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Tobacco Industry

Facing the challenges head on

INSIDE:

Tobacco Festival: a celebration of unwavering faith of tobacco growers, stakeholders

NTA human resource system manual gets CSC certification

Special Feature: **NTA PANGASINAN**

STATUS REPORT: KPP Plantation Survey





ABOUT THE COVER

TOBACCO leaf harvesting in the Ilocos and Abra countryside is in full swing and farmers like Alvin Bilgera (in photo) are hoping for a good profit amidst proposals in Congress to increase tobacco excise tax.

Bilgera, a contestant to the Tobacco Growers of the Year National Award (Virginia category), started harvesting tobacco leaf in his 0.75-hectare farm in Agtangao, Bangued, Abra in early February.

He said he is excited for the opening of the marketing season, expecting that the quality of his leaves will command higher grades and prices in the trading center. According to the Farm and Technology Services Department of NTA, Bilgera and other Virginia growers in Northern Luzon can earn an average of P70,000 net income per hectare.

"Tobacco is the only crop that gives me a decent source of income for my family. So I appeal to the government to continue giving its support to tobacco growers like me," he said in Ilokano. [Text and photo: Marife P. Peralta]

EDITORIAL

NOT A SUNSET INDUSTRY

WITH another forthcoming legislation increasing the tobacco excise tax this year, some quarters may have this perception yet again that the Philippine tobacco is in a continuous decline. However, in spite of the previous increases of tobacco excise tax, negatively affecting production figures and livelihoods, export has always delivered for the local industry. Tobacco production in the country remains to be sustainable with the reported increase in demand for quality Philippine tobacco in the world market.

The growth-challenged industry would rather focus its program on achieving a higher volume of exports based on the quality tobacco, particularly Burley tobacco leaves that local farmers are able to produce. Since we are the only country left as the possible source of the Burley type, our local producers are expected to expand their area. As of 2018, over 47% percent of the country's tobacco production (all tobacco types) are being exported.

Tobacco demand is pegged at about 82,000 MT annually. Of the total, local producers supply about 48,000 MT, while imports make up the rest. The country exported 37 million kilos of unmanufactured tobacco in 2018 valued at US\$ 158.97 million and manufactured tobacco or cigarettes valued at 43 million kilos worth US\$352.09 million in 2018.

A tobacco company has pledged a total of 32 million

kilos, 71% of the projected 45 million kilos production for CY 2020, with the assurance of ready market of tobacco farmers' leaf tobacco.

So in terms of profitability, tobacco production is not yet a sunset industry and our farmers who are poised to benefit from this development, will still continue to produce tobacco.

The "sunset" may refer only to one component of the tobacco industry, and that is the use of tobacco for smoking. Data shows a 43% decline in the volume of cigarette production, or from 127 billion sticks in 2012, the start of the implementation of the Sin Tax Law, to just 73 billion sticks in 2017.

Tobacco production is now being proposed as an emerging industry particularly on the alternative uses of tobacco for potential large-scale or commercial production. Our current efforts at NTA involve studies on the pharmacological properties of tobacco using the immunomodulatory property of tobacco leaf extracts and on the tobacco stalks and dusts as fillers or additives/adhesives for the production of plywood panels.

NTA, along its mandate to help the farmers improve their economic and living conditions, will continue its research and development programs on the alternative uses of tobacco to boost the industry and to make it sustainable. ■



Administrator Seares delivers the first Pep Talk of the first flag-raising ceremony of the year with positive reports on the industry.

Administrator Seares reports on 2018 accomplishments

USING his administration's "Farmers First" policy as his benchmark, Administrator Robert L. Seares on January 7 outlined the accomplishments of the agency for 2018 during the first flag ceremony of the year at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City.

He said that despite uncertainties, NTA has made some substantial steps forward in 2018 with many achievements benefitting the tobacco growers and the industry in general.

He said that the agency's certification to ISO 9001:2015 is a good indicator that "we have rendered quality services to our clientele."

In July last year, NTA joined industry stakeholders in crafting the Tobacco Industry Roadmap, which highlighted the importance of a long-term industry development plan in increasing farm competitiveness and reducing rural poverty. Stakeholders are now working together to enable a competitive, productive and profitable farming industry, all geared for the sustainability of the industry.

"In terms of our projects, we have materialized the tractor program for our tobacco growers, revitalized the hog dispersal at our AgriPinoy Projects, and started the construction of farmers' training center in Abra and Tagudin," he said.

In Tobacco Farmers' Production Assistance under the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) for crop year 2018-2019, the administrator reported that P79.3 million worth of production assistance was extended to a total of 5,838 tobacco farmers. The assistance is

in the form of cash, fertilizers, pesticides/suckercides.

He added that 20% of the cost of fertilizers and pesticides are given as subsidy to the farmers.

According to data from the Corporate Planning Department, there is a 26% increase in the number of farmers (from previous crop year with 4,617). Area planted also increased by 27%, from the previous year's 2,841 hectares.

For the rice production project, a total of 2,426 farmer-cooperators with an area of 1,897 hectares, were granted production assistance worth P20 million for the 2018 planting season.

For the Curing Barn Assistance Project, 3,336 tobacco farmers were extended assistance worth P50 million for construction/repair of their curing barns and curing sheds. A subsidy of P10,000 was likewise allotted for every repair/construction and the remaining amount to be paid in four years.

"The agency extended a P2,000 cash assistance for curing barn repair for those affected by typhoon Ompong," the Administrator said.

Facility assistance for the purchase of water pumps, under the Irrigation Facility Assistance and Farm Tractor Support Project, were granted to 65 tobacco farmers of Abra, while 50 tractor units were loaned out to tobacco-based cooperatives in the tobacco-producing provinces of Regions 1 and 2 and Abra.

For livelihood training courses for tobacco farming families, a total of 20 trainees had undergone training on Hog Butchering at the AgriPinoy Food Processing Plant and Training Center in Narvacan, Ilocos Sur, with the funds and expertise coming from TESDA.

This is in addition to the trainings

on food processing, noodle, bread and pastry making, agro-mechanic and sari-sari store management, under the Farmers Organizational Development, given to 1,269 tobacco farmers/dependents from the different provinces in Regions I, II and CAR.

"We also conducted training to 102 tobacco farmers to develop their capabilities in organization development and management of cooperatives, particularly in audit management, conflict management and parliamentary procedures," he added.

For the NTA Scholarship Grant under the Free Education for Tobacco Farmers' Dependents (pursuant to R.A. 9211), 246 students were given scholarship grants last year, bringing to 1,360 the total beneficiaries of the program since the start of its implementation in 2012.

"The agency will roll out more projects and continue to plan and operate on the basis of our mandate which is to help improve the lives of our tobacco growers," he quipped, expecting a more robust industry this year.

He added that the private sector's assessment that tobacco has become "a globally competitive crop" is an important announcement for the farming industry.

"Our farmers are producing quality tobacco and the agency, the private sector and the local government units, are all doing their share in giving assistance to produce quality tobacco. In the process, we shall have better opportunity to earn more," he said.

In closing, the Administrator is hopeful that with the quality of the managers, personnel and extension workers and sound working relationship with the various stakeholders, "NTA will achieve all its objectives in 2019." ■

Regulation Dept wants stricter enforcement of trading rules

by Alex L. Borje



Atty. Ambros (with mic) answers queries and clarifications from leaf buyers on the new trading rules.

THE Branch Offices must strengthen its enforcement and close monitoring of trading operations in the province to apprehend buyers of tobacco leaf without license, particularly the unregistered field canvassers (FCs), and other violators of trading rules.

This was the order of the NTA Regulation Department during the Orientation Seminar on the Revised Trading Rules and Regulations (TRR) Governing the Trading of Locally Grown Leaf Tobacco, in time for the opening of this year's tobacco trading season.

This was held on February 8 at the NTA Candon Branch Office, City Hall Compound in Candon City.

Participants in the orientation-seminar were licensed field canvassers and representatives from trading centers in areas covered by Clustered NTA Branch Offices in Region 1 and Abra.

Regulation Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros said that NTA Administrator or the Branch Manager, as his authorized representative, shall designate and assign a Roving Team who shall have the authority to go after unregistered FCs and enter the trading areas, redrying and/or manufacturing plant and similar premises to oversee the effective and efficient enforcement of the Rules and Regulations at the buying station.

"In such case, they are responsible to report such incidence," he said.

Atty. Ambros also discussed

adjustment of fees and execution of performance bond as two of the salient features of the 2018 Revised TRR, as well as licensing and documentation requirements and penalties for specific offenses.

He clarified that sub-field canvassers are legal, provided they will secure Certificate of Authority (COA) from NTA.

