



PH seeks bigger tobacco export amidst declining local demand



PRESSCON. Administrator Robert L. Seares speaks with members of the media covering the Department of Agriculture during a press conference at the NTA Central Office Conference Room in Quezon City. The Administrator and other senior officials answer questions from the Agri beat reporters on tobacco industry updates, excise tax, and other issues and concerns of the industry. The senior officials present are Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros of the Regulation Department, Fortuna C. Benosa of the CorPlan Department, Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan of the Industrial Research Department, and Imelda N. Riñen of the Farm Technology and Services Department.

Melanie Rapiz-Parel

NEDA official bats for alternative uses of tobacco

NATIONAL Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Undersecretary for Regional Development Adoracion M. Navarro urged NTA to find other alternative uses of tobacco, especially for large-scale or commercial production, as a part of the government efforts to boost the tobacco industry.

Navarro made the call during her visit to the NTA Candon Office on May 28 to discuss NEDA's regional development thrusts and growth targets with NTA Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa and other agency officials.

Navarro also acknowledged the role of the tobacco industry in generating billions of taxes, providing big income to thousands of farmers, and employing people, as she dispelled the notion that the tobacco industry is a sunset industry.

She said that "sunset" refers only to one component of the tobacco industry, and that is the use of tobacco for smoking.

She proposed instead the term "emerging industry" for the tobacco industry, particularly on the alternative uses of tobacco for large-scale or commercial production.

"Part of the strategy are industry linkages, particularly the academe, and research grants for researchers from the state universities and colleges," she said.

According to Imelda N. Riñen, manager of the Farm Technology and Services Department, NTA has been conducting numerous studies on the alternative uses

AS the nationwide smoking ban in public places and newly imposed tax hike continued to pull down demand for local tobacco, NTA is now concentrating on the production of leaf tobacco for export.

In a press conference held at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City, NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares said that this move is expected to cushion the effect of the ban on the tobacco farmers' income.

The strict nationwide smoking ban, per Executive Order No. 6 issued by President Rodrigo R. Duterte in May last year, which prohibits smoking in public places, further reduced cigarette consumption and impacted tobacco leaf output.

"The agency is now focused on cultivating tobacco leaves for export and as substitutes for blending tobacco being imported for domestic manufacturing, as this will also help tobacco farmers stay afloat amid the declining demand," he said.

In domestic manufacturing, uncertainty also looms. Due to the passage of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law, a pack of cigarettes is now P5 more expensive than the retail price of P30 in 2017. This will be followed by a series of lower rate increases until 2024.

After this period, the annual 4% increase mandated by Republic Act 10351 or the Sin Tax Reform Law becomes operational again.

According to Regulation Department Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, there is really lower local demand but the agency hopes to compensate it with the exports.

Reduced production

From the production of 48.22 million kilograms (kg) of all types of tobacco in 2017, the output this year is only seen at 40 million kg.

According to Administrator Seares, the spiraling impact of the ban and increased taxes in the domestic tobacco sector has caused local leaf production sliding down to 40 million kg, compared with 48.22 million kg—valued at P3.65 billion—in 2017.

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This will cause the number of farmers and areas planted to tobacco to drop, “which have been decreasing in the last three years by 17 percent and 15 percent, respectively,” he said.

Based on the NTA’s 2013-2017 data, the number of tobacco farmers and areas plunged by 40 percent from 53,959 to 34,465, and 43 percent from 37,021 to 22,704 hectares, respectively.

The volume and value of tobacco production also fell by 30 percent from 68 million kg to 48 million kg, and 21 percent from P4.67 billion to P3.65 billion, respectively.

According to Administrator Seares, the decision of farmers to shift to other crops may be temporary, as they always come back after a year or two, reportedly because of lack of production support, small markets, and unstable prices for other crops.

Total Contract Growing

As NTA pushes for exports, the agency continues the strict implementation of the Total Tobacco Contract Growing System, which will address both volume and quality requirement for domestic manufacturing and for export based on Purchase Commitment to be submitted by tobacco companies starting tobacco season 2018 to 2019.

“We have to invest on provision of production assistance and inputs to tobacco farmers for shifting towards topped tobacco production, irrigation facilities, and flue-curing barns for Virginia and air-curing sheds for burley and native tobacco, among others,” Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa said.

NTA will assist farmers, especially those without marketing agreements with companies, on economically sustainable, market-driven, and high-value crops and livelihood activities, Verzosa added. 🌱

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of tobacco, and some of them have been tested for possible commercial production, such as tobacco handmade paper, tobacco ethanol, tobacco extracts for pest control, and tobacco dust as an organic molluscicide.



Usec Navarro with Atty. Verzosa

Navarro also challenged the agency to come up with pipeline projects and investment programs using the Tobacco Fund (under Republic Act 4155), for the benefit of the tobacco farmers and their communities.

With Usec Navarro during the meeting were officials from NEDA Region 1 headed by Regional Director Nestor G. Rillon.

Corporate Planning Manager Fortuna C. Benosa presented to the NEDA officials the accomplishments of the agency in the past five years, potentials and challenges, plans for the agency, and a brief discussion on the proposed Tobacco Industry Roadmap.

“We appreciate so much that NEDA is meeting us as this is an opportunity for NTA to highlight the role of the tobacco industry in the development of Region 1,” Atty. Verzosa said in a message.

Also present during the meeting were Branch Managers Esmeralda G. Valera (Abra), Estrella G. De Peralta (Candon), Minerva P. Mizal (Vigan), Mario E. Corpuz (Ilocos Norte), Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana (Pangasinan), and La Union Branch Chief Agriculturist Emma Beth Fantastico. 🌱

Answering the demand for topped tobacco to safeguard the tobacco industry

INCREASED taxes on tobacco products is taking its toll on the production sector as shown by the decrease in production due to the decrease in the number of farmers involved in farming and consequently less areas planted to tobacco.

On the other hand, opportunity is evident in the demand for topped tobacco which is used in the manufacture of cigarettes, mainly satisfied by imported tobacco.

It is to this end that the Philippine tobacco industry is trying to direct its attention – production of the volume and quality of tobacco required by both local and foreign markets.

To attain this, the NTA is aggressively promoting Total Tobacco Contract Growing System by providing all the necessary production assistance to encourage the tobacco farmers to continue planting the crop. Included in this drive are the provision of subsidies for production inputs, access to irrigation support facilities/equipment/systems and requiring the buyers to signify their purchase commitments to ensure that production will be based on market demand so there will be no reason that all the targeted production will not be absorbed by the market and ensure profitability on the part of the farmers.

