



NTA officials monitor trading in Region 1

TOP NTA officials visited trading centers (TCs), wholesale tobacco dealers (WTDs), and a redrying plant to monitor trading operations, particularly in Region 1, on March 28 and 29.

NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares, Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, and Regulation Department Manager Maybelen B. Dictaan, along with the Branch Managers of their respective areas of operations, met with owners or managers of said TCs, WTDs and redrying plant to discuss current trading situations and other trading concerns, and had the opportunity to observe buying of tobacco leaves on the trading floor.

Those visited were PMFTC Trading Center/WTD/Redrying Plant in Vigan City; PMFTC Trading Center in Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur; ULPI #18 in Candon City; and Trans-Manila Inc. (TMI) Trading Center, Associated Anglo-American Tobacco Corporation Trading Center, and ULPI #16, all in Agoo, La Union.

Administrator Seares also had the opportunity to talk to the farmers in the trading centers and assured them that NTA, through the branch officials, is closely monitoring the trading operations and is always ready to address their complaints that may arise during the trading.

The monitoring team noted that only a few bales of tobacco leaves were being traded at the time of their visit, especially at the trading center of PMFTC in Vigan City. According to Manager Dictaan, the last week of March would have been the



Administrator Seares (center in white polo) and his team at the TMI trading center in Agoo, La Union.

start of peak time for trading operations.

“There are only few bales of tobacco leaves being traded at this time of the trading season, because there was a delay in planting due to the super typhoon Lawin,” explained NTA Vigan Branch Manager Minerval P. Mizal.

At the trading center of TMI in Agoo, La Union, TMI Board Chair Marjorie Diong said that they have only received about 10% of the expected volume of tobacco leaves at the time of the officials’ visit. She echoed the same observation made by Mizal that the strong typhoons that hit the Region last October had caused the delay of the planting period.

NTA, in the exercise of its regulatory authority, has overall supervision of leaf trading operations in the country and in the enforcement of regulatory procedures on the redrying, preliminary processing of tobacco leaf, and the setting up of floor prices for tobacco through the conduct of the tripartite conference. 🍃



Tobacco trading season begins

Opening of Trading Operations in Candon

TRADING for Virginia tobacco in the second district of Ilocos Sur commenced with the opening of two of the four trading centers for Virginia tobacco. Last March 13, some senior staff of the NTA Candon Branch office monitored the grading and classification of the tobacco leaves delivered by Aurora Rigor to the PMFTC trading center in Sagat, Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur. Rigor, of Caburao, Santiago, Ilocos Sur, is one of the 8,019 registered tobacco farmers from the tobacco-growing municipalities in the second district of Ilocos Sur, covering 6,252.67 hectares of farmland planted to tobacco for crop year 2016-17.

The Candon Office covers the second district of Ilocos Sur, which accounts about 40% of the total hectareage of Virginia tobacco farms in the country last cropping season.

Renato C. Aquino

Calibration and Sealing of Weighing Scales in La Union Branch

EMMMA Beth B. Fantastico, Chief Agriculturist of NTA La Union, and Marcelo T. Pascual, Supervising TPRO, calibrated a weighing scale in a trading center in Bacnotan, La Union to ensure the accuracy of weighing and measuring instruments in preparation for the tobacco trading season in the province. The team from NTA La Union visited trading centers (TCs) in Bacnotan, Agoo, Balaoan, and Sto. Tomas on March 8 and 9. For this cropping season, there are four registered TCs for Virginia, five TCs for Burley, and five TCs for native tobacco.

The other provincial branches in Region 1 also conducted the calibration and sealing of weighing scales in the trading centers in their respective areas.

Elvira N. Sambrana

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Keeping close watch over tobacco trading

TRADING is the ultimate determinant of tobacco profitability. It is therefore the most awaited time of the season where farmers anticipate good return for their investment in the labor-intensive tobacco production venture. On its end, the NTA implements equitable trading to ensure proper grading, accurate weighing, proper pricing, and prompt payment for farmers' produce.

Thus, to ensure that the various concerns that arise on the trading floor are promptly addressed, the Administrator, Dr. Robert L. Seares, and the Regulation Department Manager and staff saw to the timely conduct of Orientation Seminar on the Tobacco Trading Rules and Regulations to remind all tobacco buyers of their roles and obligations under the law during the trading season, and in the same vein, held dialogues with tobacco farmers.

The seminars were conducted in all NTA Branch Offices to stress the need for all industry players to cooperate and support each other to keep the industry

afloat amidst the evident shrinkage of tobacco production area in the Ilocos Region. The farmers were reminded of the proper way of harvesting, curing and presenting their produce to the buyers. On the other hand, the buyers were reminded to be fair in grading the tobacco to give the farmers a just payment for their produce, and as much as possible, buy all the farmers' produce to ensure that the tobacco season ends up profitable to the tobacco farmers.

Purposively, in the end, the NTA intends to conclude the 2017 trading season, without anything untoward to occur, disproving the apprehension that the consequence of the late planting of tobacco will further discourage the farmers to plant due to the havoc created by super typhoon Lawin during the seedbedding period which inevitably pushed the planting period back to when there is dwindling supply of irrigation water leading to stunted growth and the harvest season back to the hot months which are detrimental to the production of good quality tobacco. 🌱

Tobacco trading season begins... from page 1

Opening of Trading Operations in Ilocos Norte

ALEXIS B. Jamias, officer-in-charge of the Operations Division of NTA Ilocos Norte Branch (extreme right) checked on the table of leaf grades at the trading center of Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. (ULPI) VTC #10 in Lang-ayan, Currimao, Ilocos Norte before the start of trading operations in the province on March 20.



Jamias and staff from the Operations Division of Ilocos Norte Branch, along with Vigan Branch Operations staff led by Chief Agriculturist Faustino O. Taal, attended an orientation seminar conducted by the ULPI Leaf Department held at the trading center.

According to Ilocos Norte Branch Manager Mario E. Corpuz, tobacco inspectors from the operations staff of the branch office were deployed from the start of trading operations on March 21 until May 15. The assigned staff shall oversee the proper, effective, and efficient enforcement/implementation of trading rules and regulations particularly on the proper grading, proper weighing, prompt payment, and proper documentation, pursuant to RA 7171 and RA 8240. They will gather/collect Purchase Invoice Vouchers and Certificate of Purchase and other documents in the buying station and submit the same to the Branch Office for consolidation.

The two other trading centers licensed by NTA, ULPI BTC #7 and ULPI NTC #7 also in Currimao, opened for trading operations on April 26.

Divina D. Pagdilao

NTA AgriPinoy has new Project Manager

ADMINISTRATOR Robert L. Seares designated Nora A. Corre as the new Project Manager of AgriPinoy Projects effective March 13. Corre replaced Minerva P. Mizal who returned to her position as Manager of the Vigan Branch Office.



Corre has been the Senior Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer (TPRO) of Abra Branch since 2015. She first worked as Agriculturist I in the Abra Branch in 1990, and later promoted as Agriculturist II, then to TPRO III. She was the anchor of the "Oras ni Mannalon ti Tabako" radio program for Abra Branch in DZPA Bangued.

The AgriPinoy Projects, established in 2013, are the AgriPinoy Tobacco Farmers Food Processing and Trading Center in Brgy. Nanguneg, Narvacan, Ilocos Sur and the Feedmill Complex in Brgy. Sulvec, also in Narvacan.