"The sub-field canvasser/s are allowed to engage in tobacco trading provided they give proper identification of themselves including the name of the principal buyer to whom they will deliver the tobacco leaves. Further, they are required to pay the necessary license fee chargeable from the principal field canvasser," he explained.

NTA Director Danilo C. Trongco and Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa delivered their separate messages in the half-day event hosted by NTA Candon.

Presented during the open forum were issues, concerns and problems encountered during last year's tobacco trading, particularly on the enforcement of said TRR including the documentation procedures on trading and deliveries of locally grown leaf tobacco.

Monitoring

On March 26 to 29, the Monitoring Team of the Regulation Department conducted the monitoring of tobacco trading operations activities and buying stations and field canvassers in coordination with NTA Branch Offices.

The team was headed by Engr. Alex L. Borje, Chief TPRO of the Tobacco

Leaf Regulation Division, with Elvira N. Sambrana, Supervising TPRO; Primitivo M. Abalos Jr, Senior TPRO; and Franklin Ross S. Mendoza, TPRO III.

The monitoring activities were undertaken to determine the strict implementation of 2018 amended Rules and Regulations Governing the Trading of Locally Grown Leaf Tobacco.

Among the observations gathered was the deployment of NTA inspectors in various buying stations to monitor daily trading activities/operations, with office order duly signed by the Branch Manager.

As of March 30, the agency has granted requests for the official opening of registered/licensed trading centers in the Ilocos provinces.

The RD, in compliance with the Rules and Regulations on the trading of locally grown leaf tobacco, issued licenses to 36 trading centers, 15 of them for Virginia type in Ilocos Sur (9), Ilocos Norte (2), and La Union (4).

The agency also issued Permit and Authority to Purchase to 14 wholesale tobacco dealers, and Permit and Authority to Redry to three redrying plants.

Also in compliance with the existing Rules and Regulations on the Exportation and Importation of Unmanufactured/Manufactured Tobacco, RD has issued 39 Licenses/ Authority to Export, 63 Licenses/ Authority to Import, 13 Authority to Transship leaf tobacco and tobacco products, and 25 Accreditations to Manufacturers. ■

Tobacco trading opens in Pangasinan, Candon



THIS year's trading operations in Pangasinan officially started with the opening of two buying stations of Universal Leaf Philippines Inc. (ULPI) in Barangay Carmay East, Rosales.

NTA Pangasinan Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana led the monitoring and observation team during the opening at BTC #1 (for Burley) and NTC #6 (for Native) on March 11.

According to Elizabeth Q. Biala, Branch Supervising TPRO, 52,268 kilos of Burley were accepted during the trading day, including the soft opening of trading on the last week of February. Last year's total acceptances of the two buying stations were 1,299,700 kilos for Burley and 310,624 kilos for Native-Liso.

Also part of the monitoring/observation tour were Chief Agriculturist Roger T. Madriaga, Senior TPRO Alma G. Toralba, and TPRO III Magdalena Mamuyac. (Elizabeth Q. Biala)



NTA Candon Branch Manager Estrella G. De Peralta discussed trading matters with Carlos Aguillen (in striped shirts), Director for Leaf Operations, Universal Leaf Phil, Inc., during the opening of the trading operations at the ULPI 17 (formerly PMFTC) in Sidaoen, Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur on March 11.

Supervising TPRO Loreto S. Reyes, and Senior TPROs Merly Soria and Amelia Veronica L. Lacaden joined Manager De Peralta and designated tobacco inspectors from the Branch Office in the opening. (Marcelino C. Ancheta)

San Ildefonso farmers reembrace tobacco growing

by Noralyn I. Idica

FIFTEEN farmers in San Ildefonso, Ilocos Sur shifted to tobacco growing this cropping season, under the agency's tobacco crop program called "Balik Tabako."

Six of the farmers, including Sangguniang Bayan Member Mariano Pamo of Brgy. Arnap, are Virginia growers under the NTA Tobacco Contract Growing System, while the rest are Native tobacco growers contracted with buyer firm Universal Leaf Philippines Inc.

According to NTA Vigan Branch Manager Minerva P. Mizal, this is the first time in almost 15 years that tobacco plants are grown in the municipality. For this crop year, a total of 10.75 hectares are planted to Virginia and Native type variety in five barangays of the municipality.

Manager Mizal visited San Ildefonso on January 8 to check on the grown tobacco plants of Balik Tabako farmers in Barangays Sagneb, Bungro, and Arnap.

Among the returning tobacco growers were Edwin Donato of Barangay Poblacion West, and Jaime Alamar, Felipa Alamar and Renato Aguilar, all of Barangay Sagneb, who had been growing tobacco for two decades before they stopped planting because of low price for their produce.

"The farmers are encouraged to go back to tobacco farming because of the initiative of the LGU to provide full assistance on the production of tobacco in the form of farm machineries, irrigation equipment, farm inputs like fertilizers and pesticides, curing barn, and monetary augmentation to the farmers," she said.

She added that most of the LGUs in the first district support the program, as they are aware of the decline of the number of tobacco growers in the province for the past two cropping seasons.

With Manager Mizal during the farm visit were Chief Agriculturist Faustino O. Taal; Glenn Pagud, Municipal Agricultural Officer of San Ildefonso; Jose A. Taclas Jr., TPRO III and Project Coordinator for TCGS-Virginia Improved Flavor; Reynaldo A. Pugrad, TPRO I and Acting Area Supervisor; and Engr. Nasser John F. Ragasa, assisting extension worker.

The Branch officials gave on-the-spot demos on off-barring, hilling up, and irrigation techniques as they encouraged the farmers to maintain good crop growth for quality production.

NTA Vigan, covering the first district of Ilocos Sur, has in its list 1,011 farmer-cooperators representing 623.5 hectares for TCGS crop year 2018-2019, or a slight increase from the number of FCs and hectareage of the preceding crop year. ■

NTA human resource system manual gets CSC certification

THE National Tobacco Administration (NTA) has completed its Competency Based Human Resource System (CBHRS) Manual, certified by the Civil Service Commission (CSC) on March 7.

Arthur Luis P. Florentin, Executive Director IV of the Civil Service Institute (CSI), cited the untiring efforts of the Technical Working Group (TWG) and the support of the NTA management in putting into a Manual its learnings from the Program “Competency-Based HR Systems” conducted by the CSI and came up with its own Competency Framework.

The TWG completed the series of four courses, namely Competency Modelling and Profiling, Development of Competency-Based Qualification Standards and Job Descriptions, Competency-Based Assessment, and Integration of Competencies in the HR System conducted by the CSC through

the Civil Service Institute (CSI) from May to December 2016, including Coaching Sessions on the four courses, which ended in 2018.

The courses, conducted by CSI in separate schedules at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City, were attended mostly by top and middle level managers of the central office and provincial branches.

The Competency Based Human Resource Systems (CBHRS) Manual will be an effective tool that will aid NTA to attain the highest standards of core, organizational, technical and leadership competencies toward HR excellence. It will ensure collaborative efforts of the NTA to transition towards becoming more strategic in human resource and organization development.

“Indeed, the winning Corporate culture of the agency steered the NTA family into achieving another milestone, on their own very best efforts,” Administrative Department Manager Dr. Cristina C. Lopez said.

The CBHRS standardizes and integrates all human resource activities based on competencies that support NTA’S organizational goals. The NTA’s Competency Framework, translates its vision and goals into behavior and actions that each employee must demonstrate. These competencies which are classified as core, leadership and functional when fully maximized, will greatly help in the attainment of NTA’s vision of “improving the quality of life of tobacco farmers and other stakeholders through increased productivity and other income generating activities.”

“We hope that National Tobacco Administration will find this Competency Based HR System Manual valuable in strategically building NTA employees’ capabilities that will pave the way in mobilizing resources for the development of the tobacco industry,” Florentin said in his congratulatory letter addressed to NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares. ■

NTA Central Office moves to a new office address

THE National Tobacco Administration moved its Central Office a short walk away from its old address in Scout Reyes cor. Panay Avenue to the new Ben-Lor I.T. Building at 1184 Quezon Avenue in Quezon City.

The old seven-story building in Panay Avenue, the home office of the agency since January 1989, will be demolished and make way for a new building, according to Administrative Department Manager Dr. Cristina C. Lopez.

The building, which is almost 50 years old, is not reliable to withstand a 7-magnitude earthquake, based on the result of the structural investigation and integrity check of the old building by a private consultancy firm. “To protect our employees, we have to demolish and construct a safer building for us,” Dr. Lopez said.

As of March this year, the Department of Public Works and Highways has already approved the demolition of the old building.

