAHMI), funded by the Italian Government through the UN-FAO.

In all, the PhilAHIS aims to serve as a vital tool in policy-making, most particularly in animal health management, in addition to enhancing and modernizing DA-BAI's capacity to analyze animal disease risk, and develop environmental animal health management strategies. (Jo Ann Grace B. Pera, DA Info Service)



Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap (at rostrum) reiterates the full support of the Philippine government to the global efforts towards conserving and managing migratory sharks during the 3rd Meeting on International Cooperation on Migratory Sharks, held Feb. 10, 2010, in Pasay City. The meeting, attended by dozens of delegates from different countries, was organized by the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Photo also shows (from left) are Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Undersecretary Manuel Gerochi, CMS Exec. Sec. Elizabeth Mrema, and Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (PAWB) Director Theresa Mundita Lim.

WB project to 'weather-proof' RP agriculture

The World Bank is set to implement a pilot project, tapping a \$5-million grant from the Global Environment Facility, to help vulnerable Philippine communities cope with the impact of climate change.

The proposed initiative, called *Philippine Climate Change Adaptation Project*, was presented to outgoing DA Secretary Arthur Yap, incoming secretary Bernie Fondevilla, and other DA officials during their February management committee by WB experts, Samuel Wedderburn and Felizardo Virtucio Jr.

Yap said the project should enable involved government agencies—the DA, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Adminis-

tration (PAGASA)—to obtain thorough and accurate data on weather conditions, and for them to work together on a master plan to "weather-proof" Philippine agriculture and other sectors against climate change.

"We hope this project will help us get the big picture as far as climate change is concerned, and to get us working together," Yap said.

"Reliable data is still absent today, so that the DA, for one, is having difficulty anticipating weather patterns, and most of the time only reacts to actual weather conditions or changes as they come," he added.

Wedderburn and Virtucio will work with counterparts from the DA, DENR and PAGASA on the project, with the DENR heading the technical working group.

DA, LGUs to speed up assistance to farmers

The Department of Agriculture through its regional field units (RFUs) will work closely with concerned local government units (LGUs) to speed up the delivery and dispatch of interventions to El Niño-affected palay and corn farmers in Isabela, Cagayan and other provinces.

Agriculture Secretary Bernie G. Fondevilla said the DA and LGU assistance includes provision of crop seeds, irrigation pump sets, and fuel subsidies for water pumps.

The DA RFUs will also step up their monitoring so they could get an accurate picture of the situation, the actual number of affected farmers, and carry out needed intervention programs.

Due to the severity of the damage due to the prolonged dry spell, the provincial governments of Isabela and Cagayan have declared a 'state of calamity' in their respective areas.

As of March 1, total loss in the agriculture and fishery sectors in Region II has reached P5.3 billion, prompting the national government to call for an emergency employment program for the 191,613 affected farmers and fishermen.

For his part, undersecretary for operations and DA Task Force El Niño head Joel Rudinas said "the DA has started its El Niño mitigation measures as early as September 16, 2009, as we have supported early planting of rice."

Further, he said the DA-RFUs started carrying out intervention measures in January, including cloud-seeding operations with the help of Aboitiz Corp., covering the Magat Dam watershed.

The DA-RFU 2 and the National Irrigation Administration-Magat River Integrated Irrigation System (NIA-MARIIS) have also distributed an initial 115 units of open-source pumps (OSP) to affected farmers.

As a preemptive measure against possible outbreaks of rodents and other crop pests

and diseases that could be triggered by the dry spell, DA-RFU 2 director Andrew Villacorta reported that as early as December 2009, they have purchased rodenticides and insecticides, and has since then treated various crops planted in about 10,000 hectares.

He said the RFU will also distribute 25,000 packets of assorted vegetable seeds to affected farmers, and has bidden out the contract for the supply of another P10 million-worth of assorted vegetable seeds for distribution to other farmers with totally-damaged crops.

The DA-RFU 2 will also distribute irrigation pump sets, including fuel subsidy, to affected farmers. (Please see related story on page 3.)

In addition, water conservation measures -- such as "rotational irrigation," desilting of rivers and other water tributaries, and repair and rehabilitation of water irrigation systems -- are being promoted in El Niño affected areas in coordination with the NIA,



Agriculture secretary Bernie G. Fondevilla (3rd from left) and DA-RFU 2 director Andrew Villacorta (4th from left) inspect bags of table salt before loading in an airplane for cloudseeding operations in Bagabag, Nueva Vizcaya. With them are Bagabag Mayor Nestor Sevilla (left), Nueva Vizcaya provincial agriculturist Felipe Panganiban (4th from right) and officials of the DA-NIA and Bureau of Soils and Water Management.

including public information blitz through local media networks, and dialogues with Irrigators' Associations (IAs).

Aside from emergency employment, affected farmers will be granted a moratorium on the payment of their NIA irrigation fees, equivalent to three cavans of palay per hectare.

Further, their existing loans and interest payments with the Land Bank of the Philippines may be restructured.

DA allots initial P882M ... (from p1)

Palay loss is estimated at P3.73B, equivalent to 219,370 tons, and corn at P3.27B (251,670 tons), and crops, P16 million (3,350 tons).

Worst hit is Isabela, with total crop loss of P3B, followed by Iloilo, at P1.2B.

The initial P882-M El Niño fund is broken as: P52M, for cloudseeding; P260M, for interventions of NIA; P399M, purchase of 1,500 water pump and engine sets by the BSWM and 1,000 units by DA-RFU2; P25M, pest and disease management; P1.15M, veterinary drugs and biologics; P35M, mobile diagnostic laboratories; P104M, fishery inputs and livelihood; and P5.9M, crop shifting projects.

For its part, the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) has delivered 54,500 bags of salt worth P19 million to 13,625 farmers, tilling 13,625 hectares.

It is also due to bid out 300,000 bags of salt worth P150M for 75,000 coconut farmers, tilling 75,000 hectares.

Further, the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) is also conducting cloudseeding operations in the Visayas, worth P2.2M, and needs 250 units of STWs in affected areas in Negros.

Moderate El Niño until June

In its 7th El Niño advisory, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said the country will continue to experience the moderate effect of the weather phenomenon which will likely persist through June 2010.

PAGASA administrator Prisco Nilo said rainfall for February was generally way below normal over most areas of the country.

Hence, the levels in major dams of the country are declining, limiting supply for irrigation and potable water, and power generation.

To date, PAGASA said four provinces are hardest hit: Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, and Capiz.

Other moderately affected provinces, totaling 25, are: Abra, Benguet, Kalinga,

Iligan, Apayao, Mt. Province, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan; Cagayan, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales, Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, Rizal, Iloilo, Antique, Guimaras, and Negros Occidental.

PAGASA said the CARAGA region and some areas in Northern Luzon will experience below to way below normal rainfall with near normal rainfall in March. Some areas in Mindanao will likely experience thunderstorm activity.

The present El Niño situation is not as worse as in 1997-98 episode, which PAGASA described as the "strongest" in recent history because it affected the whole country.

Pantabangan Dam has enough water

The DA's National Irrigation Administration (NIA) assures farmers in Nueva Ecija and adjoining areas that there will be sufficient irrigation water from the Pantabangan Dam until April.