Asked about her plans for the project, Corre said that she will start with inventory first, and then work on the revision of guidelines for more sustainable directions and prospects.

Corre earned her Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree from Lagangilang Agricultural College, now Abra State Institute of Science and Technology, in Lagangilang, Abra. She has units in Master in Public Administration from the University of Northern Philippines in Vigan City.

She is married to Rollie Corre, with whom she is blessed with five children. 🌱



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Administrator Seares holds dialog with militant farmers' group

NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares met with members of the farmers' organization Solidarity of Peasants Against Exploitation (STOP Exploitation) in the Legislative Hall in Dolores, Abra on March 27.

The dialog was also attended by the Members of the NTA Governing Board, provincial branch managers, Regulation Department Manager Maybelen B. Dictaan, and officials of host LGU Dolores, Abra headed by Mayor Robert Victor "JR" G. Seares Jr.



Left: NTA Administrator Seares answers issues raised by the farmers. *Top:* (L-R) Administrator Seares, Dir. Nestor C. Casela, Dir. Teofilo R. Quintal, Dir. Erasto A. Castañeda, and Dolores Mayor Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. N. E. Valdez

Administrator Seares, and NTA Directors Nestor C. Casela, Teofilo R. Quintal, and Erasto A. Castañeda and the NTA Branch Managers listened to the positions on issues affecting tobacco farmers presented by the farmers' organization, headed by its chairman Antonio Pugyao and secretary-general Zaldy Alfiler.

Speaking on behalf of the group, Pugyao discussed their concerns contained in an open letter addressed to Administrator Seares.

First in the list is their demand for price increase of cured Virginia tobacco leaves, which they pegged at P128 per kilo, regardless of leaf classifications. The group said their demand is "just" since the daily cost of living and production expenses had increased in the last two years.

According to Administrator Seares, this is not possible because floor prices are determined during the Tripartite Conference on Floor Prices which is held every two years. Besides, according to Director Casela, prices are based on cost of production, not on cost of living which is the basis of the farmers' organization in coming out with their price.

Casela offered a better option. "To increase the profit of farmers, we must lower the cost of production, particularly on fertilizer, pesticide, and labor, and one way to do that is to give the farmers some form of assistance or subsidy, which their local government can provide," he said.

Casela said that the buyers cannot do away with classification or grading scheme in pricing tobacco, as proposed by the group. He explained that the leaf classification is the basis of the grade and the price of tobacco on the trading floor. "If we don't classify the tobacco as high grade worthy of high price, and with the same price as the low grade, then the farmers will no longer be motivated to produce quality tobacco," he said.

He added that the industry entails the

interplay of supply and demand. "What the world market demands is quality tobacco, and when we can't produce quality, the buyers will just import the quality leaves they need, to the detriment of the farmers," he explained.

The group also requested that they be included as independent representative to the Tripartite Conference on Floor Price. Alfiler had the opinion that tobacco farmers are contract growers of private companies, so "they cannot be truly independent."

According to Casela, the farmers, who are registered and legitimate tobacco growers representing their respective area, are already represented in the Tripartite Conference. Representatives of farmers to the biennial tripartite are farmer leaders representing different tobacco-growing areas and tobacco leaf type. Other members are representatives from NTA and the private sector.

STOP Exploitation, represented by Alfiler and two others, was invited by the agency as observers in the last tripartite conference held in 2015.

For the ongoing trading operations, Pugyao also asked that their group be given the authority to monitor trading operations. Seares countered, however, that it is NTA, as a regulatory agency, is the sole body that is authorized to monitor trading operations in the country.

Seares added that the agency is bent on closely monitoring the trading operations to ensure that the farmers will not be disadvantaged, emphasizing on the proper grading and pricing of tobacco leaves in trading centers.

The group also demanded that provisions of the contract growing scheme be reviewed, to include among other things the provision on force majeure, removal of service fee, and withholding tax plus interest, and PhilHealth benefits for the tobacco growers; condonation of debt and

provision of early recovery production assistance after a calamity.

The discussion also touched on the conduct of special audit, including visitation to the irrigation support project (ISP) sites of the agency. Alfiler said that the NTA should monitor the local government units which implemented the project as to the utilization of funds.

Engr. Abraham dela Peña, member of the NTA Technical Team of the ISP, answered the concerns of the farmers on irrigation, particularly on a project site in Santiago, Ilocos Sur, which had caused flooding during typhoons in 2015. De la Peña explained that NTA worked closely with the local governments in the conduct of inspections, validation and feasibility study of the irrigation sites. The flooding of the farms in Santiago was not limited to the farms of the complaining farmers but also the entire province due to a series of strong typhoons in 2015.

Candon Branch Manager Estrella G. De Peralta also helped in explaining about the project, emphasizing the role of the local government units in the implementation of the said project.

Director Quintal, stressed the commitment of the agency to uplift the lives of the Filipino people, specifically those who suffered losses due to calamities.

Regarding PhilHealth benefits, Abra Branch Manager Esmeralda G. Valera, explained that there is already an ongoing registration of farmers who are qualified for PhilHealth benefits.

Dolores Mayor JR Seares said that the dialogue was a success because the farmers were given the chance to air their concerns and the NTA officials were present to listen to them. He said that this is consistent with the marching order of President Rodrigo Duterte to listen to all sectors and make the farmers feel the government's presence. 🌱

Farmers' training center inaugurated in Bauang La Union

by Candido I. Liangao

THE NTA La Union Branch office inaugurated its new building, the Tobacco Farmers' Multi-Purpose Training Center on March 29, in Brgy. Payocpoc, Bauang, La Union. The P4.89-million two-storey building is one of the priority projects of the Provincial Government of La Union that are funded by the excise tax shares of the province under Republic Act 7171.



Ribbon cutting ceremony during the inauguration of the Tobacco Farmers' Multi-purpose Training Center (inset). From left: SBM Danilo Abuan, SBM Gabriel Sotto, La Union General Services Officer Emelda Pascual, SPM Nancy Corazon Bacurnay, Vice Mayor Bonifacio Malinao Jr. (partly hidden), ABONO Partylist Rep. Vini Nola A. Ortega, La Union Governor Francisco "Pacoy" R. Ortega III, SBM Warlito Dauz (partly hidden), NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares, Miss Virginia Tobacco 2017 Ms. Shawntel Micholle Cruz, and NTA La Union Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay.

N. E. Valdez



The inauguration was attended by NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares, NTA Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, La Union Governor Francisco "Pacoy" R. Ortega III, ABONO Partylist Rep. Vini Nola A. Ortega, Sangguniang Panlalawigan Member Nancy Corazon M. Bacurnay, Vice Mayor Bonifacio Malinao Jr. and other members of the Sangguniang Bayan of Bauang, NTA Regulation Department Manager Maybelen B. Dictaan, tobacco leader Franklin Dumpit, Miss Virginia Tobacco 2017 Shawntel Michole Cruz, representatives from Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc., tobacco farmers, members of the La Union Agricultural-Growers Multi-Purpose Cooperative, and the La Union Branch Office staff headed by Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay.

The event started with the ribbon cutting ceremony, with Governor Ortega, Administrator Seares, SP Bacurnay, Ms. Cruz, and other officials, followed by the blessing of the building officiated by Rev. Fr. Anselmo Samson. After the ceremony, the guests toured inside the new building.