Moreover, production technologies are continually updated to keep the tobacco farmers abreast on the best methods of producing world-class tobacco, and good agricultural practices seriously emphasized to ensure that the quality of the tobacco produced is not only world-class and free from non-tobacco related materials but that all the workers are protected from health hazards posed by the farming inputs and systems of production.

With all the stakeholders collaborating to produce topped tobacco acceptable in the world market, there is undoubtedly much to hope for as far as the tobacco industry is concerned. This is evident in the fact that although the tobacco industry has been considered as a sunset industry for a few decades now, it has remained one of the pillars of the national economy as the industry continues to identify alternative opportunities for economic development and equip the farming sector accordingly to attain the appurtenant production goals. 🌱



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Buying stations compliant with new trading rules – NTA-RD

THE Monitoring Team of the NTA Regulation Department (NTA-RD) observed that the NTA-licensed buying stations (BSs), wholesale tobacco dealers (WTDs), and field canvassers (FCs) in Region 1 were compliant with the 2018 Revised Trading Rules and Regulations (TRR) for locally grown leaf tobacco.

The NTA-RD Monitoring Team, headed by Alex L. Borje, Chief Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer (TPRO), checked on the proper implementation of the provisions of the revised TRR by the leaf buyers in the region from April 23 to 26, particularly on proper grading, proper or accurate weighing, prompt payment, and proper documentation.

The team also checked on the leaf buyers' compliance to the provisions of the Harmonized Grades for Locally Grown Virginia and Burley Leaf Tobacco, per NTA Memorandum Circular No. 001, series of 2018.

Other members of the team that conducted on-site monitoring of trading operations were Primitivo M. Abalos Jr, TPRO III; and Franklin Ross S. Mendoza, TPRO I.

Those visited were buying stations of Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. (ULPI) in Batac City and Currimao in Ilocos Norte, Cabugao and Candon City in Ilocos Sur, Bangar and Agoo in La Union, and Rosales in Pangasinan; Conleaf in Cabugao, Ilocos Sur and Bacnotan, La Union; PMFTC in Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur; Trans-Manila Inc. (TMI) in Aringay, La Union; Associated Anglo-American Tobacco in Aringay, La Union; Agrifina Estalilla Buying Station in Caba, La Union; John Medriano Buying Station in Aringay, La Union; and A & J Trading Center in Sto. Tomas La Union.

According to Borje, some buying stations had their own leaf tobacco samples presented either in international grade marks or NTA Harmonized Grade Standards. The buying stations also had their NTA-calibrated weighing scales stamped with official stickers/seals at their designated placement area and the NTA Tobacco Floor Prices, per grade with leaf samples, displayed in big tarpaulins or boards in their premises for ready reference of all concerned.

"The buying stations are also using the prescribed trading forms such as Purchase Invoice Vouchers (PIVs) and Certificate of Purchase, and they have BIR registration and Mayor's



Alex L. Borje (center, in striped shirt), head of the Monitoring Team, with Marcelino Biala of ULPI (2nd from left) and NTA Candon Manager Estrella G. De Peralta during the inspection of the buying station in Candon City.

NTA Candon

Permit," said Borje.

The NTA-RD Team, joined by the Branch Manager and other officers in their respective areas, also had the opportunity to discuss current trading situations and other trading concerns with the leaf buyers, and to observe buying of tobacco leaves on the trading floor.

Some issues and concerns, however, were raised during the monitoring.

Apolinario Pagdilao, a major field canvasser in Pinili, Ilocos Norte, reported that some field canvassers from the neighboring provinces of Ilocos Sur, Abra and La Union were buying leaves from Ilocos Norte farmers, which is a violation of trading rules.

NTA Ilocos Norte Branch Manager Mario E. Corpuz said that he will coordinate with the local government of Pinili to help regulate the movement of tobacco leaves and enforce the proper documentation of leaf production to protect the interest of the local government units.

In PMFTC Sta. Cruz, the buying station manager noted an increase in the number of farmers, exceeding their 15% buffer for farmers, which is an indication of a pole vaulting activity, side selling or trading outside the usual farmer-buyer contracts.

The NTA-RD Team also conducted entrance and exit conferences with the Branch Offices on the results/observations of monitoring tobacco trading operations.

Before the opening of the trading season, the Regulation Department, headed by Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, conducted in February the orientation seminar on the 2018 TRR for leaf buyers and farmers for the different branch offices. 🍃

Monitoring in Ilocos Norte

ILOCOS Norte Branch Manager Mario E. Corpuz, along with Chief Agriculturist Luzviminda U. Padayao, joined on April 24 the NTA-RD Monitoring Team in conducting on-site monitoring and inspection of the four buying stations in the province, namely: ULPI Virginia Trading Center (VTC) #58 located at Brgy. Biloca, Batac City; and ULPI VTC #10, ULPI Burley Trading Center #7 and ULPI Native Trading Center #7, all in Brgy. Lang-ayan, Currimao.

The joint NTA-RD and Branch Office monitoring team also visited trading operations of Apolinario Pagdilao in Pinili and James Tan in Batac City, two of the 40 field canvassers issued with Certificate of Authority to buy tobacco in Ilocos Norte.

According to Corpuz, they will conduct more visits to the

buying stations to monitor the documentation of tobacco acceptances and to check on TPROs who are assigned as Tobacco Inspectors (on rotation basis) during the trading operations.

He also reported that a tobacco monitoring point was established at the Ilocos Norte-Ilocos Sur boundary in Badoc to monitor proper recording of tobacco. This was done in coordination with the Provincial Government of Ilocos Norte, the local government of Badoc, and the Philippine National Police.

"Extension workers are being deployed to man the monitoring point to inspect vehicles transporting tobacco from the province to ensure proper documentation," said Corpuz.

He enjoined those involved in the trading to ensure that each PIV is properly recorded in the buying stations that purchased the tobacco leaves. (*Divina D. Pagdilao*)

NTA gets highest mark in customer satisfaction survey

by Excelsior R. Mejia, Industrial Research Department

NTA maintained its excellent (extremely satisfactory) mark in the recently completed customer satisfaction survey, which interviewed farmers, buying sector clients, and the private sector and trader clients on the overall performance of the agency in terms of the implementation of all the programs, projects and activities for Crop Year 2016-2017.



This was the result of the survey conducted last year by the Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College (ISPSC), an independent third party, commissioned by the NTA. The Final Report was submitted to NTA on June 4 by ISPSC President Dr. Francisco D. Lopez.