This was the assurance made by Engr. Antonio Nangel, manager of the NIA-Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (UPRIIS) during a recent meeting with farmer-leaders, local officials, and representatives from other concerned DA and government agencies in Central Luzon.

He said Pantabangan Dam can sufficiently sustain the water requirements of the current crop, and can even accommodate the 'quick-turn-around' (QTA) or third cropping, and "ratooning."

Rice ratooning, Nangel said, is the ability of standing crops to regenerate new tillers after harvest. It requires less water, labor, and inputs, and produces higher yield per unit area in a shorter time.

This current cropping, Nangel said the NIA-UPRIIS has programmed to irrigate 102,550 hectares, requiring a total of 1,284 million cubic meters of water until harvest in April.

He said Pantabangan Dam can still provide this volume of water and remain at the ideal or safe level of 194.00 meters.

Further, the Dam can still irrigate 25,000 hectares for the 3rd cropping or QTA and ratooning at the same time.

Also present during the meeting were DA Region 3 Director Redentor Gatus and Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) Executive Director Ronilo Beronio.

For his part, Dir. Gatus assured farmers that seed and fertilizer subsidies would be made available to those planning to plant a third crop or QTA.

On the other hand, Beronio said PhilRice will inform farmers on proper rice ratooning through distribution of 'flyers.'

The meeting was also attended by representatives from the National Food Authority (NFA), Land Bank of the Philippines, Bureau of Post Harvest and Research Extension (BPRE), National Seed Quality Control Service (NSQCS) of the Bureau of Plant Industry, DA-

RFU 3 officials, and federation presidents of Irrigators' Associations (IAs) comprising the Board of Directors of the UPRIIS Confederation of Farmer-Irrigators Associations (UCFIA).

UCFIA has 380 IAs as members within the service area of UPRIIS in Nueva Ecija, parts of Bulacan, Pampanga and Tarlac. It has 76,000 farmer-members who actively participate in the operation and management of UPRIIS irrigation systems, as well as in the collection of irrigation service fees.

DA-4A distributes shallow tube wells

As part of its El Niño mitigating interventions, the Department of Agriculture Region 4-A (CALABARZON) through its Ginintuang Masaganang Ani (Corn, Rice and HVCC) program has distributed an initial 28 units of shallow tube wells (STWs) to affected rice farmers in Quezon, Laguna and Rizal.

In his report to Secretary Agriculture Bernie G. Fondevilla, assistant secretary and concurrent CALABARZON regional executive director Dennis B. Araullo said such intervention will help farmers irrigate their farmlands for vegetable production during this current dry spell.

He added there is still a need to procure an additional 150 STWs to benefit other affected farmers in the region.

"The current dry spell is indeed wrecking havoc to our farmers, damaging their crops, and thus limiting their incomes," Araullo said.

He added that the distribution of shallow tube wells to vulnerable areas is just one of the strategies of the DA to alleviate the farmers' plight.

"I hope the assistance given to CALABARZON farmers by the Arroyo government through the DA will minimize the effects of El Niño to a very manageable level," Araullo said.

During the distribution of the 28 STWs to farmers in Quezon, Laguna and Rizal, Araullo was assisted by Engr. Abelardo R. Bragas, DA-RFU 4-A Regional Technical Director for Operations and Regulatory. (DA-RFU 4-A Info Div.)



Agriculture secretary Bernie G. Fondevilla (left) inspects corn ears affected by drought in Bgy. Sta. Lucia, Bagabag, Nueva Vizcaya, while Bagabag Mayor Nestor Sevilla (middle) and DA Cagayan Valley Region Director Andrew Villacorta look on.

P40-M worth of crops damaged in ARMM

More than P40-million worth of agricultural crops were damaged due to El Niño in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), based on reports given to Dep't. Agriculture and Fisheries-ARMM Regional Secretary, Atty. Lomala Balindong by the respective provincial agricultural officers of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur and Basilan.

Balindong said crop damage is biggest in Maguindanao, where P34.75-million worth of rice and corn were adversely affected.

Basilan reported a total damage of P5 million, composed of rice, corn and high value commercial crops, majority of which are rubber seedlings.

Lanao del Sur lost P 1.7 million, mostly rice crops.

Sulu and Tawi-Tawi have no reports of crop damage due to El Niño.

As of mid-February, 4,784 farmers, in 41 towns in the three provinces were affected.

They are tilling more than 6,000 hectares of rice, corn, vegetables and high value commercial crops farmlands which were affected by the prolonged dry spell.

Balindong said the DAF-ARMM has created a Regional El Niño Task Force, with field operations director Dr. Salik B. Panalunsong as action officer.

Initially, it has issued an El Niño advisory and primer to inform the farmers, fishers and the general public on the adverse effects of the prolonged dry spell.

Likewise, it has distributed an

initial 600 sacks of Open Pollinated Variety (OPV) corn seeds and assorted vegetable seeds to affected ARMM farmers. (DAF-ARMM Info Div.)

DA agencies join hands to help farmers in W. Vis

The Department of Agriculture in Western Visayas (DA-RFU 6) assures El Niño affected farmers and fishermen that the DA family and other agencies will provide them needed assistance to ease their burden.

DA-RFU6 regional executive director and El Niño task force chair Larry Nacionales said they are enjoining farmers especially in vulnerable areas to cooperate with them in pursuing the mitigating measures.

For her part, Director Drusila Esther Bayate of the DA's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said they are ready to help El Niño-affected fishpond owners and fisherfolk in Western Visayas.

Likewise, NIA Regional Director Edilberto Lumigo said they are ensuring proper management and control of available irrigation water supply.

For his part, National Food Authority Regional Manager Miguel Wycoco said they have prepared contingency measures and have enough rice stocks to respond to supply gaps.

Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation Officer-in-Charge Charlito Brilleto said they are ready to assist affected farmers who insured their crops this cropping season. (PNA)



'Living life together has enriched me'

(Excerpts of Sec. Arthur C. Yap's valedictory address, March 10, 2010)

To all of you--my dear friends, compatriots, co-workers, private sector industry leaders and partners, who have come from near and far--thank you for being here to see me off, and to welcome one from our very own ranks.

I really thank President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for choosing one from our ranks to replace me in the Department.

Last night I stared into the screen of my laptop, and I typed away a few lines. After more than a couple of hours, I still could not get a coherent thought.

It's not that there is nothing to say, in fact, there seems to be so much I want to say, that I find it difficult, not knowing where or how to start.

I was trying very hard to leave you something to remember me by.

Until I realized in the wee hours of the morning that after spending more than six years together -- words crafted in few minutes cannot give justice to what we've experienced.

How can we describe the tension of meeting deadlines?

Yung naghahabulan tayo ng deadlines? Yung

maka-walong revision, tapos pag magpe-present binabago ko pa lahat.

How do you put into words the horror of combating a calamity?

Kung alam mo na lahat na pinahirapan natin ay papawiin lang ng bagyo?

How do you put into words the aggravation of facing a legislative inquiry?

How do you put in words the tension of being lambasted by media?

The same way, how do you recall the exhilaration or the joy of meeting and surviving all the challenges that are thrown against us?

Ang dami nating dinaanan.

Ipinagdasal ko po sa Panginoon na 'wag sana madaanan lahat yun. At lahat ng ipinagdasal ko na wag madaanan, visited us.

As they always say: *Kaya natin eh! Kaya rin binigay sa atin.*

How do you share the pains and the lessons learned from disappointments?