The Regulation, Corporate Planning,



Administrative, Finance and Internal Audit Service Departments moved on January 21 to the agency’s new office address, occupying the whole of 4th Floor. The Offices of the Administrator, the Deputy Administrator, the NTA Governing Board, and the Legal Office moved on February 4, and occupied one-half of the 3rd floor.

Only the Industrial Research Department which occupies the Quality Assurance and Laboratory Building remains at the old Central Office

Compound.

Dr. Lopez said that the agency got the best deal when Ben-Lor won the bidding for its new office.

“With its proximity to our old building, which is about 300 meters away, we can have faster coordination with the Industrial Research Department in the old compound, smoother transition and easier adjustment to our employees, and close supervision with the demolition and construction for our new building,” Dr. Lopez said. ■

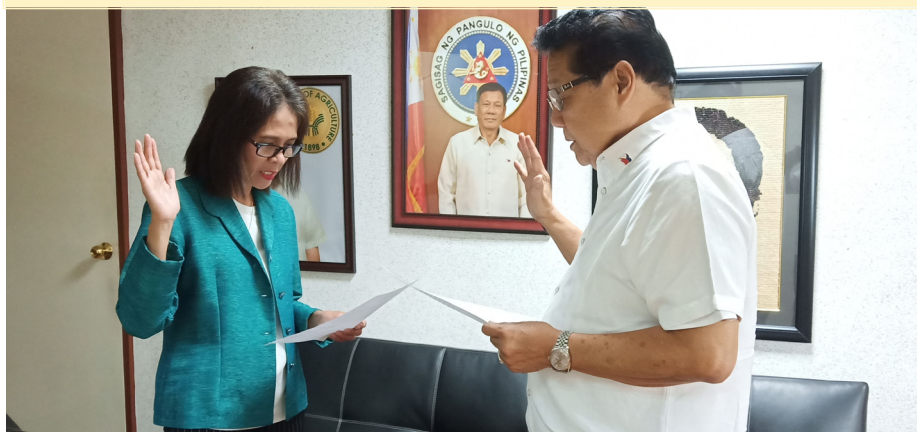
FORTUNA C. Benosa was sworn in as the new Corporate Planning Department Manager after the confirmation of her promotion from Division Chief III to Department Manager III by the Civil Service Commission.

The oath was administered by NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares in his office at the Central Office in Quezon City on January 21. Her promotion was dated July 18, 2018 but the office only received the CSC confirmation on January 8.

Benosa was designated officer in charge of the department, concurrent to her position as Chief of the Planning, Programming and Evaluation Division, on October 3, 2017, taking over the position vacated by Rex Antonio P. Teoxon who retired from service.

As OIC, Benosa served as Quality Management Representative that presided over preparations for the successful ISO 9001:2015 certification for NTA, and facilitated the Customer Satisfaction Survey, validation of the NTA Performance Scorecard with the Governance Commission for Government-Owned and -Controlled Corporations (GCG), preparation for the Agency Plan and Budget, and the annual evaluation of the programs and projects for inclusion in the Corporate

New CorPlan manager takes oath of office



Operating Budget.

Benosa, of Sarrat, Ilocos Norte, has a Master in Public Administration degree and started government service in 1985. She first joined CorPlan Department in 1994 as Data Controller IV (MISCSD).

Other than Benosa, 16 other personnel were given promotions to various positions in 2018.

They were Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, from Chief TPRO to Department Manager III of the Regulation Department (RD); Ophelia T. Gonzales, from HRMO III to HRMO IV of the Administrative Department (AD); Neyo E. Valdez, from PRO III to PRO V of the Office of the Administrator; Carol Lynn R. Sambo, from SRS II to Senior SRS of the

Industrial Research Department (IRD); Russel R. Rutab, from Financial Analyst I to Financial Analyst II of the Finance Department; Eleanor A. Rapanut, from Supervising TPRO to Chief TPRO of RD; Felisa R. Aurellano, from CDO III to Project Development Officer IV of the Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD); Franklin Ross S. Mendoza, from TPRO I to TPRO III of RD; Evangeline Y. Isip, from Computer Operator II to TPRO I of RD; Engr. Abraham C. De la Peña, from TPRO I to Supply Officer IV of AD; and Michell P. Nacpil, from HRMO II to HRMO III of AD.

Those promoted from the Branch Offices were Maricel B. Rojas, from Secretary I to Computer Operator II (Vigan Branch); Loreto S. Reyes, from Administrative Officer III to Supervising TPRO (Candon Branch); Potenciano H. Apilado, from TPRO I to TPRO III (La Union Branch); Noralyn I. Idica, from TPRO III to Administrative Officer III (Vigan Branch); and Carmencita T. Bersalona, from Computer Operator II to Agriculturist I (Abra Branch). ■

Central Office disposes of valueless records

THE NTA Records and Documents Control Team (RDCT) has done with actual disposal of valueless records with the National Archives of the Philippines (NAP) representatives, auditor, agency officials and the official buyer of these records at the NTA Central Office on January 10.

The disposal, authorized by NAP per approved NTA Records Disposition Schedule, was spearheaded by Perla C. Manzon, Administrative Services Department chief and designated Records Coordinator, and made through D' Lacoste Enterprise, NAP's official buyer.

A total of 8.88 cubic meters of valueless records, mostly unique records from the Regulation Department (RD), weighing 3,146 kilos were collected and disposed.

The records were certified by Dr. Cristina C. Lopez, Administrative Department Manager, as no longer needed, passed their retention period, not involved or connected in any administrative or judicial cases, and their disposal followed NAP guidelines on valueless records in government agencies.

The actual disposal was witnessed by Don I. Ortiz, Records Management Analyst II of NAP; Auditor Evenezzer Mag-aro; NTA Employees Association President Excelsior R. Mejia; HRMO II Michelle P. Nacpil of the Administrative Department; and Jerymy Ann E. Feria, Secretary I and records custodian of RD.

This is the second time that NTA-RDCT disposed of valueless records after the first formal disposal on August 18, 2017. ■

NTA PERSONNEL UPDATE (January - March 2019)

Original Appointments

	POSITION	OFFICE/BRANCH
Randy V. Ramos	Driver II	Administrative Department
Joemarie L. Gela	Driver II	Administrative Department
Marilene V. Sansano	Secretary I	Finance Department
Jordan C. Turalba	Cashier II	Abra Branch
Rose Anne S. Dismaya	TPRO I	Pangasinan Branch
Angelique Nova H. Corpuz	Secretary I	Candon Branch
Eleanor C. Narag	Accountant II	Cagayan Branch

Promotions

	OLD - NEW POSITION	OFFICE/BRANCH
Rolando C. Dela Cruz	SRS II - Supervising SRS	Industrial Research Dept
Imelda C. Parbo	Senior SRS - Supervising SRS	Industrial Research Dept
Rosita J. Alcoy	SRS I - SRS II	Industrial Research Dept
Elvira N. Sambrana	Sr TPRO - Supervising TPRO	Regulation Department
Primitivo M. Abalos Jr.	TPRO III - Senior TPRO	Regulation Department
Randy I. Abella	Sr SRS - Supervising SRS	FTSD
Nora A. Corre	Sr TPRO - Supervising TPRO	Abra Branch
Amelia L. Lacaden	Agriculturist II - Senior TPRO	Candon Branch
Adonis D. Lazo	TPRO III - Senior TPRO	Candon Branch
Perpetuo C. Dalloran	TPRO III - Senior TPRO	Isabela Branch
Roberto F. Pedro	Agriculturist I - Senior TPRO	Cagayan Branch



(L-R) Regulation Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, CorPlan Manager Fortuna C. Benosa, Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, and Directors Pedro J. Mendiola Jr. and Wilfredo C. Martinez attended the Senate Hearing on proposed bills tobacco excise tax hike.

Facing the challenges head on

Tobacco sector with reduced production cannot give more for the universal health care, countryside development

MUCH data has been presented on the effects of R.A. 10351 or the Sin Tax Law on increasing revenue and on health. From 2013 to 2017, the tobacco industry has contributed more than P447 billion to the national coffers while attaining its objective of curbing smoking. It has also spurred development in the countryside through shares of the tobacco-producing provinces from the collection of tobacco excise tax.

The attainment of the purposes of the Sin Tax Law and the TRAIN law (Republic Act 10963), the initial package of the Comprehensive Tax Reform Program of President Duterte, has pushed the lawmakers to propose for source of funds that is much needed by the government particularly in Universal Health Care for all Filipinos.