In his message, Gov. Ortega said that the construction of the two-storey building, funded by RA 7171 share of the province, is a gift from the provincial government to the tobacco farmers of La Union. He added that it is one way of bringing the benefits back to the stakeholders of the tobacco industry, especially the tobacco growers. "Projects such as the construction of the training center for our farmers is just a realization of our vision to transform La Union as the heart of agro-tourism in the Region," he said.

Vice Mayor Malinao expressed his gratitude in behalf of the Municipality of Bauang for the construction of the said building in the locality, assuring the governor that the local leaders will take care of this "gift" for the benefit of the tobacco farmers in the province.

Administrator Seares gave warm and encouraging words about the achievements of the provincial government in promoting the welfare of the farmers. He also expressed his high hope toward NTA's partnership with the LGUs in improving the lives of the tobacco farmers and their communities.

"We really feel that the government is helping us with the construction of this facility that benefit all the farmers of La Union," said Dumpit, farmer leader from Bauang, La Union and the current auditor of the National Federation of Tobacco Farmers Associations and Cooperatives, Inc.

According to Marcelo T. Pascual, Supervising TPRO of the La Union Branch and host of the ceremony, the proposal for the construction of the training center was initiated by the La Union Agricultural-Growers Multi-Purpose Cooperative (LUAGMPC), which was immediately approved by the Provincial Board, upon endorsement by Governor Ortega, as one of its priority projects for funding from the excise tax shares of the province.

The construction started on November 7, 2016 and completed on February 27, 2017.

LUAGMPC is currently headed by its chairman Deogenes D. Bancifra, Agriculturist I of the La Union Branch, with farmer leader Eleno V. Natura as vice-chairman.

The training center, located at the NTA La Union Branch Office compound, occupies a floor area of 91 square meters. The first floor will serve as practicum area and possible storage for farm input deliveries and farm implements while the second floor will serve as farmers' office and function room for trainings, conferences, and seminars. 🌱

NTA CANDON

QUICK GLANCE: BRANCH PROFILE

- Number of Tobacco Farmers/Hectarage: **8,537 FCs / 6,801 has**
- Number of Tobacco-growing Municipalities: **22**
- Number of Tobacco-growing Barangays: **340**
- Number of Staff: **41 Regular; 16 Job Orders**

NTA hosts events at Tobacco Festival 2017

NTA Candon Branch was actively involved in major activities during the Tobacco Festival 2017 on March 23 and 24.

The annual celebration, which is one of the highlights of the celebration of Candon City's 119th Anniversary of the historic "Cry of Candon" and the 16th Anniversary of its cityhood, promotes the country's enduring tobacco industry.

Like in previous celebrations, the NTA Candon Branch conducted the Tobacco Quiz Bee and the search for longest tobacco leaf, and co-hosted the search for Miss Virginia Tobacco 2016 with the city government.

Miss NTA La Union is Miss Virginia Tobacco 2017

MISS NTA La Union Shawntel Michole A. Cruz won the title Miss Virginia Tobacco 2017 during the pageant night held at the Candon Civic Center in Candon City on March 24.

Cruz, 20, of Damortis, Sto. Tomas, La Union, is taking up Bachelor of Science in Education Preschool Major in Easter College in Baguio City.

NTA Candon bet Christine Mary Pacleb was crowned 1st runner-up (Miss Philippine Tobacco Institute). She was also adjudged Miss Friendship, Best in Costume, Best in Swimwear, and Best in Gown. Another NTA Candon bet Charie Vhee Ballesteros was 2nd runner-up (Miss National Tobacco Administration).

Other minor awards winners were Miss NTA Ilocos Norte Myzelle Ruth U. Duyao, Miss Photogenic; and Miss NTA Abra Nicole Teneza, Best in Talent. Twelve candidates competed in the event, which was participated in by the different NTA branch offices from Virginia tobacco-growing provinces.

Miss Virginia Tobacco 2016 Precious Camille Bucad (NTA Ilocos Norte) passed the crown to Cruz during the pageant night, which was also attended by Ilocos Sur Rep. Eric D. Singson and NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares as guests of honor.

Atty. Jennifer Sanchez, Legal Officer, Japan Tobacco International (JTI), chaired the Board of Judges with Dennis Gadil, Manager of the Corporate Affairs of JTI, as vice-chair. Members were Dinah E. Pichay, Internal Audit Service Department Manager of NTA; Robert Plouffe, Executive Chef of Vitalis Villas; and Cocol Balbino of Dubai Duty Free.

Siblings top Tobacco Quiz

GRADUATING college student Analiza G. Gacusan and her younger sister Paulene, of Langlangka 2nd, Candon City, both students of North Luzon Philippines State College (NLPSC), placed first and second places in the Tobacco Quiz Bee held on March 24 at the City Hall Lobby in Candon City.

Third placer was Adrian C. Doctolero of San Nicolas, San Esteban, Ilocos Sur, also a student of NLPSC.

Some 34 college students from Candon City and other municipalities in the second district of Ilocos Sur competed in the annual event.

Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, Industrial Research Department Manager, chaired the Tobacco Quiz, with Farm Technology



Cruz

Manager's Corner

Estrella G. De Peralta
Manager, Candon Branch Office



Difficult roads lead to beautiful destinations

I learned about how it is to be a good leader from this quote from Carl Sandburg in his tribute to President Abraham Lincoln, one of the greatest Presidents of the U.S.A.: "Not often in the story of mankind does a man arrive on earth who is both steel and velvet, who is as hard as a rock and soft as a drifting fog, who holds in his heart and mind the paradox of terrible storm and peace unspeakable and perfect."

Lincoln demonstrated how a person can possess both a will of a lion and a heart of tenderness. He had the will of a general but the tact of a diplomat.

I will never be a great leader like Lincoln but I always try to emulate his example. I am a firm leader but I never harden my heart and I am always sensitive to God's touch at all times. In leading the Candon Branch, I always remind my coworkers, that there is a time for toughness and a time for tenderness. I have to tell them: "I am a general but I am also a diplomat. Join me in my journey of dedicated, committed, effective and efficient service and you will see me more as a diplomat."

The road to success is not an easy task. It is full of bumps and humps, twists, and turns. In my journey, I made mistakes. There were failures along the way. These things made me stronger and I strived hard to overcome them. I faltered and fumbled, but I got up from where I failed, I corrected my mistakes, and continued the journey. But I believe that the difficult road I traversed led me to beautiful destinations.

In hindsight, the sad experiences I had in my food-starved youth prepared me to hurdle all these things. I lost my father at a tender age of 11, with our youngest only a month old. Our widowed mother had to continue her college education that was interrupted when she got married. My siblings and I practically lived at the mercy of our relatives for four years and we saw poverty at its worst. But it was those years that I learned the values of strong faith in God, love of family, decisiveness, initiative, persistence, hard work, self-reliance, and gratitude. Those years shaped me into what I am today—a battle-tested woman.

Landing a job in the then Philippine Virginia Tobacco Administration (PVTA) at a young age of 21 was to me a beautiful destination. It was a dream come true because at an early age, having been fascinated by my mother's dedication and commitment to work as public school teacher, I dreamed of having a job like hers. In PVTA, and then later in NTA, I have found my passion and my calling as a Public Servant!

Public service is very rewarding for it makes servants out of leaders. To be able to serve people is not a privilege given to many so I consider myself to be so honored and privileged to be employed in the public sector.