Disappointments at work. Disappointment with friends. Disappointed at things that we have not been met.

How do you reduce into words the jubilation of sharing with you the milestones achieved at work?

How will you put in words

the sadness that we have -- in times of our loss, in times of bereavement.

Sa ating mga namatayan, doon po sa mga nasalanta ng bagyo.

I see so many familiar faces. Each one imprinting a memory in my mind, which I'm sure I will always remember.

I realized that words cannot capture the boundless mix of emotions which is the consequence of having lived life together with you, as we did these past few years.

In the end, it is the experience of living life together with all of you which has enriched me.

But even as I feel incapable of escaping this experience into words, I am capable of expressing my deep appreciation in your goodness to many of you.

As I close this chapter of my life, I ask all of you to pray for me.

Nothing is certain in life. We are here one day, we are gone tomorrow.

There is nothing permanent, because the only permanent thing in this world is change.

Many things will change for me when I leave here today, but I will carry the memories with you always.

Thank you very much!



Incoming Sec. Bernie G. Fondevilla (4th from right) hands over a plaque of appreciation to outgoing Sec. Arthur C. Yap during the turnover ceremonies, March 10, 2010, at the DA-BSWM Convention Hall, in Quezon City. Joining them are the members of DA executive committee (from left), namely: Undersecretary Salvador Salacup; Ass't. Secretaries Preceles Manzo, Dennis Araullo and Eduardo Nolasco; Undersecretaries Bernadette Romulo-Puyat, Belinda Gonzales and Segredo Serrano; and ass't. secretaries Clayton Olalia and Brian Balingit.



Secretaries Yap and Fondevilla are shown above with the DA Regional Executive Directors, and below with the respective head of DA bureaus, attached agencies and corporations.



'Strengthen our goals, innovate some more'

(Excerpts of Sec. Bernie G. Fondevilla's acceptance speech)

The Romans have a saying that goes like this:

'Sometimes when God grants what a man asks and prays for, they also grant what the man has not foreseen.'

God has a way of giving us greater opportunities, and something more than what we have asked.

Of course, I thank President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

I thank my friend, Secretary Arthur C. Yap, for entrusting to me this great responsibility of being the next secretary of DA.

Napakalaki pong challenge ang pagiging secretary of agriculture.

Last Sunday, while I was going to church, and was entering worship, *na-realize ko na napakalaking challenge* and great responsibility.

People raise the issue of my capability of leading the department. Maybe they're correct, maybe not.

I would not shy away from challenges. I would not shy away from responsibilities.

I'm the one who, in spite of fear, will have courage.

Courage is not the absence of fear.

Courage is exactly doing what you fear most.

I'd take on this responsibility, knowing that it is a great responsibility, and it is a great challenge.

Every difficulty, every challenge is an opportunity, and I will take that because it was given to me.

I'm not perfect, but I believe that God will give me the grace to sustain me.

Most of all, I have great people around me--you, all of you!

The work of the Department is not just a work of the Secretary. It's the work of all of us.

And so, no matter the challenges that we will face, we will have ourselves together. We work together.

In my term, I will strengthen our goals.

Pursue some more, innovate some more -- so we will ultimately realize our dream of making farmers and fishermen, businessmen of their own selves, in their own right.

Maraming salamat sa inyo and I look forward to working with all of you!

From the Regions

Selected news and developments on agriculture, fisheries, agribusiness and related sectors, as reported by the DA-Regional Field Units, and those published in national and provincial publications.

P250-M program to prop up Bicol's pili, abaca, coco sectors

The Department of Agriculture in Bicol Region (DA-RFU5), in partnership with Albay Representative Edcel Lagman, recently launched in Tabaco City, Albay, a P250-million program to revitalize the production and processing of pili, abaca and coconut for both domestic and export markets.

DA-RFU5 Officer-in-Charge Marilyn V. Sta. Catalina said the initiative, known as Locally-Funded Indigenous Crops Program (LFICP), was funded through the efforts of Rep. Lagman.

It will be implemented by the DA in tandem with two DA agencies--Fiber Industry Development Authority (FIDA) and Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA)--in Albay, Camarines Sur, Camarines Norte, Sorsogon and Catanduanes.

During the launch, Rep. Lagman and Dir. Sta. Catalina distributed to farmer-beneficiaries and LGU planting materials of pili, abaca and coconut, and several farm equipment.

For pili, the LFICP targets to produce 400,000 sexually propagated and 300,000 asexually propagated seedlings.

Bicol produces 82 percent of the country's total pili output, and it is a top export commodity, which can compete with macademia, cashew and walnut in terms of quality, Sta. Catalina said.

Bicolano processors have been exporting pili products to Japan, US and Europe.

Aside from the nuts, other parts of the pili tree have commercial uses: a resin or "manila elemi" from its trunk, for the production of lacquer, thinner and varnish; and the nut's oil, which serves as food or as a body scrub or lotion.

For abaca, FIDA will focus on disease eradication and rehabilitation of 1,777 hectares infected by the bunchy top and mosaic disease virus. It will plant an additional 331 hectares to abaca.

FIDA OIC Regional Director Edith Lomerio said last year Bicol regained its status as the country's top abaca producer, at 14,140 metric tons, 5.1% more than in 2008.

For coconut, PCA will distribute 225,000 quality seedlings for 1,500 hectares; establish 4 nurseries and maintain a seed garden with 9,000 seednuts;



Dr. Elmer Nueva (left), provincial veterinarian of Zamboanga Sibugay, ear-tags a carabao, one of the 96 head of large animals funded by the DA-MRDP. Assisting him are Julie Testa of DA-WESMIARC and a lady farmer-recipient from Brgy. Balansag.

Zambo farmers benefit from DA-MRDP livestock project

Some 200 farmers from five barangays in R.T. Lim, Zamboanga Sibugay have benefited from a P1.64-million livestock breeding and propagation project funded under the DA's

Mindanao Rural Development Program (DA-MRDP), particularly under its Community Fund for Agricultural Development (CFAD) component.

Some 208 farmers received a total of 96 head of carabao (83) and cattle (13) -- through their respective farmers' groups.

They include: Brgy. Balansag Samahan ng Magsasaka and Balansag Multi-Purpose Cooperative; Brgy. Gango Indigenous Farmers Organization and Gango Integrated Dev't. Ass'n.; Brgy. Silingan CARP Beneficiaries Multi-purpose Coop.; Brgy. Tilasan Pigsalabukan Nog Subanon Ass'n.; and Tilasan Small Farmers' Ass'n. and Samahang Magsasaka ng Barangay Pres. Roxas.

The animals were recently ear-tagged, dewormed and given vitamins--through the joint efforts of the DA-Western Mindanao Integrated Agricultural Research Center (WESMIARC), Provincial Veterinarian Office of Zamboanga Sibugay and the Municipal Agriculture Office of R.T. Lim. (DA-RFU 9 Info Div.)

produce embryo-cultured makapuno for 60 hectares; fertilize 770 hectares; and intercrop 145,000 cacao seedlings in 400 hectares. (Jennis Nidea, DA-RFU5 Info Div.)

Bayan-Anihan now in Davao

The Department of Agriculture and Gawad Kalinga (GK) recently launched a 'Bayan-Anihan' vegetable project at GK Pueblo Antonio Village, Sitio Habana, Toril, Davao City.