Under consideration are separate bills calling for higher tobacco tax rates: (1) Senate Bill No. 1599 filed by Sen. Manny Pacquiao, which seeks to increase the cigarette tax rate from the current P35 per pack to P60 per pack; (2) SB No. 2177 filed by Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian,

P70 per pack; and (3) SB No. 1605 filed by Sen. JV Ejercito, P90 per pack. House Bill No. 8677 provided P37.50 per pack tobacco tax rate.

Senate Hearing

During the hearing by the Senate Ways and Means committee chaired by Senator Sonny Angara on January 29 and February 4, NTA was one of the resource speakers on the part of the government, representing the Department of Agriculture.

The health sector, represented by the Department of Health (DoH), along with various associations of doctors, both agree to at least a P60 tax increase to avert approximately 713,000 deaths due to smoking and will result in 3.2 million quitters in adults. DoH and the Department of Finance (DoF) jointly proposed higher tobacco excise tax rates to bankroll the Duterte administration's Universal Health Care program.

The farming sector, represented by the farmer leaders of the tobacco associations in Ilocos, representatives of some local government units of tobacco growing provinces and municipalities, retailers and sari-sari store owners, manufacturers and the employees of these establishments were one in appealing to the senators against further increasing the tobacco excise tax as

this would disrupt their livelihoods, exacerbating their increasingly difficult situation because of previous tax increases.

Senator Angara said the Ways and Means committee has yet to agree on a final amount for increased tobacco excise tax rate as it awaits the Department of Health's (DoH) spending plan for the universal healthcare program. He agreed with the rest of the committee members that they need to determine the "sweet spot" in raising the excise tax on tobacco products that will ensure bigger collections, and how the fund will be spent, while discouraging more people from smoking.

The committee, Senator Angara said, aims to report the bill for plenary action, or before Congress takes its break from February 7 to May 19.

Reconsider Another Increase

NTA appealed to the legislators to reconsider increasing tobacco excise taxes because of the effects on our farmers and those who depend on the tobacco industry for their livelihood.

While the agency supports effort of the government to promote healthful environment for the benefit of the population, it also has to ensure that the interest and welfare of the tobacco farmers and other industry stakeholders



are not adversely compromised.

The tobacco excise tax rate has been going up since the passage of the Sin Tax Law in 2012, making cigarettes as the only taxable goods that had eight consecutive increases in a span of five years. The consecutive tax increases have really taken its toll on the industry.

The resulting increase in the prices of cigarettes led to a 43% decline in the volume of cigarette production, or from 127 billion sticks in 2012 to just 73 billion sticks in 2017. This decrease in volume has led to a drastic decline in tobacco leaf production, as well as reduction in tobacco farmers and farmed areas.

The agency's six-year data (2012-2017) shows that the number of tobacco farmers and areas plunged by 34 percent from 52,610 to 34,465, and 37 percent from 36,160 to 22,704 hectares, respectively.

Tobacco leaf production in the Philippines has also been reduced to only 48 million kilos in 2017 from 65 million kilos five years earlier or a 26% decline.

Demand for local tobacco leaf, which constitutes about 56% annual average for the last five years, also decreased.

In fact, one local buyer of tobacco has ceased to operate its local trading activities due to continued business losses, and has terminated majority of its employees, not to mention the displacement of tobacco farmers with which they had contract growing arrangement.

There is also a notable 25% decrease in labor force, including their dependents, from 2.95 million in 2012 to 2.22 million in 2018.

Killing the Goose

According to NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares, imposing higher excise taxes on tobacco products may discourage farmers from planting the crop, causing the number of tobacco growers and areas to drop further, and more job layoffs in the manufacturing and buying sector, and may encourage smuggling.

He said that without establishing concrete and specific measures first before entertaining any effort to reduce if not totally stopping production, our tobacco farmers may be economically dislocated or displaced, thus breeding poverty in affected areas.

Seares added that the tobacco farming sector with reduced production cannot give more for the universal health care and for countryside development. "So why kill the goose that lays the golden egg?" he said.

He also urged a government crackdown on cigarette smugglers and manufacturers of counterfeit tobacco products, which have deprived the government of much-needed revenues that could have been allocated for its priority programs, particularly the provision of health facilities and services.

Data gathered by the private sector showed the amount of seized illicit cigarettes almost doubled to 157.03 million sticks in 2018 from 89.071 million in 2017. These were valued at P628.12 million, almost twice the P356.28 million worth of fake cigarettes confiscated the previous year.

The Administrator also called on the government, through the Bureau of Customs, to be always on the alert in the entry of illicit cigarettes and machines that manufacture them, and intensify intelligence network and police action to

apprehend those involved in the trade.

In the event, however, that the legislators will push for the proposed increases, Seares appealed to the legislators that they should include in the law specific measures or safety net to counteract the economic dislocation or provide provisions that would promote the general welfare and interests of the tobacco farmers, growers, workers and other stakeholders in the tobacco industry.

"We don't want the industry to die," Ilocos Sur Rep. Eric Singson said during the Tobacco Festival in Candon City, noting that high-grade tobacco now costs P90 per kilo while low-grade costs half the price, and a kilo of corn is only pegged between P12 to P14.

"But we're not losing hope, we just have to be able to strike a balance. We also understand that government needs to raise funds for its Build, Build, Build projects and finance the universal health care as well. We'll just have to bear it, there's nothing we can do," he added.

"This may mean less profit, but we will see to it that we will continue to help the tobacco farmers of Ilocandia," Singson said.

NTA chooses, however, not to be discouraged by these developments that could otherwise have paralyzing effects on the profitable tobacco production industry.

"We have submitted our position paper to the legislators, and we let's leave it to them," Seares said.

He assured that agency continues to regulate the industry and help the farmers improve their economic and living conditions, or implement measures to help the displaced farmers, "because it is our mandate to protect them. ■"



Affected farmers: Tobacco grower Marcos P. Rivera and wife at their one-hectare farm in Payocpoc Sur, Bauang, La Union (Photo: Kristin Mae S. Castañeda)

TERMINAL REPORT: Survey on KPP Plantation

by Hermogenes A. Galvez
Project Manager I, Tobacco Dust Processing Plant
KPP National Coordinator



The KPP Inventory Team headed by KPP Candon Branch Coordinator Adonis D. Lazo checks on trees in Santiago, Ilocos Sur. (Photo: Rosella A. Dosono)

A JOINT Fuelwood Sustainability Project meeting between NTA and the private sector was held last September 11, 2018 at the Central Office in Quezon City. It was attended by the Board of Directors (BOD), Central and Branch Office officials, and representatives of major tobacco companies.

One of the most pressing concerns raised during the meeting was the immediate need to have a dialogue with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to discuss our joint stand on the facilitation and simplification of the process of securing the permits that they require. It was also agreed during the meeting that our joint projection on the volume of harvestable fuelwood for flue-curing of Virginia tobacco from 2018 to 2022 must be set in place, thus the need for the immediate survey of our Kahuyang Pangkabuhayan at Pangkakanlikasan (KPP) projects from 2013 to 2017 to gather the needed data.

Upon the instruction of the BOD, a meeting with the NTA Branch Managers was conducted on September 12, 2018

to determine the labor requirement needed to survey our KPP plantations from 2013 to 2017 for three months. Based on the managers' computation, the agency would require 34 contractual workers to complete the task in three months.

We invited Dr. Elena Usal-Ato from the Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College (ISPSC) as our resource speaker in a seminar attended by the branch managers and their respective KPP coordinators on September 24, 2018. Dr. Usal-Ato lectured on the statistical tools and methods in the inventory, monitoring, and evaluation of the growth, standing, and yield of forest trees used as fuelwood.

The following data were gathered in the assessment of our 2013 KPP plantation, to wit:

- Name of farmer cooperators (FC)
- Location of the reforestation
- GPS coordinates
- Tenurial status of the FC
- With or without land documents
- Area (in hectares)
- Tree species
- Year planted
- Distance of planting (in meters)
- Harvesting cycle
- Number of trees planted

- Tree count
- Survival rate (%)
- Average diameter (cm)
- Average height (m)
- Tree count, average diameter, average height of trees with 8 centimeters and above in diameter
- Tree count, average diameter, average height of trees with 6 to 7.9 centimeters in diameter
- Tree count, average diameter, average height of trees with less than 6 centimeters in diameter
- Name of species, year planted, tree count, average diameter, average height, distance of planting of other tree species in the plantation area

Project Coverage

The 2013 KPP plantation of 1,850 FCs, covering a total area of 1,447.99 hectares were surveyed. The breakdown of the project coverage by province is tabulated in Table 1.