I rose from the ranks. I started as Casual Clerk, then as Clerk III to Secretary II, and later promoted to Administrative Officer II. I was Administrative Officer III of the Candon Branch when I was designated OIC Manager; then in March 2013, I got my permanent appointment as Department Manager III. Never in my wildest dreams did I see myself one day as Manager. I dreamed big and worked hard but my dream was only up to the Division Chief of Administrative and Finance Division. But when the position was abolished after the reorganization of the agency in 1998, I was already resigned to the fact that I would hold the position Administrative Officer III till I retire. During that time, one must be a CESO to be a Manager and you cannot qualify to take the MATB unless you are an SG 24 employee.

"Why me, ma'am?" I remember throwing this question at our Administrative Department Manager Dr. Cristina C. Lopez when she called me up to inform me of my designation way back in 2007. "Administrator Carlitos S. Encarnacion and the rest of us have full trust in your capability," she replied. I was overwhelmed with emotions because at that moment, I was given the biggest challenge of my life, that of managing the biggest branch of the

NTA Candon Branch Profile

by Orlando O. Galdones



Visitation of the tobacco farm of TGY contestant Romeo Albay in Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur

Susan P. Tingle

SPECIAL FEATURE

NTA who are all toiling hard to make a difference in the lives of the tobacco farmers and their families," he said during the inauguration of the NTA Candon Branch Office Building on July 21, 2011. Also present in the inauguration were then Secretary of Agriculture Proceso J. Alcala, then Congressman Eric Owen G. Singson, then Congressman Ryan Luis V. Singson, and Administrator Zaragoza.

Leaders. NTA Candon was formerly headed by Rodrigo T. Pagtulingan, of Badoc, Ilocos Norte, April 24, 1989 to February 7, 2005, and August 8, 2005 to May 21, 2007. For six months, February 7 to August 7, 2005, Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, from Cabugao, Ilocos Sur, served as officer in charge of the branch office.

At present, the Branch is being managed by Estrella G. De Peralta, who hails from Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science/Education, and a Master's Degree in Education. She rose from the ranks, from Casual Clerk, then as Clerk III to Secretary II, and later promoted to Administrative Officer II, then to Administrative Officer III of the Candon Branch. She was OIC Manager from May 22, 2007 until March 5, 2013, when she got her permanent appointment as Department Manager III.

At present, NTA Candon has 41 warm bodies out of the 49 approved plantilla positions and 16 Job Orders.

Awards. The Branch Office won the Most Outstanding Branch Office Award during the 4th NTA Anniversary in July 1991, and won runner-up awards in 1993 (First Runner-up, NTA 6th Anniversary) and in 2009 (Second Runner-up, NTA 22nd Anniversary).

Milestones & Achievements

THE National Tobacco Administration (NTA) Candon Branch was created on April 24, 1989, after the division of the then NTA Ilocos Sur Provincial Office into two branches, the Vigan Branch to cover the first district of the province, and the Candon Branch for the second district.

NTA Candon, the youngest among the current eight provincial branch offices, is also considered the biggest branch, with its coverage being the biggest tobacco-producing area in the country. In its initial crop year (1989-1990) after the split, the branch office had 12,653 farmers with 10,616.26 hectares of tobacco farms. It had 120 plantilla positions but the number was trimmed down to 92 during the 1999 reorganization, then eventually decreased to 49 plantilla positions after the 2007 rationalization.

Office Building. NTA Candon has been holding office at its own two-storey building in the City Hall Compound in Candon City. The office building was constructed and inaugurated during the term of

administrator Edgardo D. Zaragoza. Before this, NTA Candon rented four office spaces in succession from 1989 to 2011. It first rented a space at Sia Building in Brgy. San Isidro (April 24, 1989 to August 31, 1991), then at Acal's Building in Brgy. Calaoa-an (September 1, 1991 to December 2001), Gacutan's Building in Brgy. San Nicolas (January 1, 2001 to July 24, 2008), and Gallero's Building in Brgy. Calaoan (July 25, 2008 to July 20, 2011).

According to Deputy Speaker Eric D. Singson, the building was constructed using the funds from the District Share of Republic Act 7171. "This is in dedication to the backbone of the tobacco industry, the tobacco farmers, and to the hardworking and dedicated men and women of

Project Updates

Tobacco Contract Growing System

A total of 814 farmer-cooperators (FCs) of the 2nd District of Ilocos Sur with an aggregate area of 601.75 hectares joined the IFOIGAP Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) for crop year 2016-2017.

For the last five years, the project has benefited an average of 944 farmer-cooperators, with a cumulative area of 713.7 hectares. The total production assistance amounted to P119,639,170.18. This is spread in all the municipalities under the jurisdiction of the branch, from Narvacan in the north to Tagudin down south and all the upland municipalities. The collection performance for this project was computed at 83.89%. And based from data, loan collection records an increase annually since crop year 2012-13 to present. However, this does not include yet the current crop year 2016-17 as collection of loans is still ongoing.

Rice Project

For the IFOIGAP Rice Wet Season Project, the number of farmer-cooperators for 2016 was 477 with an aggregate area of 316 hectares.

The IFOIGAP-Rice Wet Season 2017 budget has been approved and this will commence in May. The five-year performance of said project has a computed collection percentage of 98.42% covering the period 2012-2016 where an average of 484 farmers were served with an average total area of 342.4 hectares. Total production assistance extended in the same period for this project amounted to P22,078,195.



Distribution of calamity assistance for barn repair at Candon Civic Center; with (left photo) Administrator Robert L. Seares and Candon City Mayor Ericson G. Singson.

Irrigation Support Project (ISP)

The branch office released funds under the ISP to provide irrigation facility assistance this year, benefitting 40 qualified farmer-availees from the tobacco-growing areas in the district. This has increased the total of availees to 1,252 for the last four years (2012-2016), and with a total amount of P23,823,565.

Kahuyang Pangkabuhayan at Pangkalikasan (KPP)

Kahuyang Pangkabuhayan at Pangkalikasan (KPP) is one noble project the agency is conducting. It does not only restore the ecological balance of the environment, thru annual planting of forest tree species, but it also gives livelihood assistance to farmer-cooperators, hence the project's name.

A total of 497 farmer-cooperators from the tobacco-growing municipalities of the district, with an aggregate area of 486 hectares benefited from the KPP Project in 2016. This brings the total of farmer-cooperators to 1,799 covering 1,953.6 hectares from 2013 to 2016.

NTA hosts events at Tobacco Festival ... from page 5

Synchronized Tree Planting

The Branch Office spearheaded the nationwide synchronized tree planting activity conducted every July or during the onset of rainy season. For the last four years, at the branch level, 891,764 forest tree seedlings were distributed to various entities (national line agencies, state universities and colleges, local government units, schools, churches, cooperatives and farmer-associations, non-government organizations, peoples' organizations, the tobacco farmers and their families, and other civic-oriented groups), who trooped to various identified greening sites across the country to plant these saplings. Total area of greening sites was summed up at 356.7056 hectares.

For 2016, the Branch Office hosted the ceremonial planting at the Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College Provincial Institute of Fisheries in Sulvec, Narvacan, Ilocos Sur. The Branch office distributed a total of 322,057 seedlings sourced from the branch-assisted tree nurseries in the district. A total of 30,376 planting volunteers were involved in various greening areas, or a total of 128.82 hectares, in this annual activity. There were 14 nursery cooperators of the branch office in 2016, with 10 modules at 220 sq m. per module.