This brings to date 29 Bayan-Anihan sites in Mindanao and 177 all over the country with backyard vegetable projects. Each site has 30 family-beneficiaries.

The DA, through its Ginintuang Masaganang Ani (GMA) High Value Commercial Crops (HVCC) program, GK and other project partners target to put up a total of 500 Bayan-Anihan sites (312 in Luzon, 92 in the Visayas and 96 in Mindanao).

In Mindanao, the targets per region are: 20 in Zamboanga Peninsula, 40 in Northern Mindanao, 10 in Davao Region, 16 in SOCCSKSARGEN, and 10 in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

For the Bayan-Anihan vegetable project, the DA has provided inputs--such as vegetable seeds, seedling trays, organic fertilizers, weighing scales, fruit tree seedlings, and medicinal/culinary plants--worth P8 million. The GK, together with selected state universities and colleges (SUC) conduct the community training.



Some 2,200 children and adults in Barangay San Roque, Kitcharao, Agusan del Norte, now enjoy clean and safe drinking water. Thanks to the joint initiatives of the DA-Mindanao Rural Development Program and the Municipal Government of Kitcharao, as they recently rehabilitated the San Roque water system, worth P4 million. With the system, water-borne diseases are a thing of the past, said Kitcharao Mayor Aristotle Montante. Inset, a boy enjoys a drink of refreshing water from one of the 60 faucets of the San Roque potable water system.

DA-RFU 8 to put up 18 greenhouses

The Department of Agriculture in Eastern Visayas (DA-RFU8) is set to construct 18 greenhouses in selected cities and municipalities in the region that will produce quality hybrid and high value vegetables.

Dr. Veronica Berenguer, DA-RFU8 high value commercial crops coordinator, said under this greenhouse project, farmers will adopt the "protective cultivation technology," the temperature, humidity, light and carbon dioxide are modified for optimum plant growth.

With the technology, Berenguer said, farmers will be able to produce quality vegetables, on a competitive level, via greenhouses.

Vegetable production will then be a profitable venture for farmers in Eastern Visayas, she added.

The DA has constructed two greenhouses in 2007, in Paranas, Samar (which is non-operational) and in Ormoc City, which is currently used for producing vegetable seedlings.

Dr. Berenguer assures that the 18 greenhouses will be used

Don't burn rice straw, use as feed

The DA's Philippine Carabao Center (PCC) encourages farmers not to burn rice straw, but instead collect and stock it for use as feed for livestock animals.

Director Arn D. Granada, officer in charge of PCC at West Visayas State University Calinog campus, said farmers should not burn rice straws after harvest, instead they should gather and keep them as feed for their animals.

Granada also urged farmers to plant *humidicula* grass, which is resistant to drought, fast-growing, and can regroup easily on pasture areas. Planting materials of *humidicula* is available at PCC, WVSU Calinog upon request.

The southern part of Iloilo and Antique are now experiencing prolonged dry spell due to El Nino.

PCC advises farmers and livestock raisers to closely coordinate with their municipal agriculture officers and nearest PCC office for technical assistance. (James Earl E. Ogatis, DA-RFU6 Info Div.)

to the fullest, in cooperation with concerned vegetable farmers' organizations that will manage and operate the facility. (Leyte Samar Daily Express)

Abra farmers receive veggie seeds

Farmers from the 27 municipalities of Abra recently received vegetable seeds worth P190,000, from the Department of Agriculture-Cordillera Administrative Region (DA-CAR).

The seeds were turned over to Abra Governor Eustaquio Bersamin by DA-CAR assistant regional director Josephine Aben and Ruben Dulagan, regional coordinator of the GMA-high value commercial crops (HVCC) program.

"We owe President Arroyo so much for a lot of agricultural projects implemented here in support of the livelihood of our farmers. The Abra sustainable project worth P100 million committed by PGMA and the DA was already delivered," Governor Bersamin said.

"The DA is continuously making an impact in Abra with their timely assistance and support with its calamity interventions.

The vegetable seeds will help our farmers recover faster from the destructive effects of typhoons Ondoy and Pepeng, he added.

During the seed turnover ceremonies, Governor Bersamin and ARD Aben also awarded a check worth P62,500 to young Abra farmer Mario Astudillo, who just returned from a one-year training in Japan, under the DA-NAFC young farmer agriculture exchange program.

Astudillo will use the money for goat meat production.

Gov. Bersamin also committed to give Astudillo additional funds for the project.

He also instructed Abra's provincial veterinarian to extend technical assistance to ensure the success of Astudillo's goat project.

Jesus Villamor, Jr., Abra's OIC-Provincial Agriculturist, said the DA previously gave farmers seeds of quality rice and corn varieties.

Abra farmer-leaders thanked Gov. Bersamin and the DA-CAR for their continuing support to increase their productivity and income. (DA-CAR Info Div.)



Outgoing Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap discusses the DA interventions versus El Nino in a meeting with farmers in Brgy. Lamping, Sta. Barbara, Pangasinan. With him are DA-RFU1 Dir. Cipriano Santiago, Undersecretary for operations Joel Rudinas and GMA-Rice program national coordinator Frisco Malabanan.

Leaders laud PGMA for signing 'MinDA'

Mindanao leaders thank President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for recently signing the Mindanao Development Authority Act of 2010 (MinDA) or Republic Act 9996, February 17, 2010.

President Arroyo also swore into office presidential adviser on Mindanao Jesus Dureza as MinDA chair. He will serve a fixed term of six years.

Tasked to integrate government's peace and development efforts in Mindanao, the MinDA strengthens the existing Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDCo).

Dureza headed MEDCo during the Ramos administration.

"It's a major milestone of the Arroyo administration and a big boost to Mindanao," MEDCo chair Undersecretary Virgilio Leyretana said.

The MinDA will cover Mindanao and Palawan as a focus area for the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA). It will also act as the official and permanent Philippine Coordinating Office for BIMP-EAGA.

"PGMA has shown again her great concern for Mindanao when signed into law MinDA and now we Mindanaons must support this agency to make it successfully perform its functions," said Deputy House Speaker Simeon Datumanong.

Datumanong is one of the principal authors of the bill's Congress version.

The other principal authors of the Congress version are Rep. Datu Pax Mangudadatu of Sul-

tan Kudarat and Rep. Rufus Rodriguez of Cagayan de Oro, while co-authors include 37 congressmen from the Mindanao bloc.

Meanwhile, the Senate version of MinDA bill was principally authored by Senator Juan Miguel Zubiri and co-authored by Senators Miriam Defensor-Santiago, Edgardo Angara, Manny Villar, Richard Gordon, Juan Miguel Zubiri, Lito Lapid, Jose "Jinggoy" Ejercito Estrada, Ramon Revilla Jr., Loren Legarda, Mar Roxas, Pia Cayetano and Juan Ponce Enrile.

"We Mindanaoans are so thankful to PGMA for signing the MinDA Bill into law. This law will establish Mindanao-wide agency for the comprehensive integrated and faster development of Mindanao," Rodriguez said.

"This MinDA will not only bring in more funds and projects for Mindanao but will likewise serve as the engine of development of Mindanao as part of the BIMP-EAGA," he said.

"The signing of the MinDA Bill into law is a historic milestone for Mindanao because this heralds the end of a decades-long wait and long-felt need for Mindanao to have a permanent development agency," Leyretana said.