In the 2016 Survey also conducted by ISPSC, farmer-cooperators of the NTA also gave an excellent (extremely satisfactory) mark to the programs, projects, activities, and services which they availed of in 2015.

The purpose of the survey is to solicit feedbacks from the various NTA clients as regards the efficiency and effectiveness of the policies, systems and procedures underlying its different programs, projects, activities and services.

NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares said in a statement that he was “pleased” with the agency maintaining its excellent mark, noting an improvement of rating in several areas. “We are encouraged by our continuous improvement and are confident that with consistent hard work and dedication to service among the employees, we will be effective in fulfilling our mandate to our stakeholders.”

As in the previous survey, ISPSC used three sets of survey forms designed by NTA. The first set contains the question on how satisfied are the respondent farmers in terms of the package of technology, technical, financial and marketing assistance, training and scholarship, and availability of extension workers.

The survey gave the farmer cooperators the opportunity to give feedback on the agency’s programs and projects, such as the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS), Rice Production, the Kahuyang Pangkabuhayan at Pangkalikasan, Irrigation Support Program, Hog Production, Scholarship Program, and Irrigation Project for Tobacco Farmers.

Using the 5-point Likert scale, with performance rating of 5 as Excellent and 1 as Poor, the eight Branch Offices earned 4.75 average rating of satisfaction from the farmer-cooperators. This is higher than the 4.5 overall performance rating in 2016.

A total of 1,460 farmer respondents, or roughly equivalent to 10% per project location, were randomly selected from tobacco growing provinces, namely, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur (divided into Vigan and Candon Branch Offices), Abra, La Union, Pangasinan, Isabela and Cagayan.

The second set of the survey asks the respondents

(researchers, consumers, and buyers) on how they rate NTA services rendered along these criteria: courtesy, knowledge of work, response to queries, pertinent information offered, and prompt and speedy service.

The third set asks respondents (traders and the private sector) on the rating of the agency in terms of the above criteria, including availability of staff at trading centers, correct billing for research/regulation and monitoring fees, and fair and objective application of rules and regulations.

There were 247 respondents for the second set, and 63 for the third set.

The eight branch offices earned 4.8 average rating of satisfaction from the researchers, consumers and buying sector clients, and 4.68 average rating of satisfaction from the private sector and traders.

The same survey also showed that the Central Office departments, namely Corporate Planning, Industrial Research, and Farm Technology and Services, are delivering excellent service to its clients (consumers and buying sectors clients, the private sector and traders).

The clients, as a matter of protocol, have been requested to accomplish the survey form after transaction in said departments.

The Central Office departments got an overall rating of 4.9 based on the parameters from researchers, consumers, buying sector clients, and an overall rating of 4.5 from private sectors and traders.

Cagayan Branch stands first in the level of satisfaction of their farmer cooperators with 4.92 weighted mean, followed by Ilocos Norte and La Union with 4.81 and 4.8, respectively.

Pangasinan tops the second set (performance rating by researchers, consumers, and buyers) with 4.98 weighted mean, followed by Candon and Ilocos Norte with 4.88 and 4.8, respectively. Candon Branch tops the third set (performance rating by private sector and traders) with 4.96, followed by La Union and Pangasinan, with 4.86 and 4.83, respectively.

As embodied in the Performance Agreement Negotiation between the Governance Commission for Government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCC) and NTA, the agency like all state agencies, including GOCCs, must ensure the satisfaction of their respective customers or clientele in order to be relevant and worthy of continued government support. 🍏

TGY Evaluation

The Tobacco Grower of the Year (TGY) Ilocos Norte Branch Technical Committee (BTC), chaired by Branch Manager Mario E. Corpuz, checks on tobacco leaves during the on-farm evaluation of tobacco grower in Pugaoan, Pinili, Ilocos Norte, one of the 13 contestants to the TGY Project for CY 2017-18, early this year. On-farm evaluations of the provincial contestants were undertaken on different schedules from February to May, to evaluate the performance of each of the five contestants for the Virginia-Neutral category and eight contestants for the Virginia-Improved Flavor. According to Manager Corpuz, the BTC during the evaluation would like to confirm the farmers’ adherence to the recommended package of technology, Good Agricultural Practices, adequacy of curing barn facilities and barn accessories, awareness/prevention of non-tobacco related materials (NTRMs) and updated farm records of their field activities. After marketing, the sales record of the contestant will also be evaluated, along with the summary of the cost of production, gross income and yield. The result of the evaluation and confirmation will be submitted to the National Technical Committee. (Divina D. Pagdilao) 🍏



THE crude water tobacco leaf extract (TLE) from tobacco dust can be used for the control of mango leaf hoppers and sucking insects of eggplant. TLE is produced using on-site extraction, based on demonstration trials conducted by the Product Development Division (PPD), a division of the Industrial Research Department in Batac City.

PPD, headed by Engr. Cecilio A. Cabigan, Chief Science Research Specialist, in coordination with NTA Branch Offices in Ilocos Norte, Vigan, La Union and Pangasinan, conducted the demonstration trials. This involved six farmer-cooperators (FCs) for mango and 12 FCs for eggplant.

The NTA Tobacco Dust Plus (TDP), which is 100% pure tobacco, is used as the raw material for the on-site extraction technology (see Figure 1). TDP is an organic molluscicide and organic fertilizer (FPA Registration No. 1-21f-1136) with 1% alkaloids.

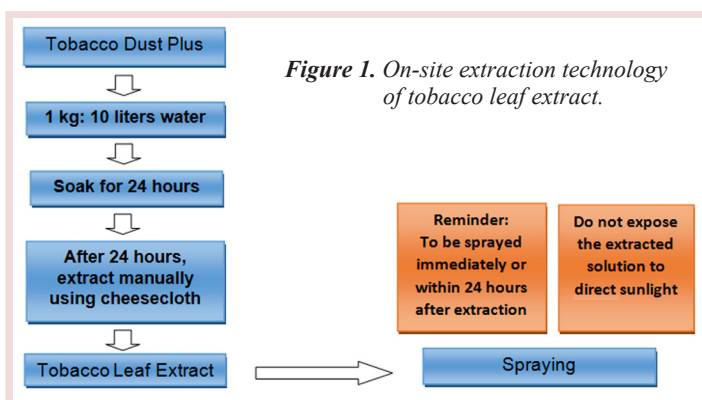


Figure 1. On-site extraction technology of tobacco leaf extract.

The desired amount of tobacco dust is soaked in water at the rate of 1 kg / 10 L water for 24 hours. After 24 hours, the leaf extract is carefully filtered with cheesecloth. It is important to make sure that no residue gets into the extract and into the sprayer tank because this could lead to clogging of the spray nozzle during spraying.