NTA Scholarship Program

The NTA Scholarship program covers five school years (SY 2011-12 to SY 2015-16). Several slots for two-year technical and four-year courses, preferably agriculture-related courses, were offered to qualified sons and daughters of tobacco farmers.

Forty-three of the 142 scholars from the Branch Office already graduated from their respective courses in different colleges in the province. One of the scholars, Abigael E. Imperial, a graduate of Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, is now employed at the branch office as job-order extension worker. As of second semester of SY 2016-2017, the branch office has 61 remaining scholars.

Other Projects

– Tobacco Grower of the Year 2016

Fifteen contestants participated in the Tobacco Grower of the Year Provincial Contest for the Branch Office for crop year 2015-2016 (Topped Tobacco category). Of the categories, 10 are entered for Virginia Improved subtype category and five for Native Snuff subtype.

– Oras ni Mannelon ti Tabako

The branch office edition of the "Oras ni Mannelon ti Tabako (OMT)" radio program was aired at DZTP Candon, every Monday 12:00 NN-12:30 PM, from December 26, 2016 to April 24, 2017. Anchors were Adonis D. Lazo, TPRO III and Marcelia P. Pulgar, TPRO I.

and Services Department OIC Imelda N. Riñen, Abra Branch Manager Esmeralda G. Valera, Internal Audit Service Manager Dinah E. Pichay, Regulation Department Manager Maybelen B. Dictaan, Cagayan Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda, and Jo Reddish V. Barriga, private secretary of the Administrator, as members.

Longest Tobacco Winners. *CANDON City Mayor Ericson G. Singson (right) handed over cash prizes to tobacco farmers for winning in the Longest Tobacco Leaf contest held last March 24 at the Candon City Hall lobby. For the Topped Virginia category, winners were Edmund Bragado, first place; Eddie Orpilla, second place; and Romualdo Llanes, third place (2nd to 4th from right), all of Langlangka 2nd, Candon City.*

With Mayor Singson during the awarding were Ilocos Norte Branch Manager Mario E. Corpuz, chairman of the Board of Judges, with Pangasinan Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana and Isabela Branch Manager Herman C. Torres as members.

For the Neutral Virginia category, winners were: Robert Valdez of Oaig Daya, first place; William Valdez also of Oaig Daya, second place; and Dionisio Maranion of Balingaoan, third place.



Manager's Corner ... from page 5

agency!

But public service, especially being a leader, is a privilege that is not given to many so I accepted the challenge and from that date until today, I have never regretted my decision. Because in NTA, I pursued a career closest to my heart. Because when one's heart speaks, it will push one to go forward, excel and accept challenges.

I persevered because I am always reminded of Robert Schuller's words, "Tough times never last but tough people do."

NTA Candon workers have a distinct trait —Love of Service. And bringing government services right at the doorsteps of the clients is the rallying cry of the staff even if it means crossing rivers, climbing mountains, traversing through muddy roads, and encountering some "friends" in the hinterlands. We take pride in our co-workers who share the vision and mission of NTA even if it means doing multi-tasking jobs, even sacrificing family time for public service. I give my kudos to them for their support, dedication, commitment and loyalty as they are all motivated by the thought that NTA is their second family.

We had faced so many challenges and obstacles. How can we forget the rationalization of the agency in 2007 where our plantilla was reduced from 92 to 49 positions, the "marngisit" issue in 1993 where farmers alleged that their black tobacco was a result of the nitrate fertilizers, the "No delivery" of tobacco in 2014 and many other issues. And yet we survived all these things.

We have weathered all these crises and will weather any that will come because of the guidance of our Lord Almighty, the unwavering support of the NTA top management (past and present), our local officials, especially Candon City Mayor Ericson G. Singson, and the tobacco trading center operators who both share our vision to serve the farmers, our counterparts in other govern-

ment agencies, the nongovernment organizations, and above all, the tobacco farmers who provide us the strength to overcome all obstacles!

On a personal note, I am taking this opportunity to mention the people who pushed me to travel difficult roads and who have traveled with me during the journey.

My former bosses in the PVTA, Division Chief (DC) for Administrative and Finance Hector I. Aquino and DC for Operations Loreto P. Peña who opened doors for me. More opportunities for learning, skills and capabilities enhancement came when Mr. Rodrigo T. Pagtulingan was appointed as Manager of NTA Candon. These three persons really pushed me to excel and nurtured me professionally.

My gratitude goes to the late Administrator Encarnacion who designated me OIC of the NTA Candon on May 22, 2007. Administrator Encarnacion gave me this most challenging job when I was not even a full-fledged Manager that time.

My deep appreciation also goes to Dr. Cristina C. Lopez, and to the other central office managers for their support! I am grateful to all of you for nurturing my professional growth and for providing NTA Candon all the tools for efficient and effective service.

I also thank former Administrator Edgardo D. Zaragoza and the top management that time, for providing me the tools to enhance my skills and capabilities, for providing me the opportunities to prove my worth and for my appointment as Department Manager III.

And to our present Administrator, Dr. Roberto L. Seares, and to our Deputy Administrator for Operations, Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, thank you so much! You may be both new in the NTA but we can see how development-oriented you are. NTA will soar even higher with you at the helm.

For me, NTA also means *No Trabaho Alisto*. It is the agency that has developed over the years into a highly professionalized workforce.



Candon City support to their farmers is bigger than ever

TOBACCO growers in Candon City received a total of P7.2 million financial assistance for the current cropping season, on top of the P7.4-million worth of benefits given to them by the Candon City Government in the form of farm inputs, implements, and machineries.

The local government also spent in the same period P5 million for the repair and construction of flue-curing barns, benefitting 431 farmers, and another P6 million for the construction of 43 units of flue curing barns for various barangays.

According to City Mayor Ericson G. Singson, the city government continues giving its full support to the tobacco growers in recognition of their contribution to the city coffers through Republic Act (RA) 7171.

Candon City, as the top producer of Virginia tobacco in the country, received the highest share from the tobacco excise tax among other tobacco-growing local government units with P356.9 million, based on 2013 collection which was released in March 2016.

Last year, the Sangguniang Panlungsod passed the Supplemental Development Plan of the City, through Resolution No. 020-16, embodying therein priority development projects, plans, and objectives funded under RA 7171 funds.

Bulk of the funds went to agro-industrial and infrastructure projects such as farm-to-market roads, farmers' multi-purpose halls or warehouses, and repair or rehabilitation of river control or irrigation systems of the different barangays, and subsidy to farmers' associations and cooperatives.

Mayor Singson also instructed the provision of a P30,000 cash incentive to each registered local grower who will plant tobacco starting crop year 2017-2018. He clarified that it is not a loan but a cash assistance to lower cost of production and to make their farming venture profitable.

Mayor Singson admitted that tobacco hectareage has decreased to about 16.54 percent in the past two years, citing various factors such as the damage on curing barns by calamities last year, and planting of other crops such as corn and peanuts by farmers in some tobacco areas. For the current crop year,



789 farmers planted tobacco which is less than the average of 830 farmers for the past two years. This crop year's total of 875.69 hectares, however, is higher than the average of 512.47 hectares for the same period.

But the mayor is hopeful, that with the help of the Balik Tabako program of the NTA Candon Branch, more farmers will be encouraged to engage in tobacco production. "We will continue giving them the assistance they need in all aspects of production, from land preparation to post-harvest activities, especially farm inputs and implements, and now this cash subsidy we will be giving them starting next planting season," he said.