He said through the years, about 18 ad hoc bodies had been overseeing Mindanao development.

President Arroyo said she was excited to sign the bill as she has also authored the bill when she was Senator. (Phil. News Agency)

International News Round-up

A digest of selected news, developments and breakthroughs in agriculture, fisheries, agribusiness and related fields culled from websites and publications of international institutions and organizations.

ICRISAT suggests long-term strategy vs. El Niño

As the Philippines is currently experiencing the El Niño weather phenomenon, the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and its partners recommend several measures that Filipino farmers and the Philippine government could do to mitigate its effects and sustain farm productivity, including the establishment of a Philippine Dryland Research Institute (PhilDRI).

ICRISAT director-general Dr. William Dar, who once served as acting agriculture secretary in the Philippines, said the measures include the following:

First, growing of drought-tolerant crops to match the available length of the growing season and low soil moisture.

Second, implementation of contingent action plans to be mapped out by the Philippines' Department of Agriculture (DA) and local government units (LGUs), in consultation with farmers. These involve replacement of affected crops with drought-tolerant ones, and production of seeds of dryland and other alternate crops.

Third, efficient management of natural resources, harvesting water during the rainy season, arresting land degradation, and conserving soil moisture.

Fourth, empowering stakeholders through capacity building and enabling the national government and LGUs to formulate policies supportive of dryland agriculture including other support services.

ICRISAT also recommends growing an array of crops together with livestock, along with other income-generating activities that lessen the risks of crop failure.

In all, the Philippine government should map out a long-term strategy to cope with El Niño and climate change, said Dar.

He said the strategy calls for sustained investments on water conservation and management, and dryland agricultural research.

In particular, he said the next administration and legislators should consider the establishment of a Philippine Dryland Research Institute (PhilDRI), which was previously filed by former DA Secretary and party-list Representative Leonardo Montemayor during the 14th Congress.

As envisioned, the PhilDRI would generate appropriate innovations and policies to cope with climate change and El Niño. (ICRISAT)



Global warming will trim rice production by 10%

Rice production is projected to decrease 10 per cent if the world's temperature increases by 1 degree Celsius.

This is according to a lecturer at Thailand's Kasetsart University Faculty of Agriculture, Ed Sarobol, who cited studies conducted by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and Thailand's Chiang Mai University.

Speaking at Kasetsart University's 48th annual conference, Sarobol said the ear of paddy rice and blossoms will drop if the temperature rises.

Further, he said the seed will be stunted at 80 percent if the air temperature exceeds 36.5 degrees Celsius.

However, he noted that increasing carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentration will impact favorably on plant growth and development.

For instance, if the CO₂ con-

centration is increased, the plant's water-use efficiency and photorespiration will also increase.

That means if the CO₂ concentration increases every 10 parts per million (ppm), the plant production will be increased by one per cent.

Sarobol added the global environmental change will also have adverse impact on animals, as they would experience *hypercapnia*, a condition where there is too much CO₂ in the blood.

In addition, the increasing air temperature will affect the animals' respiratory system, membrane fluidity, and reproductive health.

He said the study conducted last year found that during the 50-year period, from 1951 to 2000, Thailand's average minimum temperature increased by 0.30 degrees, while the average maximum temperature increased by 0.13 degrees.

The study also found that the amount of rainfall in Thailand during summer, from November to April, has increased.

In contrast, the amount of rainfall in the rainy season (May to October) has dropped.

Thailand's Water Resources Department (WRD) has projected that about 21 provinces will face drought this year.

"We will closely monitor the rain situation from January to April. If the rains are delayed during this period that means the drought situation would be severe," said WRD director-general Kasemsun Chinnvaso.

He said they have prepared water-carrying vehicles to provide water and assist people in dry areas. (IRRI)

Australia should also adapt to climate change

Australia needs to adapt to climate change to minimize the risks and enable its primary industries to survive and prosper in the future.

Thus, said Dr. Mark Howden, a scientist at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), who is co-editor of the book, *Adapting Agriculture to Climate Change: Preparing Australian Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for the Future*.

"Australia is highly sensitive to climate change, and we know enough to start preparing adaptation strategies, and

start planning and acting now," Dr. Howden said.

Australia's primary industries include: grains, cotton, rice, sugarcane, wine grapes, horticulture, forestry, broadacre grazing, intensive livestock industries, marine fisheries, aquaculture and water resources.

Examples of adaptation options include: new breeds of crops better suited to higher carbon dioxide concentrations in the air, higher temperatures and reduced water resources; changing fishing practices to match changing species distributions and populations; and

choosing more suitable sites and species for forestry plantations.

Another Australian expert, Dr. Michael Robinson of the University of Melbourne and the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, said "climate changes are likely to be far-reaching and will add to the substantial pressures that already exist for agriculture."

Adaptive responses must be supported by good science, which must be available and accessible, Dr. Robinson added. (*The FishSite News Desk*)

DA to continue pursuing ... (from p3)

security, competitive and free trade, sustainable agriculture, and profitable farm and fishery endeavor," Fondevilla said.

He pointed out that despite the challenges facing Philippine agriculture, the increasingly pronounced rebound of the world economy from the most recent financial crisis presents opportunities for the sector in terms of investments and international and domestic demand growth.

"The Philippines' population and the steady growth of the middle class in the region is a strong base for agriculture and food products which can provide a steady source of growth both domestically as well as for export market," Fondevilla said.

These areas of opportunities include food production, distribution and other logistics support activities, which also include green technology in agriculture, he noted.

Green technology, he explained, covers organic foods and the production of sustainable and renewable feedstocks for fuel and energy.

Fondevilla pointed out that the Philippines is now the preferred investment destination in Asia based on rising private invest-

PGMA distributes ...

(from p3)

- provision of fuel assistance for affected Cagayan rice and corn farmers (ongoing distribution of P150,000 per municipality, with a total of P12.4 million region-wide in addition to LGU initiatives)

- provision of vegetable seeds and seedlings (25,000 packets ready for distribution; P10-million worth of seeds for delivery and distribution to augment LGU interventions);

- provision of pesticides and rodenticide in case of pest outbreak (168 kg rodenticide distributed to 338 rat-infested barangays, covering 11,000 hectares. Infestation now under control);

- rotational irrigation system implemented by the DA-National Irrigation Administration since December 2009 to preserve water until harvest time; and

- information campaign on water conservation through meetings with farmers' and irrigators' associations, and trained 15,518 farmers on proper water management thru Farmers' Field School.

ments in agriculture mainly for biofuel feedstock.

The Biofuels Act in the country and the rising awareness for the need to shift to clean fuel sources has provided the necessary stimulus for the development of the biofuel feedstock industry, he said.

He said several companies are investing in biofuels in the Philippines.

These include BENLINC, PNOG-AFC (Zambales, Bukidnon, General Santos, Bohol, and Cebu), Bioenergy Farms, Eco Global Bio Oil, CURCAS Energy Australia, Highlands Dev't Corp, DK Biofuels, KIBIO, GMC, Abundant Biofuels Corp, Herminio Teves Group, GFI, Cavite Biofuel Production Inc., FUELS Inc., Roxol Bioenergy, Basic Energy, First Pampanga Biofuels Corp., Alsons Power, Isabela Alcolgas

P860-M projects ...