Production Parameters

Of the 3,070,322 trees planted, mainly ipil-ipil, 1,245,669 trees survived or a survival rate of 40.57 percent. The potential yield of the surviving trees is 95,820.69 cubic meters of fuelwood, enough to flue-cure 11.32 million kilos of tobacco leaves, or supply the fuelwood

Table 1. SUMMARY OF 2013 KPP ACCOMPLISHMENT/PRODUCTION PARAMETERS BY PROVINCE

PARTICULARS	IPIL - IPIL						BAMBOO					GRAND TOTAL
	Ilocos Norte	Vigan Ilocos Sur	Abra	Candon Ilocos Sur	La Union	SUB-TOTAL	Cagayan	Isabela	La Union	Pangasinan	SUB-TOTAL	
Total Target												
Number of Farmers	327	128	175	220	343	1,193	198	130	17	312	657	1,850
Area	205.30	101.41	269.00	263.35	347.86	1,186.92	171.33	214.15	20.00	89.93	495.41	1,682.33
Surveyed/Completed Inventory												
Number of Farmers	327	128	175	220	343	1,193	198	130	17	312	657	1,850
Area	191.81	101.41	246.25	237.22	186.25	962.94	171.33	214.15	15.00	84.57	485.05	1,447.99
Percent Accomplishment												
Number of Farmers	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

IPIL-IPIL	
Total Number of Trees Planted	3,070,322
Total Number of Trees that Survived	1,245,669
Survival Rate	40.57
Trees with 8 cm & above in diameter	
Percent Over Total	26.24
Average Diameter (cm)	10.4
Average Height (m)	6.9
Trees with 6 to 7.9 cm in diameter	
Percent Over Total	23.74
Average Diameter (cm)	6.7
Average Height (m)	5.6
Trees with less than 6 cm in diameter	
Percent Over Total	50.02
Average Diameter (cm)	4.1
Average Height (m)	4.0
Overall Average Diameter (cm)	6.4
Overall Average Height (m)	5.1

BAMBOO	
Total Number of Bamboo Planted	96,753
Total Number of Bamboo Clumps	18,882
Survival Rate	19.52
Average Number of Poles per Clumps	19.23

requirement of 5,662.12 hectares of Virginia tobacco plantation, using the following assumptions being adopted by the private sector:

- 1 tree = 30 kg of wood
- 1 cubic meter = 390 kg of wood
- 3.3 kg = fuelwood requirement per kilogram of tobacco
- 2,000 kg = yield per hectare of tobacco

The potential yield of KPP 2013 could only cover the 44.54 percent of the fuelwood requirement of the total area of 12,713 hectares planted to Virginia tobacco.

Of the above-mentioned potential yield, 25,143.35 cubic meters or 26.24 percent are ready for harvest, having an average diameter of 10.4 centimeters and average height of 6.9 meters.

The rest of the standing trees comprise the following:

Trees with 6 cm to 7.9 cm in diameter - 23.74 percent
 Average diameter (cm) 6.7
 Average height (m)..... 5.6

Trees with less than 6 cm in diameter - 50.02 percent
 Average diameter (cm) 4.1
 Average height (m)..... 4.0

Nevertheless, the average diameter of the surviving trees is 6.4 centimeters and the average height is 5.1 meters.

The survival rate of the bamboo production was much lower, registered at 19.52 percent or 18,882 bamboo clumps survived out of 96,753 bamboo seedlings planted. An average of 19 bamboo poles per clump was counted.

Profile of the KPP Contractual EWs

Of the 34 contractual extension workers that were hired, 21 of them are forestry graduates, broken down as follows:

Branch Office	Forestry Graduate	Other Agriculture Course	TOTAL
Ilocos Norte	-	6	6
Vigan, Ilocos Sur	3	-	3
Abra	3	1	4
Candon, Ilocos Sur	4	5	9
La Union	6	-	6
Cagayan	2	-	2
Isabela	2	-	2
Pangasinan	1	1	2
TOTAL	21	13	34

Our branch managers and their field staff are witnesses to the dedication and courage of our newly hired KPP contractual EWs to accomplish the survey and inventory of our 2013 KPP plantation. They have to travel up to the reforestation areas of their respective farmer-cooperators, mostly located on hilly to mountainous terrain and grapple with their daily route against the sharp edges of the leaves and thorns of the surrounding vegetation, not to mention the risk of getting allergies, bruises, and insect bites.

Maintaining the services of contractual EW will also operationalize the recommendation of Dr. Segundino U. Foronda, who reviewed last year the KPP program implementation, in strengthening the Agency's project monitoring and appraisal system with the creation of a new organic unit of NTA to build the capacity to sustain



KPP surveyors had to negotiate unfamiliar terrain to reach project sites for inspection (Photo: NTA Candon)

its fuelwood initiative. The contractual workers will be able to monitor and supervise the reforestation areas on a regular basis and identify specific strategies, such as weeding and fertilizer application, to improve the growth of younger trees, particularly those planted during crop years 2015 to 2017, Crop 2015 to Crop 2017.

KPP Implementing Guidelines

To address the issues and concerns raised by Dr. Foronda in his report to the agency and to operationalize his recommendations to improve the implementation of future KPP projects, the agency conducted a series of project reviews, consultations, meetings, and dialogues with the branch managers,



The KPP Project Coordinator, Branch Managers, focal persons and newly hired surveyors (contractual) attended the orientation seminar on the conduct of survey and inventory of trees held at the NTA Candon Branch Office in October 2018. (Photo: NTA Candon)

Central Office department managers, and members of the technical group from the PMPMI, ULPI and TMI who are in-charge of the fuelwood sustainability initiative of the private sector.

The collective output of said technical group was already submitted to the Corporate Planning Department for final project review before submission to the NTA Governing Board.

Issues and Concerns

Among the issues and concerns common to all Branch Offices is the contractual status of the KPP foresters. The Branch Managers are one in recommending the renewal of the employment of the foresters, who have proven to be technically equipped, efficient, hardworking, dedicated and dependable, to continue the survey of 2014 KPP projects. Vigan Branch suggested that the KPP surveyors be in charge of the project if ever the implementation of the KPP project will be resumed in 2019 since Branch extension workers are not technically equipped as regards to this project compounded by their multi-project

involvement and voluminous paper works.

La Union recommended that more time should be allotted for the succeeding inventory of tree plantations to at least four months per crop year.

Another common issues and concerns is the accessibility of KPP sites that it took so much time for the inventory staff to travel in order to reach the plantation area.

Most project sites were located far from the residence of the farmer-cooperators or in the mountains, most of them with steep and bushy terrain, and some areas were located at the rim of dikes and river banks which are susceptible to soil erosion.

In Candon, the average distance of the project sites to the road is 2 to 3 kilometers or there are even project sites that are located 5 km away from the road. In Pangasinan, the average distance and time needed to travel from the residence of the FCs from the residence is 5 kilometers, 1 hour and 45 minutes.

All the Branch Offices noted low survival rates in their areas due to

calamities, such as typhoons and droughts (2013-2015 were El Niño years), grass fire, stray animals and negligence, such as burning (kaingin system or charcoal making) and cutting of trees and harvesting of bamboo shoots by unknown persons. Other plant sites were prone to flashfloods and erosions while other areas were not suited for bamboo. Pangasinan reported that some plantations were affected by government projects like rip rapping of dikes along river banks.

Another factor was lack of time of farmers in the care and maintenance of their bamboo plantation due to their activities from other crops.

Another common concern is the delay of inventory due to lack of cooperation of farmer-cooperators. Some of them are not available during the scheduled date of survey and interviews. Abra reported that there are plantation areas not cleared, making it hard for the surveyors to establish the location of sample site.

Four branches (Ilocos Norte, Vigan, Candon and Pangasinan) raised concerns on the lack of land documents to support application or securing for DENR permits. Candon reported that only four FCs have land titles.

Ilocos Norte and Vigan noted lack of budget for the maintenance of plant sites. High cost of labor is also needed in the harvesting of trees. FCs in Candon were appealing for the restructuring of their loans to 10 years.

Malfunctioning of GPS was also a cause of concern for Vigan, Isabela and Cagayan. Isabela reported that the battery of the unit was easily drained that they had to use their cellphones to get the coordinates of the project location.

Vigan and Candon raised concerns on the inavailability of fuelwood buyers in their area. ■



Dr. Segundino Foronda explained to KPP cooperator Andres Ageppa how to improve the mahogany and gmelina trees for better yield. Dr. Foronda, with NTA Vigan staff headed by Chief Agriculturist Faustino O. Taal, visited Ageppa's plantation site in Brgy. Marnay, Sinait, Ilocos Sur in December 2017. (Photo: NTA Vigan)

WITH bigger increase in excise tax on tobacco products being pushed in Congress, the energy of the Tobacco Festival, at the country's tobacco capital in Candon City, still poured out onto the streets in festive celebrations.