He also added that the city government conducts the Tobacco Festival every year in commemoration of their cityhood to honor the local tobacco growers, and other industry stakeholders, and as a colorful thanksgiving celebration to promote the major industry of the city.

The city government is hopeful that it will receive the same amount, if not bigger, of their shares from tobacco excise tax in the next release of the funds expected within the year. "As before, big percentage of the fund will go directly to the farmers to advance their welfare and their communities," he added. The amount will also help the city government continue improving its capacity to deliver basic services to its constituents.

He stressed, "Our cash crop has been Virginia tobacco, and the city is ever thankful to our growers. Without our farmers, the industry that has spurred the progress of the city will not survive."

The mayor sees a rosy picture of the tobacco industry for the next five years. "We have been very hopeful, with the support of the national government, through the NTA, in helping our farmers produce quality tobacco, and as long as we have buyers for our harvests," he said.

BRANCH OFFICE STAFF



Front Row (L-R): Orlando O. Galdones, Adonis D. Lazo, Amelia L. Lacaden, Estrella G. De Peralta, Gavina B. Zapata, Loreto S. Reyes, Resty C. Cambe; **2nd Row:** Charito A. Masiglat, Julita F. Valdez, Cynthia B. Magaliao, Susana G. Dangpalan; **3rd Row:** Gina G. Artates, Hermielyn C. Ringor, Vanessa J. De La Cruz, Marcelia P. Pulgar, Janette P. Casiño, Rosario D. Pare, Rosella A. Dosono, Esperanza E. Alberade, Melecia D. Dato, Annabelle C. Dasalla, Roan G. Daproza, Susan P. Tingle; **4th Row:** Rowel G. Galdones, Arman M. Valdez, Rolando B. Habon, Valeriana C. Arellano, Helen D. Peña, Oliva C. Galdones, Analiza R. Gabuat, Wenefreda V. Fangan, Abigail E. Imperial, Mary Jane A. Aguilar, Melisa C. Balladeo, Matilde D. Arreola; **5th Row:** Ulysses R. Manuel, Angel S. Clarin, Alexander A. Ellorin, John James B. Canosa, Reynaldo L. Padillon, Nestor H. Defiesta, Leonardo C. Escobar, Julius Mark Lester L. Flores, Edilberto P. Guerrero, Restie V. Peralta; **6th Row:** Rodolfo R. Allarde Jr., Wilfredo A. Agana Jr., Charlemagne P. Navarro, Michael Christian D. Laya, Marcelino C. Ancheta, Nelson C. Rentutar, Abraham C. De La Peña, and Milo Q. Sanchez. Not in the photo are Feliza D. Directo (sick leave), Benson B. Cariño (sick leave), Merly S. Sison (abroad), and Edgardo P. Arde (on detail at NTA Agripinoy).

NTA visits Northern Mindanao

by Ma. Mercedes M. Ayco

NTA top officials, headed by Administrator Robert L. Seares, visited the tobacco areas in Northern Mindanao from April 10 to 12 to conduct meetings with tobacco farmers, in coordination with local government leaders, to observe advancement of the tobacco industry in the area in terms of production and facilities.

With the Administrator were Deputy Administrator for Support Services Dr. Mikael G. Crisologo, the two Members of the NTA Governing Board, Directors Teofilo R. Quintal and Erasto A. Castañeda, and NTA La Union Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay.

Joining the top officials were members of the Tobacco Technical Working Group (TTWG) of the National Seed Industry Council (NSIC) headed by its Chairman, Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan of the Industrial Research Department, with Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana (Manager, Pangasinan Branch Office) and Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda (Manager, Cagayan Branch Office), members.

Ma. Mercedes M. Ayco and Nelly G. Alba, both staff of the field offices in Cagayan de Oro City and North Cotabato, respectively, welcomed Administrator Seares and party at their arrival in Laguindingan airport on April 10. They proceeded to the only tobacco auction market in Mindanao, the Tobacco Bagsakan in Poblacion, Laguindingan, Misamis Oriental, where they were met by Municipal Agricultural Officer



The Tobacco Technical Working Group of the National Seed Industry Council at a farm in Luna, Claveria, Misamis Oriental for the varietal testing

Diosdado Ayson, representing Mayor Diosdado T. Obsioma, and Cecile Manoza, Municipal Economic Enterprise Development Officer.

Administrator Seares was amazed to know that the trading operation of Native/batek tobacco in Mindanao is all year round, which is different from the marketing system in the Ilocos Region. The tobacco leaves were sold by “mano” (1 mano = 100 leaves), unlike in Ilocos where they are sold in bales.

The PMFTC officials escorted the group to the modular barn sites and to the Virginia tobacco farm of Juan Mercado, a big-time farmer, in Baungon, Bukidnon. Roberto Schloesser, Leaf Director of PMFTC, proudly presented their new product, the IQOS, which is smoke-free and without tar. From there, the group paid a courtesy call to Baungon Mayor Pedro Alvarez at the Municipal Hall, then to Misamis Oriental Governor Yevgeny Emano at the provincial capitol.

On the following day, April 11, the group and some PMFTC staff met with Mayor Meraluna S. Abrogar

of Claveria, Misamis Oriental. They discussed the expansion of PMFTC in the area and the projects to be implemented when they will receive their share of excise tax under RA 7171.

The group proceeded to the farm of Mr. Ambal in Tamboboan, where the members of the NSIC-TTWG evaluated the performance of tobacco varieties and hybrids in terms of agronomic parameters and resistance to tobacco diseases in a particular location. This is to identify suitable varieties for planting in Misamis Oriental during the dry, wet and off seasons.

In the early afternoon, PMFTC showed the group the tobacco production facilities also in Claveria. First, they toured the greenhouse where seedlings are produced, then the buying station where trading operation was ongoing during the visit. The assigned tour guides discussed the flow of buying operations and the curing conditions.

The group was called back to the conference room for the farmers’ forum together with Mayor Abrogar of Claveria. The Virginia tobacco farmers from Claveria were very eager to hear the updates on the tobacco industry and the assistance they will be receiving from RA 7171. 🌱



Administrator Seares (center) checking on tobacco leaves at the modular barn site in Baungon, with from left Engr. Sambrana, Dr. Bonoan, Dr. Palabay and Director Quintal.

NTA Director Castañeda passes away

THE NTA management and staff were shocked at the untimely demise of their Director Erasto A. Castañeda. The 66-year-old Director died after collapsing during a field evaluation of tobacco farms by NTA officials in Claveria, Misamis Oriental last April 11. Director Castañeda formally took his oath of office as Member of the NTA Governing Board, representing the tobacco farmers, along with other agency officials, before President Rodrigo Roa Duterte in Malacañang last April 4.

Before his appointment, Castañeda, of Vigan City, worked as Agriculturist II of the NTA Vigan Branch and later assigned as officer-in-charge of NTA Mindanao Field Office in Cagayan De Oro City from 2004 until he opted for retirement in 2007. He is survived by his wife Elsie Q. Castañeda.