(from p1)

will create and improve business opportunities, benefiting farmers, ruralfolk, entrepreneurs and traders," said DA-MRDP director Lealyn Ramos, who is also concurrent DA Region 10 (Northern Mindanao) regional executive director.

A long-term poverty alleviation program of the Philippine government through the DA, the MRDP is funded by a loan extended by the World Bank, with equity and counterpart from the national and beneficiary local government units in Mindanao.

To date, the DA-MRDP has completed over 58 kilometers (kms) of FMRs, mostly in Caraga region, two units of level-2 potable water system, and a 6-meter bridge.

Nearly completed projects include: 150 kms of FMRs, 59 linear meter bridges, five units of level-2 potable water systems, and a communal irrigation system in Sulop, Davao del Sur, servicing 100 hectares.

This year, the respective DA-MRDP regional fund allocations are: Region 9, P143M; Region 10, P94M; Region 11, P158.7M; Region 12, P130M; Caraga, P132M; and Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), P206M. (Sherwin B. Manual, DA-MRDP)

Corp., and Southern Bukidnon Bioenergy, among others.

Other investment prospects in the country's farm and fisheries sector include poultry and livestock production, where the Philippines enjoys a distinct advantage because of its avian-flu free status and its reputation as

Instant agri-info ... (from p1)

Telephone Company (PLDT) through a novel project, called Farmers' Contact Center (FCC).

Powered by PLDT's OnCall (Managed Contact Center solution), the project allows farmers to talk extensively with the DA's agricultural technicians and experts to get guidance and information on their various concerns without having to worry about high prices on call rates.

Through PLDT Toll Free, call charges from SMART and Talk n' Text mobile is set at P7.27 flat rate per call, instead of charging by the minute.

An agreement formalizing the joint FCC project was signed last February by then Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap and PLDT vice president for corporation relations management Renato Castaneda.

Yap said the initiative, implemented by the DA through its Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), is part of the extension component of the government's flagship program on food security, dubbed as FIELDS.

Agriculture Secretary Bernie

relatively free of the foot-and-mouth disease.

Investors can also explore the area of seed production, Fondevilla noted. Beidahuang China, for instance, has signed an agreement to invest in seed production in the country.

Fondevilla welcomed the project and vowed to support and further strengthen it on his watch.

ATI Director Asterio Saliot said agriculture experts will be on hand to answer queries received through the FCC, which has established direct links with the various DA bureaus and attached agencies, and including agri-fishery state universities and colleges.

The FCC may be accessed through the following hotlines:

1-800-10-982AGRI (or 1-800-10-982-2474) for provincial toll-free calls using PLDT lines;

982AGRI (or 982-2474) for calls within Metro Manila;

391DA (or 391-32) for text messages using Smart and Talk&Text;

0920-946AGRI (0920-946-2474) for mobile calls and text messages using Globe, TM and Sun Cellular;

info@e-extension.gov.ph for emails;

www.e-extension.gov.ph and **www.ati.da.gov.ph** for the online discussion fora and instant messaging.



Agriculture Secretary Bernie G. Fondevilla is interviewed by media persons right after the Cabinet Meeting presided by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, in Daluyon Resort, Sabang, Palawan, February 23, 2010. Behind him is DA-Region 4B executive director Antonio Gerundio.

AFTA to ... (from p3)

region can now be looked at as an additional source of important raw materials and intermediate goods not locally produced but which are inputs for local industries," said Manzo in his report to former DA Secretary Arthur Yap.

The Philippines may even be in a "better position" to export excess produce in the future, like yellow corn, to our ASEAN neighbors that are not yet self-sufficient in these goods, Manzo said.

AFTA, which is seen to become a potent free trade area covering the Philippines and nine more countries in five years' time, is a potential market of close to 600 million people—the world's largest market next to China and India.

"If we analyze briefly the Philippines' level of trade in terms of the sensitive agricultural products," he said, "it is evident that the bulk of its farm imports, except for rice, come from countries outside of the ASEAN region."

For instance, almost all of the country's live pig breeder imports over the past five years came from the United States, Australia and Europe, he said, while most of its beef, pork and chicken meat imports were also sourced from these countries as well as from Canada, Brazil and New Zealand.

Moreover, even if Thailand and

Vietnam are the Philippines' biggest competitors in the region, there are "unique concerns" that "favor our domestic hog and poultry industries," Manzo said in his report to Yap.

For one thing, he said, the Philippines alone is a major producer of pork meat in the region, given that "Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia are predominantly Muslim countries and they do not produce and consume pork that much."

Manzo said, "this reality should augur well for local pork, especially those produced in Mindanao, which is an area that is geographically closer to the rest of Southeast Asia and long declared free of the foot-and-mouth disease (FMD)."

In fact, he said, the DA's Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) has already reported shipments of canned pork-based processed products to Thailand.

As one of only two ASEAN countries still free of the Avian Influenza (AI) or bird flu virus—the other one is Brunei—the local poultry should be able to capitalize on this advantage by "looking forward to a larger market in ASEAN," he further said.

Manzo said that AFTA is also no threat to the yellow corn subsector "as there is not enough supplies from our Asean neighbors. We may even be in a better position to export our excess corn to them in the future."

Agri-agra law ... (from p3)

compliance by banks, and providing for penalties that would go to the Agricultural Guarantee Fund Pool (AGFP) and the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. (PCIC)," said Puyat in her report to Sec. Fondevilla.

The new law effectively eliminates non-agri alternative compliance -- whereas before under PD 717, banks are deemed complied if they invest 25% in Local Government Unit (LGU), Pag-ibig or Home Guaranty Corp. bonds; extend loans for housing, education or medical institutions, microbusinesses, and socialized or low-cost housing projects.

Such non-compliance ate up P122.19 billion or 73.67 percent of alternative compliance under the old law, Puyat said.

Modes of Compliance

Now, RA 10000 limits the banks' "alternative compliance" mainly to the following:

- Wholesale lending to accredited rural financial institutions for retail lending to small farmers or fisherfolk, or opening of special deposit accounts with accredited rural financial institutions;
- Loans for agriculture infrastructure like farm-to-market roads and postharvest facilities;
- Investments in preferred shares of stock of rural financial institutions, including

farmers' cooperatives and mutual benefit associations;

- Loans for, or investments in, activities identified under the Agricultural Modernization Credit and Financing Program or AMCFP; and

- Traditional agri-related "alternative compliance" modes like investments in Land Bank or Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) bonds and shares of stock of Quedancor, or rediscounting of guaranteed loans of Quedancor and PCIC.

Stiffer Penalties

RA 10000 also imposes stiffer penalties against non-compliance or under-compliance, as erring bank will pay 0.5% of the total amount not complied or under-complied.

Previously, PD 717 imposes a fine of only P1,000 to P30,000 per day.

Also, RA 10000 mandates the BSP, DA and Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) to review its provisions, and thereafter submit their findings to Congress for appropriate action.

As of November 2009, the loanable funds of the banking sector reached P2.27 trillion.

This meant that lending to the agri-agra sector should have reached over P500 billion, while loans to small and medium enterprises must have amounted to P227 billion. But loans extended to the agriculture sector only stood at less than P350 billion.