The city's major streets were closed to make way for the colorful floats in the grand civic parade and street dances that highlight the creativity of the Candon folks, most of them from families of tobacco or rice farmers.

The festival is not just the celebration of the region's most important cash crop and its contribution to the economy, but also a colorful feast of their 121st Anniversary of the historic "Cry of Candon" and 18th Anniversary of its cityhood.

The festivities, which ran from March 17 to 25, included youth competition featuring homegrown games, beauty pageants, dance competitions, blessing and inauguration of the new city slaughterhouse and the Agri-Pinoy Trading Center, special day for agriculture, senior citizens, educational, trade fair, mountain bike race, fireworks display, and concerts.

The festival gives emphasis on the benefits derived from the industry not only by the tobacco farmers but by the country as well. It also aims to draw attention to the tobacco industry so that critics will realize how the industry contributes to the economy of the nation.

Ilocos Sur congressman and a former city mayor Eric D. Singson, in a statement during the coronation night of the Search for Miss Virginia Tobacco 2019, said that the tobacco industry in the Ilocos region is feeling the crunch borne out of the national government's imposition of high excise taxes of tobacco for universal health, but he still believes the industry is not a dying industry.

According to Singson, the man behind the festival that started in 1995, the usual national production of 50 million kilos of tobacco leaves per annum has dwindled by half, and withdrawals of taxed cigarettes in the Bureau of Internal Revenue also had a slump of about 30 percent.

"This may mean less profit, but we

Tobacco Festival:

a celebration of unwavering faith of tobacco growers, stakeholders

Text and Photos by Neyo E. Valdez



(From left) Ilocos Sur Rep. Eric D. Singson (2nd District), Guest of Honor Senator Cynthia A. Villar, and NTA Director Rodolfo F. Salanga.



Candon City Mayor Ericson Singson and Atty. Claire G. Singson (2nd and 3rd from left) are so delighted to see the quality tobacco leaves produced by Candon City tobacco farmers. With Candon City First Couple are (from left) Pangasinan Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, NTA Director Rudy F. Salanga, Isabela Branch Manager Herman C. Torres, and Project Manager Hermogenes A. Galvez.

will see to it that we will continue to help the tobacco farmers of Ilocandia," Singson said.

NTA has been supporting the Festival since its inception in 1995 during the leadership of NTA Administrator Joaquin Ortega and through its Branch Office in Candon City, then headed by Branch Manager Rodrigo T. Pagtulingan. Its initial activity was a tobacco exhibit where they converted Candon North

Central School as showroom of NTA mission, programs and projects, industry's contribution to tobacco farmers and the country and alternative uses of tobacco.

From then on, the Branch Office was actively involved in major activities such as the Tobacco Quiz Bee and the search for longest flue-cured tobacco, and co-hosted the search for Miss Virginia Tobacco with the city government. ■



Miss Virginia Tobacco 2019

(L-R) Krishnah Marie Gravidez, Miss JTI; Joana Mae Yoro, Miss PTI (First Runner-Up); Miss Virginia Tobacco 2019 Donnabelle Erno; and Dianne Lacayanga, Miss NTA (Second Runner-Up)

DONNABELLE Erno, a stunning 20-year-old morena beauty from San Fernando City, La Union walked away with the 2019 Miss Virginia Tobacco beauty title in Candon City on March 22.

Erno, representing NTA La Union, received her crown from the hands of last year's winner, Jenny Claire Raquel.

Erno, a graduating Hotel and Restaurant Management student of Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State

University, bested 11 other contestants from four Virginia tobacco-producing provinces to take home the coveted title, including two minor awards: Best in Evening Gown and Best in Creative Costume. She continued its winning pageant streak after winning the 2018 Mutia ti La Union last year.

Two candidates representing NTA Ilocos Norte, Joana Mae Yoro and Dianne Lacayanga, were Miss Philippine

Tobacco Institute (First Runner-Up) and Miss National Tobacco Administration (Second Runner-Up), respectively. Krishnah Marie Gravidez of NTA Candon was adjudged Miss Japan Tobacco International, a special award.

Gravidez was adjudged Best in Swimwear and Best in Talent while Lacayanga and Develyn Lamioan of NTA Abra were Miss Photogenic and Miss Friendship, respectively.

Tobacco Quiz Bee

CANDON National High School (CNHS) Grade 9 student Christine Ysabelle Palado of Barangay Tablac topped this year's Tobacco Quiz Bee, held on March 22 at the City Government Center Multipurpose Hall in Candon City.

Second and third placers were another CNHS student Reyminda Grace Gaston of Barangay Paras and Loren Grace Gambito, a graduating BSBA student of North Luzon Philippines State College, of Barangay Oaig Daya, respectively.

This is the first time that a high school student topped the contest, co-sponsored by the National Tobacco Administration and the Candon City Government.

Some 70 college and high school students from Candon City and other municipalities in the second district of Ilocos Sur competed in the annual event as part of the celebration of the Tobacco Festival.



Tobacco Quiz winner Palado (4th from right) received his P3,000 cash prize from Tobacco Quiz Bee officials (from left): Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, quiz master Imelda N. Riñen, Tobacco Quiz chairperson Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, Estrella G. De Peralta, Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay, Minerva P. Mizal, and Dinah E. Pichay.



Longest Flue-cured Tobacco

TOBACCO farmer Robert Valdez (9th from left) of Oaig Daya, Candon City won first prize in the competition for the Longest Virginia Tobacco Leaf, Neutral category, held at the City Government Center Multipurpose Hall.

Other winners in the Neutral category were Anselmo Valdez of Oaig Daya, second prize; and Charles Torricer of Salvador II, third prize.

For the Topped category, the winners were Cresenciano

Solomon of Brgy. Cubcubbuot, first prize; Dominador Valdez of Brgy. Cubcubbuot I, second prize; and Edgardo Gadut of Brgy. Parioc II, third prize.

This year's contest was chaired by Pangasinan Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, with Isabela Branch Manager Herman C. Torres, Cagayan Branch Manager Corazon R. Riazonda, Abra Branch Manager Esmeralda G. Valera, Project Manager I Hermogenes A. Galvez, and Ilocos Norte Branch OIC Luzviminda U. Padayao, as members.



Virginia Tobacco Festival 2019

HOST team NTA Candon took the volleyball championship match against defending champion NTA Abra in two sets, at the City Government Center Multipurpose Hall on March 22, during the 2019 Virginia Tobacco Festival Cup.

The Candon Team, with Branch Chief Agriculturist Roman Raganit Jr as coach, advanced to the championship round with undefeated slate in four games of the three-day sportsfest hosted by Candon Branch Office.

NTA Ilocos Norte finished third of the eight-team volleyball competition, one of the highlights of the agency's participation to the Candon City's annual

Tobacco Festival. Meanwhile, a team from Region 2, composed of Cagayan and Isabela branches, finished first place in the Virginia Tobacco Festival Cup marathon held around the City Hall Compound on March 21. NTA La Union and NTA Vigan were second and third placers, respectively. NTA Candon Branch Manager Estrella G. De Peralta commended the different branch offices, including the Central Office, for their active participation in the event that serves as "one of the human resource interventions to promote unity, friendship, wellness, sportsmanship, discipline and empowerment among the employees." Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John

I. Verzosa, along with Administrative Department Manager Dr. Cristina C. Lopez, NTA Directors Rodolfo F. Salanga, Nestor C. Casela, Danilo C. Trongco, and Teofilo R. Quintal, handed cash prizes to the winners. "I am overwhelmed with emotions seeing you all as it has been awhile since a big group of NTA employees are together. The sportsfest is one of the human resource interventions that an organization promotes because it contributes to the total development of employees. Through sports, we learn the values of discipline, hard work, teamwork, respect for others, determination, among others," Dr. Lopez said in her inspirational message.

Crude Water Tobacco Leaf Extract for Controlling Golden Apple Snail Eggs in Rice Fields

by Imelda C. Parbo

THE golden apple snail, a major pest in rice production, is highly productive under favorable growing condition and with abundant food supply. The control of adult golden apple snail is more complicated because adult snails are mobile and tend to hibernate during drought and with limited water supply. The use of molluscicide can effectively reduce the population of snails but it affects the environment and the person exposed to it.

According to FAO (1989), handpicking of snails and removal of egg masses is a widespread control method and it is relatively effective especially in a small scale farming. Egg destruction is also recommended

to control the reproduction of golden apple snails.

The tobacco crude water extract was tested to control the hatching of snail eggs. The ovicidal effect of the tobacco extract was found effective in the laboratory trials, in pans and aquarium where their growing conditions were simulated at the Product Development Division Laboratory of NTA.