Corn cob dispenser for tobacco farmers

by Felisa R. Aurellano



Farmer-cooperator Reynaldo C. Acosta (left) receives the Certificate of Citation for his invaluable time and effort in gathering data for the demonstration trial, from Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, with (from left) Sta. Lucia Mayor Ferdinand F. Hernaez, FTSD OIC Imelda N. Riñen, and NTA Candon Branch Manager Estrella G. De Peralta. **Top photo:** Acosta shows how the dispenser works before farmers and local officials. **F.R. Aurellano**

THE Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD), through its Farm Technology Development Division (FTDD), conducted a demonstration trial of its own design of an automatic dispenser using corn cob as fuel substitute in curing Virginia tobacco, during a Field Day held at Brgy. Namatican, Sta. Lucia, Ilocos Sur on April 6.

Tobacco grower Reynaldo C. Acosta hosted the demonstration trial in his curing barn. He said he used an average of 600 kg of corn cob per curing batch with lesser barn tending time compared with fuelwood. The dispenser's automatic element regulates the volume and frequency of corn cob according to the heat requirement of the curing stage. Consequently, barn tending time is greatly decreased; thereby, giving the farmer time for other productive activities.

A hectare of tobacco crop consumes 24 cu.m. of fuelwood for curing or around eight trees of an eight-year-old ipil-ipil tree. With the use of corncob, an agricultural waste, as fuel substitute, Acosta had saved 192 trees for a hectare of tobacco and had solved the problem of disposal of agricultural wastes.

The automatic dispenser was also tried in the barn of Eddie Habab in Brgy. Sapang, Sta. Lucia, Ilocos Sur.

Roman J. Raganit Jr., Supervising Science Research Specialist and FTDD officer-in-charge, and Oscar D. Cortero, Science Research Specialist II, spearheaded the design and modification of the dispenser and the demonstration trial.

The activity was attended by 70 farmers, local officials, and officials of the National Tobacco Administration. Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, in his message after the demo trial, expressed support to science-based innovations that could help in the sustainability of the industry. He also assured the farmers that they are recognized as the backbone of the tobacco industry and their concerns are given prime attention. Convinced with the capability of the automatic dispenser, Sta. Lucia Mayor Ferdinand F. Hernaez requested the farmer-cooperator to sit with them in a planning session for the possible joint funding of the manufacture of several units for their local farmers.

The field day was made possible through the coordination of the NTA Candon Branch, headed by Estrella G. De Peralta, FTSD headed by OIC Imelda N. Riñen, and the local government of Sta. Lucia, Ilocos Sur. 🌱

Cagayan Branch, ULPI hold leaf grading orientation in the barangays

by Gilbert A. Taguiam

NTA Cagayan Branch joined the Universal Leaf Philippines Inc. (ULPI), the sole contracting buyer firm in Region 2, in conducting the Leaf Orientation Seminar for the farmer cooperators (FCs) of both dark air-cured (DAC) tobacco and Isabela Burley (ISB) starting third week of April.

The project, spearheaded by the Leaf Department of ULPI based in Reina Mercedes, Isabela, is done annually prior to trading season, which usually starts in May.

In the previous years, ULPI got cured leaves from the curing shed of stalk-cut tobacco to be used as samples to show how to classify according to leaf position. This procedure seemed to have a minimal impact to the FCs because they still delivered mixed grades in a bale. Thus, this year, NTA Cagayan suggested to ULPI to bring with them conditioned/fermented tobacco for their samples so that the farmers could determine every



grade for each stalk position. With the innovation, the farmers learned to classify per stalk position and later on, classify per grade conditioned Burley tobacco and fermented DAC. The farmers appreciated the advantages of this innovative system of orientation and believed that this could have minimized the mixed grades that caused the down-grading of their tobacco produce that redound to negative income for them.

During the series of orientation seminars in different barangays of Tuao, Amulung, Solana, and Baggao, speakers

from ULPI discussed the desired moisture content of tobacco to be delivered. Some of the leaves delivered by the farmer have above the ideal moisture content (18.5% for Burley and 20% for DAC) because they presumed that extra moisture adds weight to their tobacco. Contrary to their belief, their produce will get low grades if found to have high moisture content. Tobacco leaves which are found to be soft or wet are subjected to sun-drying at the trading center which will surely degrade the quality of the leaves.

Delivery of clean tobacco, or those free of non-tobacco related materials (NTRMs), was also emphasized during the orientations. The NTA, ULPI, and the farmers agreed that a certification must be executed to serve as a pass slip for tobacco deliveries with the following requirements: (1) must be well conditioned/fermented; (2) must have been baled according to leaf position, graded, and pre-classified; (3) must have

Tobacco Dust



Plant visit. NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares, along with Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa and Regulation Department Manager Maybelen B. Dictaan visited the Tobacco Dust Production Plant in Brgy. Fernando, Sto. Tomas, La Union. TDPP Project Manager Hermogenes A. Galvez toured the NTA officials and La Union Branch officers headed by Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay, to the facility where the commercial brand, Tobacco Dust Plus, a biodegradable molluscicide cum fertilizer, is produced.



Delivery of tobacco dust. Truck helpers reload 250 bags of Tobacco Dust Plus (TDP) to a delivery truck at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City on March 14. TDP, the commercial brand of the tobacco dust produced by NTA, will be delivered to dealers and fishpond operators in Iloilo. Since 2009, NTA has been producing TDP at its Tobacco Dust Production Plant in Brgy. Fernando, Sto. Tomas, La Union. The product is a biodegradable molluscicide cum fertilizer for grow-out fish ponds in the country.

an ideal moisture content of not higher than 17% for ISB and 18% for DAC to give an allowance for further fermentation upon hauling from source to the trading center; and (4) must be free from NTRMs. The certification form is devised to ensure that all tobacco delivered from the province should have been inspected by the extension workers of NTA and ULPI and found to have passed all the requirements.

Speakers from NTA, Branch Manager Corazon R. Riazonda and/or Chief Agriculturist Gilbert A. Taguiam, discussed with the farmers their roles during tobacco trading as stipulated in the Tobacco Trading Rules and Regulations, with emphasis on offenses and penalties under Regulation XIV. Under this rule, if farmers are found to “hitch or ride on” their produce to that of their fellow farmers to evade payment of their production loan, they will be penalized with fine or imprisonment.

NTA speakers also emphasized the rights of the farmers to ask for mediation in case of disagreement on grading and classification of their tobacco produce; and in case mediation fails, the farmers have the right to request for arbitration. Here, the NTA will inspect, examine and determine the grades and its decision will bind both parties. 🌱

NTA releases calamity assistance for curing facilities repair

TOBACCO farmers affected by “Lawin” finally received calamity aid under the P3.5-million financial assistance from the National Tobacco Administration.

Each of the 1,245 affected farmers from Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Abra, La Union, and Pangasinan received P2,000 for barn repair to help them recover from the damages caused by the super typhoon that hit Luzon in October last year.

NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares attended the first batch of distribution of calamity assistance by the provincial branch offices in Region 1 and Abra on April 17-19.

Some 206 tobacco farmers from Cagayan also received calamity assistance for air-curing sheds, during a simple awarding ceremony held at the Branch Office in Tuguegarao City on April 26. The Isabela Branch Office will release the calamity assistance to the 299 farmer recipients of said calamity assistance in May.

Mayor Benjamin V. Sarmiento of San Juan, Ilocos Sur hosted NTA Vigan in the ceremonial release of calamity assistance on April 17 at the San Juan Gymnasium. Administrator Seares, along with (DASS)-designate Dr. Mikael Benedict G. Crisologo, and Directors Nestor C. Casela and Teofilo R. Quintal, distributed checks to 207 farmers in the first district of Ilocos Sur.