The crude water TLE is an all-natural pesticide that has been proven to be safe, affordable and effective in controlling the population of sucking insects in eggplants (see Figure 2) and leaf hoppers in mangoes. It is easy to prepare and convenient to transport. Extraction is done on-site so this can be applied to large plantations, even in remote areas.

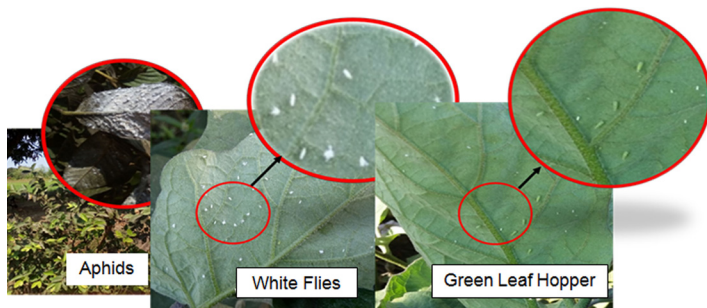


Figure 2. The sucking insects which are effectively controlled by the TLE.

According to the former project leader, Nelly U. Castro, now Chief Science Research Specialist of the Farm Technology and Services Department, the TLE from the on-site extraction technology must be used within 24 hours after extraction and is only recommended to be sprayed on fruit trees, non-solanaceous vegetables and virus-resistant solanaceous vegetables.

Controlling Pests with Crude Water Tobacco Leaf Extract

by Imelda C. Parbo



Figure 3. Difference in crop stand of eggplants treated with crude water tobacco leaf extract and treated with insecticide. Note the overlapping of leaves which made it difficult for farmers to pass through between plant rows.

Eggplants treated with TLE grew bigger (see Figure 3) and more robust than the untreated plants, thus resulting in high yield. Mango plants sprayed with TLE also have more fruits than those sprayed with commercial insecticides.

The flowers of the TLE-treated mango plants of a farmer-cooperator in San Juan, Ilocos Sur were clean and no mango leaf hoppers in sight. There was also an increase in the fruits developed from each flower head and the fruits were free from blemishes.

The table below shows the cost of control per hectare for eggplant and mango using the TLE and commercial insecticides. For eggplant, the cost of control per hectare using TLE was lower (P350.40) compared to commercial insecticides (P1,354.50). Similar result was obtained for mango with lower cost of control of P3,600 per hectare using the TLE compared to commercial insecticides with P9,975 per hectare.

*Estimated cost of the commercial pesticide versus crude water TLE**

Crop	Total Spray Volume/ha (L)		Cost of Control (Php/ha)	
	Tobacco Extract	Commercial Insecticide	Tobacco Extract	Commercial Insecticide
Eggplant	466.65	3612.00	350.40	1,354.50
Mango	4,800.00	600.00	3,600.00	9,975.00

* (NTA-PDD 2015)

The farmer-cooperators, during the interview conducted by the researchers after the demonstration trials, said that they did not encounter any problem and difficulty in the extraction process and that the efficacy of the TLE is at par with chemical insecticides they are using.

The Tobacco Dust Plus is available for order at the NTA Branch Offices and available for pick up at the Tobacco Dust Processing Plant in Barangay Fernando in Sto. Tomas, La Union.

Tobacco leaf grading simplified with harmonization of leaf grades

by Neyo E. Valdez

THE National Tobacco Administration (NTA) has simplified the grading system with the implementation this year of the NTA Harmonized Grades of Locally Grown Virginia and Burley Leaf Tobacco.



(Left to right: NTA Vigan Manager Minerva P. Mizal and staff check on the leaves for grades during a seminar in Candon City; Chief SRS Lina A. Sera serves as Resource Person on harmonized grades; samples of cured leaves and their equivalent grades; and Cera cross-checking leaf grades with a chart.

The harmonization of leaf grades is contained in Memorandum Circular No. 001, series of 2018 signed by NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares on February 20 this year. The said Circular, which took effect beginning trading season 2018, covers the adoption of the Harmonized Grading and Classification System by all registered tobacco buying stations and field canvassers.

Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, manager of the Industrial Research Department that spearheaded the harmonization of leaf grades, said that buying station operators and the NTA technicians assigned therein should adhere to these standards. Farmers, through their cluster leaders, were given advice regarding the new grading standards long before the start of the trading operations late last year.

Bonoan added that the harmonization of leaf grades helps eliminate confusion on the different grading systems/classifications of the buying stations and misunderstanding between farmers and sellers in grading the quality of leaves.

The agency had acknowledged that grading is the most disputed and very critical aspect of trading, as it determines whether the farmer gains or loses.

Before the harmonization, the farmers had been claiming that their tobacco leaves were not being given the appropriate grade, that some are graded arbitrarily, and that the buying stations show them a grading system/classification different from those of the NTA.

NTA Grading System

As provided by law, the Philippine tobacco industry adopted a leaf grading system, that is more physical-oriented and consists of only a few grades that can be easily followed by the local farmers.

Per NTA Grade Description of Philippine Virginia Leaf Tobacco, approved by the NTA Governing Board under Board Resolution No. 011-2000 on February 15, 2000, the leaf is given the topmost Grade "AA" if it has deep color of lemon or orange, rich in oil, thin and more than 10% allowance on injury; followed by A, B, C, D, E, F1, F2, R (reject). For Burley the topmost grade is A, followed by B, C, D, E, F, then R.

This is oversimplified compared with the grading system being used by the world traders since 2002, which runs to about a hundred or more, as this reflects the specific quality

requirements deemed essential by the manufacturers.

Major leaf buying firms, such as PMFTC, ULPI, TMI and ConLeaf, use their own international standards, based on the demand in the international market, where leaves are classified according to stalk positions. These grade classifications, however, have caused a negative reaction from the farmers.

According to Bonoan, while the grade classifications are many, with each one being descriptive of the specific quality, a particular tobacco production technology or culture will produce only a few grades in the classification.

The idea to harmonize leaf grades in the country came after Lina A. Cera, Chief Science Research Specialist, and head of the IRD's Quality Assurance Division (QAD), and Alfonso E. Sabado, Supervising Science Research Specialist of QAD, attended in 2008 the USA Tobacco Visitors Information Course in North Carolina where they learned the principles and application of the U.S. Standard Leaf Grades for Flue-cured and Burley tobacco (U.S. and foreign grown).