DA, EU and FAO implement P260-M small-scale irrigation project

The Department of Agriculture — in partnership with the European Commission on Food Facility through the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, and concerned local government units — is implementing a €4.2-million (roughly P260M) project, entitled "Increasing rice yields and productivity through the promotion of small-scale irrigation systems and integrated crop management (ICM) systems in rainfed areas."

It aims to benefit 4,200 small farm households in five priority provinces: Bulacan, Pampanga, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija and Pangasinan.

Under the project, the farmer-beneficiaries will be provided

1,400 units of shallow tube wells and surface water pumps, at one set for every three farmers, who till an average of one hectare each. They will receive flatbed dryers.

They will be trained by the DA through the Philippine Rice Research Institute and other concerned agencies to use certified seeds, apply appropriate fertilizers and other inputs, adopt ICM systems that include site-specific nutrient management, integrated pest management, and controlled irrigation—all to increase their rice productivity and income. Some of them will be trained to become certified seed producers

The project runs from January 2010 to June 2011.



DA Undersecretary for operations Joel Rudinas (center) presides over a steering committee meeting of a project funded by the European Commission on Food Facility through the UN Food Agriculture Organization (FAO), called 'Increasing rice yields and productivity through the promotion of small-scale irrigation systems and integrated crop management systems in rainfed areas.' With him (from left) are: European Union officials Raffaella Boudron and Nicholas Taylor; DA-InfRES project manager Dir. Roy Abaya; DA-RFU3 Dir. Redentor Gatus; and Kazuyuki Tsurumi, FAO Representative in the Philippines.

Editorial: Of legacy... (from p2)

During his term, President Arroyo has increased the price of palay from P10 per kilo in 2004 to P17 in 2009.

In all, the country's farm labor productivity – or the amount of agricultural output produced by a farm worker – has increased by 8.4% to P21,561 per person in 2008, from P19,894 in 2004, at constant prices.

Touching farmers' lives

More importantly, he has touched the lives of thousands of small farmers and fishers across the country, and somehow made a big difference, giving them hope and opportunity, not only for themselves, but more importantly for their children and children's children.

Here are some excerpts of their testimonials:

Noel America, chairman of the Tangkilik Multi-Purpose Cooperative in Real, Quezon, has this to say:

"Malaking tulong ng Department of Agriculture at ni Secretary Arthur Yap sa aming mga magsasaka sa pagbibigay ng mga proyekto tulad ng paghahayupan at paghahalaman. Nakabangon ang mga mamamayan na lubhang naapektuhan ng landslide noong 2004. Unti-unti na silang nakakatayo..."

Adelina Laurente, of Children of Emmanuel Rural Improvement Club (RIC), Candaba, Pampanga:

"Binigyan kami ni Sec. Yap at ni Pangulong Arroyo ng Bagsakan Center. Yung mga ani naming gulay at livestock, kami-kami na rin ang nagtitinda sa murang presyo para makinabang ang lahat. Nakatulong po nang malaki ang DA sa pagbibigay sa amin ng mga alagaing baboy at manok, mga buto ng gulay, binhing palay, at fertilizer..."

Lamberto Riego, chairman of St. Joseph Natural Farming Ass'n., Camarines Sur:

"Kami ay mayroong mahigit 240 farmer-cooperators na gumagamit ng pro bio-N organic fertilizer at liquid foliar spray--na aming ginagawa sa tulong ng DA at ni Secretary Arthur Yap. Sa paggamit ng mga ito, nabawasan ng 60% ang aming gastos sa palayan. Ang kanilang ani ay na-doble, at ang iba naman ay na-triple. Malaki rin po ang naging parte ng DA para mas mapalawak ang kaalaman ng aming mga magsasaka, di lang po sa palayan, kundi rin sa gulayan sa pamamagitan ng kanilang Farmer Field School o FFS..."

Manuel Pasa Jr., manager of Kilusang Patubigan ng Lateral B Dev't Coop., Lagonoy, Camarines Sur:

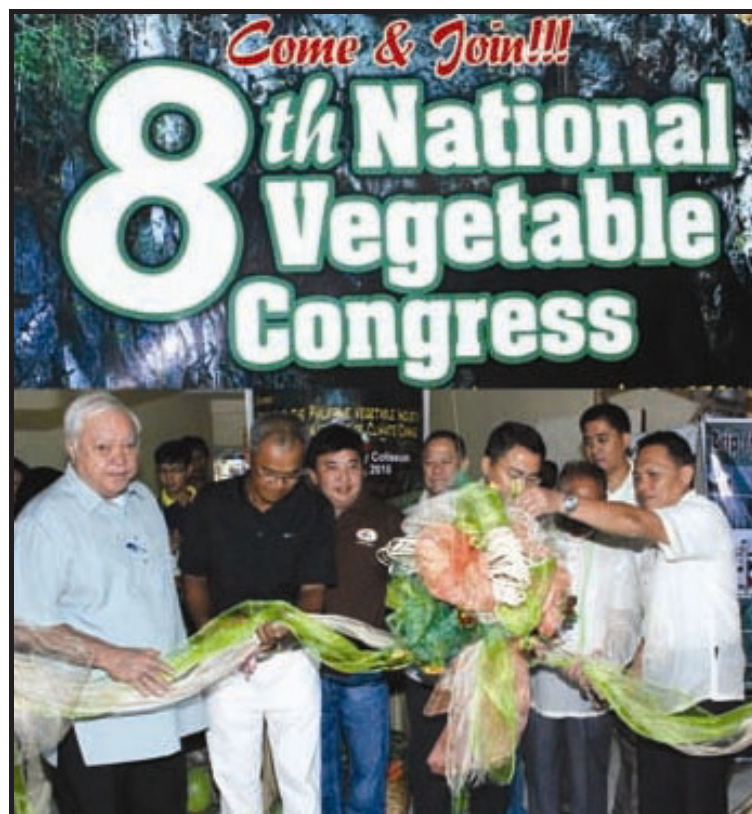
"Sa panahon ng tag-ulan, problemado kami dahil nabubulok ang aming palay. Kung binebenta namin, murang-mura ang presyo. Nang mag-request kami sa DA ng flatbed dryer, gumaan ang aming problema. Ang palay na dinidiver ng mga miyembro ay pinapatuyo na namin. Kaya malaking pasalamat namin sa DA. Kaya magsama-sama tayo at sa tulong ng gobyerno, sana'y mai-angat natin ang ating kabuhayan para sa ating mga anak, para sa ating pamilya..."

These are just some of the farmers, whose livelihood and the future of their children and their children's children have been secured through the efforts of Sec. Yap and members of the DA family.

And this is legacy that he will leave behind and bequeath to Sec. Bernie G. Fondevilla, who we believe will carry on the job as well.

Thank you Mr. Secretary for touching their lives and ours!

We wish you all the best on your next journey!



DA Region 4-B Director Antonio Gerundio (right), representing incoming DA Secretary Bernie G. Fondevilla, officially opens the 8th National Vegetable Congress in Puerto Princesa City, Feb. 23-25, 2010. Sec. Fondevilla urged farmers and other industry stakeholders to further strengthen partnerships to protect the country's vegetable sector from climate change by using modern, drought- and pest-resistant seeds, and adoption of cost-efficient production, postharvest, processing and transport technologies and facilities. Also in photo (from left) are: Puerto Princesa Vice Mayor Lucilo Bayron, Palawan Vegetable Growers Inc. President Oliver Conde, Phil. Vegetable Industry Dev't. Board, Inc. Pres. Lyndon Tan, and AGAP party-list Rep. Nicanor Briones.