Mayor Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. of Dolores, Abra hosted NTA Abra in the distribution of calamity assistance to 209 farmers on April 17. Spearheading the ceremonial release were Administrator Seares, Dr. Crisologo, and Mayor Seares.

In Ilocos Norte, 194 tobacco farmers received their calamity assistance on April 18. Administrator Seares, Dr. Crisologo, and Director Casela graced the awarding of calamity assistance held at the NTA Auditorium.

Administrator Seares assured the tobacco farmers of the agency’s continuous support to the local growers, with new projects to be implemented within the year. He also encouraged farmers to give feedbacks through project proposals that they submit to the branch office.

The program ended with the response from one of the recipients, where he thanked the NTA for this assistance that they received.

In Candon, Administrator Seares, assisted by Candon City Mayor Ericson G. Singson, Dr. Crisologo, and Director Quintal, personally awarded calamity aid checks to 253 tobacco farmers qualified for the calamity assistance. The awarding program was held at the Candon Civic Center on April 18.

In La Union, Administrator Seares, assisted by La Union Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay and COA auditor Jenelyn Calixterio, personally awarded calamity aid checks to 82 of the 161 tobacco farmers qualified for the calamity assistance. The awarding program was held at the new Tobacco Farmers’ Multi-purpose Training Center in Bauang, La Union.

Administrator Seares, in his message, assured the farmers of the agency’s continuing support through the implementation of various programs and projects that will help them achieve higher farm productivity. He also announced new projects that the agency plans to undertake this year, among them are cattle dispersal and the distribution of tractors for the tobacco farmers.

Farmer Cesar Laroya of Brgy. Parasapas, Rosario, La Union, speaking in behalf of the recipients, expressed his gratitude for the assistance, as he requested the agency officials to give them more assistance in the form of irrigation support, such as the provision of water pump, hoses and well casings (*lusob*), and

LBP conducts briefing on E-payroll system in Ilocos Norte

RELATIVE to the agency's application and enrollment in an electronic payroll system, the Land Bank of the Philippines, Batac Branch, through its Branch Head, Aurea A. Nolasco, conducted a briefing to officials of NTA Ilocos Norte on February 21. Present during the briefing were Branch Manager Mario E. Corpuz; Elaine A. Tinio, Administrative Officer III; Valentino L. Valdez, Accountant III; and Greta S. Torres, Cashier II.

Nolasco discussed the requirements needed for the availment of the ATM Payroll Services, the process/procedures to be followed, and the guidelines on the banking system.

The E-Payroll System was implemented in the Branch Office on April 2017. *(Elaine A. Tinio)*

NTA releases calamity... from page 11

tractors.

The branch offices in the areas conducted on-farm inspections a few days after the typhoon to see the extent of damages on the curing barns and air-curing sheds in the affected areas. Their damage report served as bases for coming up with programs that will enable the tobacco farmers recover from other damages caused by the calamity. 🌱

-- *Divina D. Pagdilao, Neyo E. Valdez*



NTA AgriPinoy Training School graduates fifth batch

NTA AgriPinoy Training School held its Commencement Exercise for the fifth batch of trainees, held at the NTA AgriPinoy Projects Showroom in Nanguneg, Narvacan, Ilocos Sur, on April 6.

The 29 graduates, 25 of which are scholars under the Training for Work Scholarship Program of TESDA Region 1, completed Slaughtering Operations NC II, a short butchery/slaughtering course accredited by the Technical Education and Skills Development. The other four included two workers of the Meat Processing Section of NTA AgriPinoy facility and two 4th year BS Agriculture OJT students of Mariano Marcos State University (Batac City).

In PHOTO: The fifth batch of graduates with (seated, from left) Administrative Officer and School Registrar Noralyn I. Idica, Training School (TS) Director and NTA APP Project Manager Nora A. Corre, Farm Technology and Services Department officer-in-charge Imelda N. Riñen, TS Trainer and Head of Slaughtering Section Arturo D. Castillanes, Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, Larry Dizon of TESDA Ilocos Sur, Candon Branch Manager Estrella G. de Peralta, and Abra Branch Manager Esmeralda G. Valera. Noralyn I. Idica

NTA Ilocos Norte hosts job levelling interview by GCG

by *Divina D. Pagdilao*

THE Governance Commission for Government Owned and Controlled Corporation (GCG) conducted Job Levelling interviews with all the staff of the Ilocos Norte Branch, Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD), and the Product Development Division (PDD) of the Industrial Research Department on March 13-15. This was to evaluate the actual activities of the employees as compared to the job description of their present position in relation to Job Grade Salary Standardization.

The Ilocos Norte Branch Manager Mario E. Corpuz was chosen as respondent to answer questions relevant to branch management and operation.

According to Manager Corpuz, failure in the activity will mean failure of all the branches. So, before the scheduled GCG encounter, the Senior Staff of the branch headed by Manager Corpuz gave

firm instructions for all staff to review the activities undertaken with respect to their position and their job description.

Some instructions were also shared by FTSD officer-in-charge (OIC) Imelda N. Riñen and Project Development Officer Luzviminda U. Padayao; and Engr. Cecilio Cabigan, PDD Chief Science Research Specialist.

The CGC team, with seven members headed by its leader Director IV Atty. Rybigail L. Lao, conducted orientation in the afternoon of March 13. Atty. Lao discussed the objective, the actual groupings, and time allotment. The Branch Office was divided into two groups: (1) the Office of the Branch Manager (Administrative and Finance), and (2) the Operations Group with two evaluators per group. FTSD and IRD-PDD had two separate groups of evaluators. The interview proper was held on March 14.

The Office of the Branch Manager was evaluated by Atty. Lao and Atty. William B. Ruyeras. For the Operations group, two GCG evaluators interviewed first Divina D. Pagdilao, Agriculturist I, then two others, who are both Agriculturist I, followed by Alexis B. Jamias, Supervising Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer (TPRO); and Myrna D. Salut, Senior TPRO.

Two TPRO III holders were interviewed simultaneously. The TPRO I staff were interviewed in groups of two. The evaluators were GCG team members Katrina M. Mendoza and Vanessa R. Rosales.

The exit conference was done with the senior staff of the three departments.

After the evaluation, Corpuz congratulated the group for a "job well done," stressing that the performance of employees in the interview was commendable. 🌱



(L-R) Vice Mayor Geraldine M. Balbuena, Administrator Seares, and Mayor Jane Mamsaang-Cecilia

ADMINISTRATOR Robert L. Seares was the guest of honor during the "Palanos," a cultural night before the culmination program for the Grand Pinao of the Municipality of Peñarrubia, Abra, in celebration of its 100th Foundation Anniversary, held at the Municipal Plaza last March 3.

Administrator Seares, who was a former Municipal Health Officer of Peñarrubia, talked on the benefits that the local government units receive from their shares of the tobacco excise tax, under RA 7171, as he urged the local leaders headed by Peñarrubia Mayor Jane Mamsaang-Cecilia to help the agency look after the interest of their farmers, from production of quality tobacco to trading.

Highlights of the program were the grand production number on the "Christianization of the Tingguians of Patoc" by selected students of Little Flower High School of Peñarrubia; Uggayam (traditional Igorot chant and prayer); and tadek performances by Administrator Seares and Mayor Cecilia, Former Abra Governor Eustaquio P. Bersamin and Vice Mayor Geraldine M. Balbuena, and other local officials and guests. 🌱 N.E. Valdez