After the training, the QAD team started characterizing locally grown Virginia and Burley tobacco using U.S. Grade Standards, from 2008 to 2011, but according to Cera, not all grades therein are for local applications. In 2012, the team started working on the harmonization of the grades being used by the U.S.A. and the system adopted by the world traders.

Need to harmonize

Cera explained that different buyer firms use different specifications but they refer to the same grade. These different grading systems have left tobacco farmers, including extension workers, confused.

For example, for Choice Quality Orange Leaf (B10), only USA and TMI adopted this grade name. ULPI and PMFTC use First Quality Orange Leaf for the same grade name (in one instance ULPI used Good Quality Orange while PMFTC used Top Quality Orange Leaf). On maturity of leaf, USA, TMI, ULPI and PMFTC use "Ripe." In one instance, however, ULPI used "Mature to ripe" while PMFTC used "Very ripe." For the body of leaf, USA and PMFTC use "Fleshy."

TMI and PMFTC, in one instance, use "Medium" referring to the body, while ULPI has no specifications for this. Except for ULPI and PMFTC, all buyer firms use "Firm" to refer to the leaf structure. For oil, TMI and USA use "Rich in oil"; "Oily"



(Left to right: Supervising SRS Alfonso E. Sabado checks on leaf samples at the IRD lab; representatives from the buying firms present their comments on the proposed harmonized grades; extension workers during a practicum on leaf grading; and IRD Manager Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan explains the importance of harmonized grades.

for PMFTC; and no specifications for ULPI.

For color, all use “Orange” except PMFTC in one instance where it used “Light orange to orange.” All firms use “Deep” to describe intensity, except ULPI which has no specifications for this. To describe width, only USA and PMFTC use “Spready” and the rest of the firms have no specifications for this.

Using the NTA harmonized standard, the specifications for the same grade name Choice Quality Orange Leaf (B10) will just be ripe (maturity), fleshy (body), firm (leaf structure), orange (color), oily (oil), deep (intensity), and spready (width).

According to Cera, the elements of quality and the degree of words and phrases used in the specifications in the proposed NTA harmonized grades of locally grown Virginia leaf tobacco are almost synonymous in meaning, yet, they are sufficiently different to represent steps within the range of the elements of quality to which they are applied.

The conventional type of classification will still be retained for floor pricing. Using the above example, the grade name Choice Quality Orange Leaf (B10) will be given the floor price for Grade “AA.”

“That’s why we have to harmonize or to bring different leaf grades into agreement for better implementation and easy understanding of users,” Cera said.

Pilot-testing

A Technical Working Group, headed by Bonoan, with Cera and Sabado, branch managers and representatives from major leaf buying firms as members, was constituted in 2011. The group was tasked to come up with the first draft of the NTA harmonized grades.

The said draft was presented to the different tobacco buyer companies and also to the NTA Branch Managers for review and comments.

The draft of the NTA harmonized grades underwent four revisions through continuous consultations with the tobacco buyer companies.

Bobby F. Wellons, Division Training Instructor, Agricultural Marketing Service of Raleigh, North Carolina, USA, who was given a copy of the final draft during the Leaf Grading Seminar at Mighty Corporation office in Malolos, Bulacan in 2015, found the draft to be technically sound and in harmony with the principles of the internationally accepted leaf grading standards of Flue-cured and Burley tobacco.

Another big step forward in the harmonization was a pilot testing of the harmonized grades in selected buying stations.

According to Bonoan, the pilot testing helped the agency determine the harmonized grades of locally produced tobacco including the frequency and the economic advantage of using the harmonized grades over the grading system of private buying firms.

The draft of the proposed implementing rules and guidelines

of harmonized grades was presented to the extension workers in 2015, with Cera and Sabado as resource persons. The output of the presentations became the basis for the holding of a training-seminar on leaf grading standards to a core-group of leaf grading trainers composed of the Tobacco Production and Regulation Officers of the Regulation Department and the different provincial branch offices, and the IRD research specialists. Farmer-leaders also participated in the said trainings.

According to Cera, the final draft of the Proposed NTA Harmonized Grades was presented to Administrator Seares, Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, the managers from the different branch offices, and to the technical experts of the country’s major leaf buyers. The leaf buyers presented their inputs to the draft in successive meetings in July last year.

Positive feedbacks

With harmonized leaf grades used in all trading centers in the country, Administrator Seares had expected a better grading system, as farmers tend to agree on things that they can really understand.

“In its first year of implementation, we have received good feedbacks from the farmers. Some of them are very thankful that now they can easily agree to grades given to their leaves, particularly on the quality, moisture, and sorting as to stalk position, thus avoiding unnecessary confrontation in the trading floor,” said Administrator Seares.

Slowly, the tobacco farmers get to appreciate the importance of adopting the harmonized leaf grading system, following international grading standards, alongside the adoption of good agricultural practices, that lead to the production of tobacco leaves as required by the export market, thus making the harmonization endeavor worth the efforts to come up with the results that will redound to the benefit of all sectors of the industry.

The biggest challenge now for the agency is to build up the confidence and competence in the application of harmonized leaf grading standards. “Of course, this is subject to review every time production technology is improved, because we have to evaluate things, and in the long run, we may then limit or readjust the number of grades across all varieties,” said Bonoan.

With the harmonized leaf grades, the agency officials are ensuring a profitable trading season for both the farmers and the traders. According to Bonoan, setting up a simplified grading system that follows the U.S. standards adopted worldwide will really make our tobacco competitive in the global market.

The trading season for tobacco has ended but the agency will continue enhancing its competence on international leaf grading standards using harmonized grades. 🌱



Photo: ADONIS D. LAZO

TOBACCO PRODUCTION:

THE ILOCANO FAMILY'S LIFELINE

by Neyo E. Valdez

TOBACCO as the major cash crop of the Ilocos region has an undeniable impact on the agricultural, economic, and social life of every Ilocano family, and has been a major force in the economic development of Ilocos especially Region I where flue-cured or Virginia tobacco is grown.

It is little wonder that the tobacco, a major industry in the region that survived the Spanish and American colonial period, represents the Ilocano, the way *pinakbet* does for regional dish, “Manang Biday” for folk song, bucanegan and “Biag ni Lamang” for literature, and *saluyot* for leafy vegetable.

The widespread influence of tobacco on the Ilocano families, particularly in the last quarter of the preceding century, was one of the main points of discussion at the “Ilocano” episode of the “Wika ng Ina Mo” radio program of DZUP 1602 (campus radio) in UP Diliman, Quezon City. Our Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa and I were invited as resource persons during the program aired live on June 8.