LGUs to get P6.3 B from tobacco taxes

Tobacco-producing provinces mostly in Ilocos are set to receive a huge windfall, their share in excise taxes, as President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has ordered the release of P6.371 billion owed by the National Government to local government units (LGUs) that produce barley and tobacco products.

"Pursuant to Executive Order No. 843 issued by the President on November 5, 2009, the P6.3 billion will be paid in seven equal annual installments starting 2010 with a provision for the monetization by the LGUs of their respective shares," Budget and Management Secretary Rolando Andaya, Jr. said.

The DBM, Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), and the DA's National Tobacco Administration (DA-NTA) have issued joint circulars to implement Republic Act 8240, which took effect on January 1, 1997, and mandated the 15% share of barley and native tobacco-producing

LGUs from the incremental tax on tobacco products.

In availing the P6.3 billion tax share, Sec. Andaya said LGUs can exercise two options: to wait for seven years or avail their respective shares in advance from the trustee banks at a discounted value, net of interest and other charges.

The DBM has already given the beneficiary LGUs their respective Notice of Payment Schedules (NPS) that contain their share and schedule of payments and ensure annual provision for the revenue share, Andaya said.

"Director Carmencita Delantar, in charge of the DBM bureau releasing the incremental revenue share of tobacco-producing LGUs from the excise tax on tobacco products, has already given them their respective NPS," Andaya revealed.

Andaya reminded the LGUs that the proceeds be used specifically for cooperative, livelihood and agro-industrial projects. (OPS)

NLAQ on track as country's major agribusiness hub

"We have achieved gains in improving local farm productivity and have laid down the foundations to tap the high-end local and international markets for the various products of the North Luzon Agribusiness Quadrangle (NLAQ)."

Thus reported newly-appointed Agriculture Secretary Bernie G. Fondevilla to President Arroyo during a recent media briefing in Malacañang.

He said with several big ticket infrastructure projects, NLAQ is now better equipped to increase agricultural productivity and incomes of farmers and fishers, enhance food security, and seize the emerging potentials of the international market towards a better life for the people in Northern Luzon.

NLAQ, whose development champion was former DA chief Arthur Yap, covers four regions (Cordillera, Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, and Central Luzon, particularly northern parts of Aurora, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija and Zambales).

Through NLAQ, Fondevilla said the Arroyo government has invested in better education for students; provided housing projects; extended conditional cash transfers and microfinance facilities to poor families; expanded the coverage of Philhealth; distributed lands to agrarian reform beneficiaries and certificates of ancestral domain titles; developed new and idle lands for agribusiness; and protected mangroves and established landfills, dumpsites and materials recovery facilities.

For its part, the DA through the FIELDS program is boosting up the agribusiness sector in NLAQ, with the following achievements:

- Provision of 276 units of composting facilities that produce organic fertilizers;
 - From 2001 to 2009, 54,509 hectares (ha) were provided irrigation, while 104,003 ha and 565,913 ha were restored and rehabilitated, respectively -- increasing NLAQ's palay production by 39%, from 5.21 million tons in 2000 to 7.23 million tons in 2008.
 - Implemented three major irrigation projects: Agno River, Banaoang and Casecan.
- These are expected to increase irrigated areas by over 50,000 ha, and thus boost rice and corn



President Arroyo and former DA Sec. Arthur Yap inspect a lateral canal of the NIA-Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation System, in Guimba, Nueva Ecija, a vital component of NLAQ.

production, and provide electrical power to households and industries.

- Trained a total of 377,299 farmers, agricultural extension workers, and farmer-entrepreneurs, who went through 6,759 various agricultural technology trainings, from 2001 to 2009;

- Provided loans through Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP), which increased its releases to small farmers and fisherfolk by 66% from P97.036B (1982 to 2000) to P161.068B (2001 to August 2009). As of December 2009, the LBP loan portfolio in NLAQ is P13.8B, including those for small farmers and fisherfolk;

- Provided thousands of NLAQ farmers with 446 units of flatbed dryers, 26 cold chain facilities (i.e., 12 ice makers, six refrigerated trucks, and eight cold storage facilities), and 11 tramlines;

- Establishment of four mariculture parks (Santo Tomas, La Union; Narvacan, Ilocos Sur; Sual, Pangasinan; and Casiguran Bay, Aurora); and

- Provided 915,863 bags of hybrid and 6 million bags of certified palay seeds.

Other Major Infrastructure

- Constructed and rehabilitated 2,093 kilometers of farm-to-market roads (FMRs), worth P3.32B, from 2001 to 2009; and national and local roads, totaling 7,981 kms. and 9,736.44 lineal meters of bridges, worth P29.46B, from 2001 to 2009. These linked the NLAQ provinces to the markets in Metro Manila, helping vegetable farmers transport their produce faster

and safer.

Among the major roads improved or completed were:

- La Trinidad-Mt. Data-Bontoc-Banaue sections of the Halsema Highway, which cuts travel time between Baguio and Bontoc from seven hours to four hours and 30 minutes. It will be completed in May 2010.

- Bontoc-Tabuk-Tuguegarao Road (108 kms.), which will reduce travel time between Bontoc and Tuguegarao from five hours and 30 minutes to three hours.

- Rehabilitation of the 120-km. Baler-Casiguran Road, 98.5% complete as of January 2010, which will cut travel time from 8 hours to 3 hours and 30 minutes; and

- Start of construction of the Tarlac-Pangasinan-La Union Expressway (TPLEX). When completed, the 88.6-km expressway will cut travel time from Tarlac to Rosario, La Union by about two hours.

Two major ports were also completed:

- Dingalan Port in Aplaya, Aurora, in January 2008, which since then has boosted production of various agriculture and fishery products; and

- Rehabilitation of Port Irene in Sta. Ana, Cagayan, in September 2008.

Twelve airports were also upgraded and completed, speeding up transport of products and exports, and promoting tourism. Among them are:

- Poro Point International Airport in San Fernando City, La Union, completed in February 2009;
- Bagabag Airport in Nueva

Vizcaya, completed in February 2010;

- Basco Airport in Batanes, expected to be completed in May 2010; and Itbayat Airport, to be completed in April 2010; and

- Rehabilitation and improvement of Casiguran Airport, in Aurora.

Two flood control projects will be completed this year, namely:

- Laoag River Basin Flood Control and Sabo Project in Laoag, Ilocos Norte, in July 2010;

- Agno River Basin Flood Control Project Phase II-A in June 2010.

Three major power projects were also completed:

- The 33-megawatt Bangui Bay Windfarm in Ilocos Norte, operational since June 2005;

- San Roque Multi-Purpose Project, commissioned in May 2003, using the Agno River as hydro-source; and

- The power component of the Casecan Multi-Purpose Irrigation and Power Project, completed in December 2001, contributed a yearly average output of 443,033 MW from 2002 to 2008.

Through the Barangay Electrification Program, the Arroyo Administration was able to energize an additional 839 barangays, from 2001 to 2009 in NLAQ. From 7,668 barangays in 2000, total energized barangays now stands at 8,507, or almost 100% of the total 8,510 barangays through NLAQ.

Potable water was also made available to far-flung municipalities, benefiting more than 470,000 people.