Program hosts Glecya Atienza and Camille Pajarillo facilitated the one-hour discussion of the Ilocano episode which centers on the tobacco industry. The other episodes for the month dealt on the Ilocano language and literature, and Ilocano orthography.

Atty. Verzosa and I were glad to discuss tobacco growing families and we even had the opportunity to dispel some misconceptions on tobacco. There were lots of discussion on the industry, but what intrigued non-Ilocanos like Ms Atienza, which is the highlight of this article, is on how the Ilocano family got involved in tobacco production and how the industry has influenced the Ilocano way of life through the years.

Think of the Virginia tobacco and be reminded of the numerous Ilocano farming families who have derived a big bulk of their farming income and livelihood from the industry for many decades since the 50s, the reason the golden leaf industry continues to thrive in the region despite continuing anti-tobacco lobbies and other efforts to curb tobacco production and smoking.

The concentration of tobacco production in Ilocos started in the 50s after an American tobacco firm found out that the soil and climate in the region were good for Virginia or flue-cured



Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa and Neyo E. Valdez (1st and 3rd from right, respectively) pose with Glecya Atienza and junior anchors after the live broadcast. Camille Pajarillo / DZUP

tobacco. The Ilocanos then were more than willing to embrace tobacco production because the crops were grown during summer when most of their unirrigated land would lay idle after rice production.

Most farmers in the region, unlike those in the Central Luzon and some regions in Mindanao, own smaller land areas and usually unirrigated, thus giving them a very limited annual income from farming. With tobacco, they were given the opportunity to earn more than what they get from their usual rice-corn cropping rotation. Even without the capital for production, some middlemen or leaf buyers handily loaned the farmers some amount which would be paid after the trading season.

Compared with other crops, tobacco needs more attention and care, and follows strict standards and technology to produce quality leaves that the market requires. But to produce highly priced quality tobacco leaves, a tobacco grower needs patience, diligence and hardwork, which are trademark characteristics of the Ilocano.

Members of the Ilocano family work together for this labor-intensive yet lucrative farming venture. A big part of tobacco production including post-harvest activities is mostly done during summer where the children are having their long school break. So every member of the family, including school-age children help in the farm during this period of production. The

father and the elder children are responsible for the production, from seedbedding to the gathering of leaves, construction of curing barns, and loading of tobacco leaves in sticks/strings into the barn. And during harvest and curing period, everyone, including the children and some helpful neighbors, join in the sticking, and later, sorting of leaves. The women usually join their husbands in selling their produce in the trading center.

Are the Ilocanos promoting cigarette smoking? Do all Ilocanos smoke, as one way of patronizing their own product? No and no. The character of Gloria Romero's iconic movie "Manang Biday" where she brandished an oversized *pinadis* (rolled native tobacco) borders more on theatrics than realism and does not represent the Ilocano women, generally. Not all Ilocanos get into smoking, which some of them consider it as a choice rather than a vice. To the Ilocanos, the tobacco is just an agricultural crop where they can earn big income, especially during summer. There may be health hazards in tobacco production, but this has been addressed by the agency and private contractors with the application of Good Agricultural Practices in the tobacco farming communities.

Tobacco trading usually falls in as early as February up to the last week of May, so the farmers can have the money to celebrate the fiesta of their patrons that are held mostly in the said period, and they have the money in time for the school enrolment in June, and capital for rice production in the ensuing season.

Ilocanos born in the 60s towards the 80s in the farming communities know how tobacco farming has helped most Ilocanos raise a family and send their children to school. Most of these children have become professionals, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and writers. The money was also spent to send members of the family to work abroad as contract workers. Think how these individuals who were successful in their careers and work, contributed to the improvement of the economic condition in their communities.

The number of farmers and hectareage may have dwindled through the years, but the income of farmers per hectare of tobacco remains high. But unlike before, farmers now are given production assistance to subsidize production cost, thus giving them more returns of investment. It also helped that the NTA has eliminated the cowboy system, or trading through intermediaries, and lowered loan interest, which contributed to the reduction of production cost to the advantage of the tobacco growers.

Some farmers who returned to tobacco claimed that the crops they produce other than tobacco yielded very little. Some who shifted to corn production went back to tobacco only after a year or two because they do not have market for corn and they do not receive government assistance, unlike in tobacco production.

It also helped that the local governments are keen to continue their support for tobacco farming for the billions of revenues it brings. The Sin Tax Law generates enormous revenue, in the form of excise taxes, for the national treasury, P3.65 billion in 2017, which the government uses for its education, infrastructure, economic, health and welfare programs all over the country. A part of the excise tax collection is appropriated to beneficiary Virginia tobacco growing provinces, pursuant to R.A. 7171; and, Burley and Native Tobacco growing provinces, pursuant to R.A. 8240.

With the economic benefits redounding to the benefit of the families in the Ilocos region, some farmers will not see themselves leaving tobacco production anytime soon. This I have to explain to Ms Atienza, that in the absence of viable alternative crop for tobacco, the industry remains to be the family's lifeline of some Ilocanos. 🍏

NTA La Union GAD holds training on disaster preparedness

THE NTA Branch Office in La Union conducted a one-day disaster risk preparedness for its staff and extension workers, particularly in preparing for disasters such as typhoon, flood, fire, and earthquake on June 11 at the Branch Office in Payocpoc, Bauang, La Union.

The activity was spearheaded by the Branch Office's Gender and Development (GAD) unit headed by its Focal Person, Administrative Officer V Aurie Nellie A. Tumbaga, in cooperation with the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) personnel from the Bauang Fire Station and the Provincial Headquarters in San Fernando City, La Union.

The resource speaker, Supt. Christine D. Cula, BFP Provincial Director, emphasized that training and usual practice of activities for disaster preparedness is compulsory for everyone, especially for office workers. "The preparation should include all concerned regardless of sex affiliation as calamities and disasters command gender equality," she said.

For better understanding of tsunami, earthquake, fire and flood, Cula presented video clips of disastrous events, as she lectured participants on dealing with each disaster. She reminded them to be sensitive with their surroundings during a disaster, be aware of the sound alarm that signals dangerous situations, and always keep the contact number of BFP in the locality for immediate assistance.

The participants were given practical knowledge in operating a fire extinguisher during an emergency, and a drill on duck-walking with head covered against falling debris during earthquake. BFP personnel Billy A. Lopez Jr, Jeric A. Belbis, Jim R. Dulatre, all Fire Officers 1, facilitated the demonstration.

Meanwhile GAD La Union Branch also invited therapists from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority to render a free Health and Wellness service on June 11.

The therapists, Kimberlyn A. Caranay, Thelma Tanganim, Lucel Lynne Pang-ot, Jose M. Callena and Miriam P. Campo, offered body massage to the branch employees.

According to Tumbaga, the employees need body relaxation after some months of tiresome tasks during the tobacco trading season. (*Candido I. Liangao & Potenciano H. Apilado*) 🍏

NTA joins Kabisig Gov't Expo & Trade Fair 2018

NTA, through the Market Research and Development Division (MRDD) of the Industrial Research Department, joined other government agencies in the Kabisig Philippine Government Expo and Trade Fair 2018 held on June 19-21 at the Trinoma Mall in Quezon City.

This was organized by the Kabisig Mindanao Foundation, Inc., headed by Assistant Secretary Daniel C. Guillen. This year's theme was, "Pamahalaan at Mamamayan, Kapit-Bisig sa Kaunlaran at Pagbabago."

The event provided a one-stop information exhibit which featured the office profiles, programs, projects, products and accomplishments of various government agencies, including government-owned and -controlled corporations.

The MRDD, headed by OIC Excelsior R. Mejia, along with Ramon L. Fernandez and Roderick C. Villarin, took charge in putting up and manning the NTA booth.

The NTA booth highlighted the other uses of tobacco such as handmade paper and tobacco dust. It also featured the role of the agency in the development of the tobacco industry as a major support of the Philippine economy. 🍏

Balaoan LGU gives fertilizer subsidy for tobacco growers

THE local government of Balaoan, La Union through Mayor Aleli Concepcion will be providing tobacco farmers fertilizer subsidy for tobacco production for the coming crop year 2018-2019. This was announced by Vice Mayor Al-Fred O. Concepcion during a dialogue with farmers on June 4.

According to Vice Mayor Concepcion, the municipal government will subsidize 50% of the volume of fertilizer required by every farmer. "Farmers, however, should form themselves into an association that will serve as channel for assistance," he said.

The vice mayor, who initiated the fertilizer subsidy program, also offered the possibility of a 100% subsidy if the provincial government would shoulder the other 50%. He expects that the program will encourage the tobacco growers to continue engaging in tobacco farming.

Concepcion explained that more tobacco produced locally means more benefits for farmers and the municipality. He added that Balaoan's shares from the tobacco excise tax

through Republic Act 7171 play a vital role in the progress of the municipality, particularly in the construction of farm-to-market roads, bridges and irrigation canals in the tobacco farming communities.

Concepcion also met with representatives of different tobacco companies and senior officials from NTA La Union on June 14 to explain about LGU's fertilizer subsidy program and other local initiatives for the tobacco industry. Those in attendance were Rogelio C. Flores of Continental Leaf Philippines; Project Production Manager Virgilio R. Ubaldo, and Alejandro D. Ablog of Universal Leaf Philippines Incorporated (ULPI-17); Production Supervisor Melchor N. Halog of Phillip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corporation (PMFTC); Extension Manager Rolando Directo of Trans-Manila Incorporated (TMI); and NTA La Union Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay; Marcelo T. Pascual, Supervising TPRO; Potenciano H. Apilado, OIC-Area 1 Supervisor; and Candido I. Liangao, Agriculturist I. *(Candido I. Liangao)*



NTA joins Farmer's Day celebration at Sakuting Festival

Mizal (Vigan), Estrella G. De Peralta (Candon), Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay (La Union), Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana (Pangasinan), Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda (Cagayan), Herman C. Torres (Isabela), FTSD Manager Imelda N. Riñen, and Project Managers Hermogenes A. Galvez (Tobacco Dust Plant), and Nora A. Corre (AgriPinoy).

Tobacco Farm Access Roads to Markets (TOFARM) project, and the Solar-powered Irrigation System.

They joined other guests which included Roosque B. Calacat, Assistant Secretary for Barangay Affairs and Partnership of the Department of Interior and Local Government; and Undersecretary Tomasito M.C. Umali of the Department of Education.

Displayed at the Dolores Civic Center grounds during the said program were two units of four-wheel tractor, 10 units of hand-tractor engine, and other farm tools and machinery for distribution to the local farmers. According to Dolores Mayor Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., the farm tools and machinery were acquired using funds derived from the municipality's share of the tobacco excise tax per RA 7171.

Administrator Seares, in his message, talked on the different programs that benefit tobacco growers, funded by the agency through the Tobacco Fund under Republic Act (RA) 4155, such as tobacco production subsidy,

Highlights of the celebration were different competitions participated in by the farmers, such as biggest carabao, cattle, and goat contest; rice relay; cooking contest of native snacks or rice cakes (kakanin); dressing chicken; and identification of plant fertilizer and rice varieties. *(Melanie Rapiz-Parel)*

ADMINISTRATOR Robert L. Seares and other agency officials joined the Farmer's Day celebration during the 6th Sakuting Festival of the Municipality of Dolores, Abra, held at the Dolores Civic Center on April 30.

With the Administrator were Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, Branch Managers Esmeralda G. Valera (Abra), Mario E. Corpuz (Ilocos Norte), Minerva P.

ATI launches farmer-scientist training program in Alubijid, Mis. Oriental

THE Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) Regional Training Center in Region 10, in collaboration with some national government agencies, local offices and the local government of Alubijid, Misamis Oriental launched the first phase of the Farmer Scientist Training Program (FSTP) in Sampatulog, Alubijid on May 22.

The agencies involved are the Department of Agriculture and the National Tobacco Administration, Department of Agrarian Reform, Department of Trade and Industry, Cooperative Development Authority, and the University of the Philippines Los Baños.

Most of the participants were members of the tobacco-based cooperative Sampatulog Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Farmers' Cooperatives.

According to Guillerma Valencia of UPLB, the program is divided into three phases which will be conducted in two years. The farmers who complete the three phases will receive National Certificate as Farmer Scientist.



TAGUDIN, ILOCOS SUR. THE local government of Tagudin, Ilocos Sur, handed out P1.215-million worth of farm equipment, tools and production inputs to the local tobacco growers on June 11. Mayor Roque Verzosa Jr. ordered the distribution of 137 knapsack sprayers, 137 2-inch hoses, 93 electric pumps, and 950 bags of fertilizer (16-20-0) to the beneficiaries. Forty-three of the tobacco growers also received P20,000 cash assistance for the repair and construction of curing barn. *(NTA Candon)*

Pls turn to page 12



SCHOLARSHIP

FOUR of the 23 scholars of the Ilocos Norte Branch pose with (L-R) NTA Ilocos Norte Branch Manager Mario E. Corpuz, NTA Director Nestor C. Casela, Chief Agriculturist Luzviminda U. Padayao, and Administrative Officer V Elaine A. Tinio, after receiving their checks bearing the amount of their financial assistance from the Ilocos Norte Branch on May 8. According to Tinio, chairperson of the Branch Scholarship Committee, the assistance covered the second semester of School Year 2017-2018.

NTA Ilocos Norte

9 NTA scholars graduate in Ilocos Norte

NINE NTA scholars under the Agency's Scholarship Program finished their respective courses in Mariano Marcos State University in 2018, with one of them graduating as cum laude.

Hezza Kate C. Balais graduated Bachelor of Science (BS) in Agricultural Technology cum laude from MMSU Laoag City Campus. Seven other NTA scholars finished their courses in MMSU Laoag City, namely, Chrisma Kaye Cabading, Joy Angelica C. Lucas, Ejiel P. Mata, Elieza Mae D. Manzanillo, and Jennyvebs R. Urabo, all graduates



Balais

April 18, 2018

Dear Sir,

Thank you for the generous support you are giving to the children of tobacco farmers like me. Because of your Scholarship Program, I was able to finish my college education, the first to graduate in my family.

I earned my Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education, major in Mathematics, from Occidental Mindoro State College and graduated cum laude last April 6. I plan to take the Licensure Examinations for teachers this September. Thank you, NTA, I am now one step closer to my dream of becoming one of our country's educators.

Living in a less privileged community gives us students financial and academic challenges, but this helps us realize the value of education, inspiring us to strive to finish our college degree. With the scholarship grant that you offered us, you have relieved us of financial burden, thus allowing us to focus more on our studies. For this motivation, nine of us NTA scholars in our province for this school year, were able to graduate in college and are now ready for employment.

Your generosity has inspired us to help others and give back to the community. Thank you very much and more power!

BONG LAURENCE S. QUITON
San Jose, Occidental Mindoro



of Bachelor of Elementary Education; Marivic B. Pagdilao, BS in Information Technology; and Arajane C. Lumbo, BS in Business Administration, major in Marketing Management.

The other scholar Oggieamar J. Reyes finished his BS in Agriculture degree in MMSU Batac City campus. (*Elaine A. Tinio*)



33 graduates from Batch 8 of NTA AgriPinoy Training School

NTA AgriPinoy Training School Batch 8 graduates received their certificates of completion for National Certificate (NC) II in Slaughtering Operations on June 19 at the NTA AgriPinoy Tobacco Farmers Food Processing Plant and Trading Center in Nanguneg, Narvacan, Ilocos Sur.

Twenty scholars from Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), nine on-the-job trainees from the Mariano Marcos State University in Batac City, and four employees of NTA AgriPinoy comprised the latest batch of graduates.

In Photo: (Seated L-R) NTA AgriPinoy Project Manager-Designate and Training School Director Nora A. Corre, Information Officer Melanie Rapiz-Parel, AgriPinoy Consultant Dr. Mikael Benedict Carmelo G. Crisologo, TESDA Provincial Director Marissa T. Alcantara, TESDA Supervising Specialist IV Arnel Gallardo, and Head of Slaughtering Section and Trainer Arturo D. Castillanes, with the members of the Batch 8 graduates. (*Melanie Rapiz-Parel*)

NTA holds transitioners training for IQA Team

MEMBERS of the NTA Internal Quality Audit (IQA) Team attended the training course on Auditing Quality Management System (QMS), facilitated by the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP), held at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City on June 7 and 8.



Administrator Robert L. Seares (seated, 4th from left) joins participants and DAP lecturers during the photo session on the second day of the training.

N.E. Valdez

The two-day training, facilitated by Resource Persons from DAP, Michael L. Gapuz, Christian Eparwa and Mark Louie Grado, introduced the team members to Auditing QMS, Auditing Principles and Process, and Auditing QMS requirements. The participants learned the preparation of IQA Plan, Itinerary and Checklist during the workshop session on the second day.

Also present during the training were Administrator Robert L. Seares and Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa who delivered their respective messages, Administrative Department Manager Dr. Cristina C. Lopez and Corporate Planning Manager Fortuna C. Benosa.

The NTA IQA Team is headed by Internal Audit Manager Dinah E. Pichay, with Charity P. Garcia, Internal Auditor IV, as Vice Team Leader, and 23 members composed of selected employees from the different departments.

According to Pichay, the training is in preparation for the transition of the agency's management system standards from ISO 9001:2008 to ISO 9001:2015.

NTA attained ISO 9001:2008 certification for its Quality Management System (QMS), covering the Central Office and the Farm Technology and Services Department in Batac City, in September 2016 and passed the second audit in July this year.

In December last year, NTA invited another resource person from the DAP to facilitate the transition training course on ISO 9001:2015, which gives emphasis on risk-based management, and more emphasis on achieving value for its organization and its customers.

The IQA Team is scheduled to conduct this year's internal quality audit of the NTA's QMS on June 25 to 29 to ensure continuing enhancement of the agency services in conformity to ISO 9001 QMS standards. 🌱

Solar-powered Irrigation Project site evaluation



Candon Branch

NTA Candon headed by Branch Manager Estrella Galigo De Peralta explained the benefits of the agency's solar-powered irrigation system project (SPIS) to its prospective recipients, the Salasa Farmers' Association in Pidpid, Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur, on May 17. With Manager De Peralta during the visit were Roman J. Raganit Jr., Chief Agriculturist; Merly S. Sison, Senior TPRO; Amelia Veronica Lacaden, acting Senior TPRO; Orlando O. Galdones, acting Administrative Officer V; Susan P. Tingle, TPRO I; and John James Canosa, TPRO I.

NTA Candon

Ilocos Norte Branch

Ilocos Norte Branch Manager Mario E. Corpuz, along with other Branch senior staff and Engr. Felisa R. Aurellano, Community Development Officer (CDO) III of the Farm Technology and Services Department, visited the proposed site of the SPIS Project in Brgy. Nambaran, Bacarra, Ilocos Norte on April 27. The branch office selected North Eastern Tobacco Farmers Association of said barangay to be the project recipient, using the criteria for evaluation set by the Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM) and NTA.

Divina D. Pagdilao



ATI launches... from page 10

Lydia A. Echaves of ATI Region 10 said that the municipality of Alubijid, headed by Mayor Alvin Giovanni A. Labis, is only the second LGU in the province that conducted the FSTP. Mayor Labis, in his message, gladly accepted the FSTP as he urged the local farmers to avail of the opportunity to gain economic advantage and enhance their knowledge. (Ma. Mercedes M. Ayco) 🌱