The results in the laboratory were verified in farmers' fields in 2016. Demonstration trials were conducted in the City of Batac, San Nicolas and Dingras, Ilocos Norte involving six farmer-cooperators for two rice planting seasons in 2017.

The crude water tobacco leaf extract (TLE) is obtained by soaking ground native tobacco, Salway variety, in tap water for 24 hours at the rate of one kilogram per three liters of water. The tobacco leaf extract is produced manually by squeezing the soaked leaves using fine cotton cloth. One liter

of tobacco leaf extract is diluted with 3.5 liters water ready for spraying. For on-farm extraction technology, one kilogram of tobacco leaves is soaked in 10 L of water. No dilution is required.

Golden apple snail eggs are found deposited on rice plants, structures like levees, branches, and other vegetation near the rice fields where water is present. The prevalence of snail eggs is high during the onset of rainy season which coincides with the regular planting season for rice in August.

Spraying of the egg clutches with crude water tobacco leaf extract was done at three-day interval in two planting seasons. The egg clutches were classified and characterized according to the color as bright pink and wet (newly laid), pinkish, pale pink with some whitish eggs, whitish eggs and cracked and fallen egg clutches (Figure 1).

The crude water TLE was sprayed directly on the egg mass deposited on the rice plants and levees around the



Newly laid



Pinkish



Pale Pink with some whitish eggs



Whitish eggs



Cracked and fallen

Figure 1. Classification of snail egg clutches according to color. NTA-IRD. 2017.



Figure 2. Comparison of untreated and TLE-treated golden apple snail egg clutches. NTA-IRD. 2017.

rice paddies. The most dominant color of the egg clutches observed before spraying was pink. A significant change in color of egg clutches was observed 24 to 48 hours after treatment application wherein the bright pink-colored clutches turned to pinkish, gradually to pale pink with some whitish eggs on top of the clutch and eventually whitish (Figure 2).

To some extent, the egg clutches dropped to the ground even if they did not change from pink to white. In some cases, whitish egg clusters cracked and dropped to the ground (Figure 3).

The treated egg clutches that turned whitish did not have dark spots (neonates or hatchlings), an indication that these will not hatch or the incubation was not completed.

This is a good indication that the crude water TLE is effective in the destruction of egg clutches that if not controlled will result in thousands of hatchlings that can grow to voracious snails that can economically reduce rice yield if not properly managed on time.

For a more holistic approach to control the hatchability of snail eggs by spraying crude water TLE, it is recommended that areas around rice fields and along irrigation canals and levees be kept clean to limit the places where the adult snails can deposit their eggs.

Based on the interviews conducted after the demo trials, the farmer-cooperators were satisfied and convinced that the crude water TLE is effective in controlling golden apple snail eggs in their rice fields with no residual or hazardous effect. The technology is highly acceptable to them. ■



Figure 3. Detached/fallen egg clutches after spraying with crude water TLE. NTA-IRD. 2017.

OMT Ilocos Norte hits airwaves with new anchors

THE Oras ni Mannalon ti Tabako (OMT), a radio program established by the National Tobacco Administration, continues to hit the airwaves over Bombo Radyo, Laoag City. This program is a 30-minute paid broadcast of the NTA Ilocos Norte Branch Office in ten broadcast schedules: March 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30; April 1, 6, 13, and 27; and May 4 and 11.

Rhonelle P. Sulicipan and Mae Angela U. Lacamora, both Tobacco Production and Regulation Officers 1, were given Special Order by NTA Administrator Dr. Robert L. Seares to take the seat as program anchors vice Jesusa D. Calano who was on-leave.

In every airing schedule, the program format includes (1) Tabako Patrol, which showcases news and NTA updates; (2) Saludsod ken Sungbat, which entertains questions from the listeners through text hotline and answered by the program anchors; (3) Techno-Guide Portion, which discusses the different technology components in quality tobacco production; and (4) Question of the Day, where the first four texters with correct answers win exciting prizes.

This radio program is a strategy of the Communication Support Programs of the agency, which is aimed at enforcing the teaching of quality tobacco production provided by the NTA extension workers to tobacco farmers. It also aims to inform the community as a whole of the other programs and projects in line with the agency's mandate of improving the economic and living conditions of the tobacco farmers and all those who depend on the industry for their livelihood. (Rhonelle P. Sulicipan)



On Air: Lacamora and Sulicipan

MOISES D. DURAN

P.R.A.I.S.E. Awardee Model Extension Worker - Cagayan Branch

A silent worker with BIG output

by Gilbert A. Taguam and Josefa P. Correo

MOISES Dulin Duran, Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer (TPRO) I of Cagayan Branch, is very much committed to help the agency fulfill its mandate, and he is dedicated to his tasks in his 28 years of extension work helping the farmers make the best of their tobacco venture.

He has a very big heart for his farmers, especially those who have less in life. That's why he is well loved and respected by his farmers and the agency accorded him the recognition he deserved. He has received plaques of recognition for helping his farmer-cooperators win the coveted Tobacco Growers of the Year, provincial level, in crop years 1999-2000 (for Cigar-filler category), and 2012-2013 and 2015-2016 (both for Burley).

He has also impressed the Branch Office with his 100% collection efficiency in IFOIGAP Rice Dry Season CY 2018 and IN Curing Barn Assistance Program.

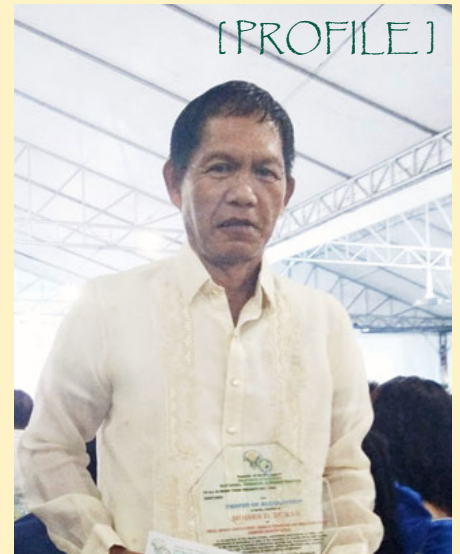
Aside from his duties as TPRO, he is the designated Area Supervisor of Area III (comprising the municipalities of Tuao, Solana, Enrile, Tuguegarao City, Peñablanca, Amulung, and Iguig), the area with the most number of tobacco farmers and area planted to tobacco. He

is also the Branch Coordinator of the Bamboo component of the Kahuyang Pangkabuhayan at Pangkakarlikasan project.

Duran, who hails from Accusilian, Tuao, Cagayan, has a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree, specializing in Entomology from the Cagayan State University, Piat Campus.

He started his first job in private agricultural companies, then as a contractual employee of the Department of Agriculture. He was hired by NTA Cagayan in 1990 and was given a permanent position as Agriculturist I. He was the designated Municipal Team Leader until the rationalization in 2007, that changed his position to TPRO I.

More than his exemplary performances, he is also known for his humility as a supervisor and extension worker and his deep faith to God. He



Duran

is guided by the Bible verse: "Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people (Colossians 3:23)." His peers would rather describe him as a "silent worker but with big output."

He performs and works well even in the absence of his supervisor because he has dedicated his service to his clients for the glory of God, making God as his Supervisor.

He is a role model to his colleagues, an inspiration to the younger co-workers and a great service provider to his farmers and family.

He has two children with his wife, the former Maria Lopez of Agoo, La Union: Mark Louie, a nurse by profession and is now working in the Bureau of Fire Protection, and Princess Mara, a BS Pharmacy graduate and presently pursuing her second course (Doctor of Medicine) at the Cagayan State University, Tuguegarao City. ■



Two of the TGY awardees qualified for the National category: (L-R) Florentino Gallardo of San Miguel, Balungao and Joseph P. Lubos of Malasiqui, Pangasinan.

5 Pangasinan farmers vie for TGY National awards

by Alma G. Toralba

FIVE tobacco growers from Pangasinan are qualified to join the Tobacco Growers of the Year (TGY) Contest National Category for Crop Year 2018-2019.

The contestants are provincial winners in their respective categories. For Burley type, the contestant farmers and their assisting extension workers are Florentino Gallardo of San Miguel, Balungao, CY 2016-2017, assisted by Marina G. Pine, Agriculturist I; Lito Esteban of Matarannoc, San Manuel, Tarlac, CY 2015-2016, assisted by Rechie B. Vallo, TPRO I; and Janeth Lilagan, CY 2017-2018, assisted by Edna C. Perlaoan, TPRO I. For Native-Batek category, they are Roberto Reciles, CY 2017-2018 and Joseph Lubos, CY 2016-2017, both of Gatang, Malasiqui, Pangasinan, and assisted by Marcos P. Atela, TPRO I.

The Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD), as the National Technical Committee, headed by FTSD Manager Imelda C. Riñen, conducted the first and second evaluation in January, based on yield and farming practices per implementing guidelines of the contest. ■

NTA PANGASINAN

QUICK GLANCE: BRANCH PROFILE

- Number of Tobacco Farmers/Hectareage: **3,016 FCs / 2,121 has**
- Number of Tobacco-growing Municipalities: **21**
- Number of Staff: **24 Regular; 17 Job Orders**

Office. The Provincial Branch Office has its own office in Carmay East, Rosales, Pangasinan and an Area Office located at Poblacion, Villasis, Pangasinan. Both office buildings are owned by the NTA obtained thru donations made by the Local Government Units of Rosales and Villasis, respectively.

Manpower Complement. The Branch Office is managed by a Department Manager III and assisted by the Chief Agriculturist, responsible for the operations; and the Administrative Officer, supervising administrative matters. There are 24 regular staff and 17 Job Order employees.

Area of Operation. The Branch Office covers 18 municipalities of Pangasinan and three municipalities of Tarlac.

Stakeholders. Tobacco Farmers. For crop year 2018-2019, there are 3,106 tobacco farmers with an aggregate area of 2,121.91 hectares. The average land holding is 0.60/ha per farmer. **Tobacco Buyers.** There are 30 tobacco buyers operating under the Branch Office, as follows: one Cigar Manufacturing, one Wholesale Tobacco Dealer, three Trading Centers, 17 Field Representatives, and eight Viajeros.

Tobacco Planted. There are two types of tobacco grown in areas covered by the Branch Office: Burley and Native tobacco. For Burley tobacco, there are two sub-types, the Traditional and the Improved Flavor Burley. For the Native type, the sub-types are Batek and LPI 1/ LPI 2. For the Neutral Burley tobacco, there are 883 tobacco farmers planting an aggregate area of 562.37 hectares. Likewise, improved flavor tobacco covers an area of 117.27 hectares planted by 179 tobacco farmers. For Native Batek tobacco, there are 1,954 farmers tilling an area of 1,442.27 hectares.

Trading Operations. Before the start of trading operations, the Branch Office inspects trading centers to ensure compliance to rules and regulations such as presence of approved licenses, calibrated weighing scales, availability of Purchase Invoice Vouchers (PIVs) and other documents.

The Branch Office created a Provincial Roving Team to oversee the implementation of the Trading Rules and Regulation and assigned Tobacco Production and Regulation Officers to various trading centers.

The Branch Office hired trading clerks to record PIVs and Certificate of Purchase (COP) received by the Provincial Branch Office.

Activities, Programs, Projects

IFOIGAP-TCGS. For a period of five years (CY 2014-2018), the project which is financed by NTA has assisted a total of 4,560 farmers with an aggregate area of 2,884 hectares. Likewise, collaborative TCGS project was also implemented and financed by the participating buyer firm. For crop year 2017-2018, total of 1,029 farmers tilling an area of 754.13 hectares were provided with production assistance worth P34.179 million.

Rice Project. For a period of five years (2014-2018), the project has assisted a total of 1,531 farmers with an aggregate area of 1,070.5 hectares, with the farmers gained an average of P45,456 income per hectare. For crop year 2017-2018, a total of 441 farmers tilling an area of 351.5 hectares were provided with production assistance worth P5.032 million.

KKP Project (Bamboo). For six years (2013-2018), a total of 448.62 hectares of bamboo plantation had been established.

Curing Barn Assistance Project. For CY 2018, the Branch Office has provided a calamity assistance to 101 farmers whose curing sheds were destroyed by Typhoon Lawin in 2016. For the same period, the Branch Office received and processed the application of 369 farmers for curing shed repair and 70 farmers for curing shed construction.

Irrigation Support Project. For a period of four years, the provincial office has provided financial assistance to 138 beneficiaries under the ISP under the ISP.

Tobacco Growers of the Year. Since the restoration of the project in CY 2011-2012, the Branch Office has produced 18 provincial winners. The contest involves Native (Batek), Improved Flavor and Traditional Burley category. Cash prizes and trophies were handed out to the winners.



Dominador Salindong of Mannoag Palay Tobacco Farmers Association received his tractor cultivator from Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, assisted by NTA Pangasinan Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, farmer leader Saturnino Distor and Senior TPRO Jovita G. Briones.

BRANCH OFFICE STAFF



First row (seated): Marcos G. Atela (Agriculturist I), Myrna P. Galaraga (Agriculturist II), Alma G. Toralba, (Senior TPRO) Joselyn G. Miguel, (Administrative Officer IV), Engr. Roger T. Madiaga (Chief Agriculturist), Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, Elizabeth Q. Biala (Supervising Agriculturist), Magdalena N. Mamuyac (TPRO III), Jovita G. Briones (Senior TPRO), Regina Baysa (Cashier III), and Eulalia Z. Ele (TPRO III). Back row: Ralph Gerald P. Bermudez (JO Administrative Aide), Dante P. Briones (JO Administrative Aide IV), Alvin N. Gacayan (JO Driver II), Ronaldo P. Molina (TPRO I), Marlon G. Facun (TPRO I), Israel C. Ramos (Agriculturist I), Leodegario N. Tolentino (TPRO I), Rogelio R. Opolento (JO Utility Worker I), Virgilio Rabang (TPRO I), Lorna S. Espanto (TPRO I), Yolanda S. Ignacio (TPRO I), Rose Anne S. Dismaya (TPRO I), Marina G. Pine (Agriculturist I), Edna C. Perlaoan (acting TPRO III), Richie B. Vallo (TPRO I), Ann Desiree N. Gacayan (Secretary), Maria Saniata T. Briones (JO Administrative Aid I), and Honey Abigail Hafalla (JO, Administrative Aid I).

Our latest provincial winners for Pangasinan were Janet Liligan and Roberto Reciles (Burley and Native category).

NTA Scholarship Program. The program has benefitted 101 students who were given support for tuition and stipend. As of date, there are 46 graduates. Majority of them have already secured employment, two of them hired by the Branch Office, namely, Roseanne S. Dismaya, TPRO 1 (given permanent position on March 21), and Ann Margarret P. De Fiesta, Forester (Job Order).

Tobacco Dust Marketing Activities. The provincial branch office has provided significant support to the Tobacco Dust Plus Project thru the conduct of trainings to prospective fish pond operators and scouting market outlet for Tobacco Dust Plus. ■



NTA Director Wilfredo Martinez and NTA Pangasinan Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana meet the tobacco farmer and their leaders, who are members of tobacco cooperatives and associations, in a dialog during the 3rd Pangasinan Umaani Expo 2019.

NTA joins 2nd Pangasinan Umaani Expo

by Marlon G. Facun

NTA Pangasinan Branch Office joined other government agencies, private sector and nongovernment organizations in the province in the 3rd Pangasinan Umaani Expo 2019 held at the Provincial Agriculture Office, Provincial Nursery Compound in Barangay Tebag East, Sta. Barbara, Pangasinan on March 11-16.

The Branch Office facilitated the Tobacco Farmers Forum and meeting of the officers and member of the Pangasinan chapter of the National Federation of Tobacco Growers Association and Cooperatives (NAFTAC), during the Agew na Umaanid Tanaman (Corn and High Value Crops Farmers' Day) on March 14.

Local farmers, traders, and other stakeholders attended the NTA Farmers' Day facilitated by Marlon G. Facun, Lorna S. Espanto, Rechie B. Vallo, Ronaldo P. Molina, and Israel C.

Ramos, all extension workers from the Branch Office. Also present during the NTA day were NTA Directors Wilfredo C. Martinez, Nestor C. Casela, and Teofilo R. Quintal.

Held during the opening day was the awarding of Plaques of Appreciation to Outstanding Agricultural Extension Workers, Gawad Saka Provincial Winners, and Outstanding Tobacco Farmers.

Other highlights were the Farmers' Congress, ceremonial distribution of shallow-tube well (an irrigation project of the National Irrigation Administration), Rice Product Contest, and Film Showing of Farm Machineries and Equipment and Fellowship during the Agew na Umaaniy Pagey (Rice Farmers' Day) on March 12.

The highlights for the last three days were Agew na Umaanin Bibii tan Kooperatiba (Umaani Women's and Cooperatives Day and Agribusiness Day), Agew na Umaani Extension Officers (Agricultural Extension Workers' Day), and Exhibitors and Sponsors Day. ■

Manager's Corner

CESARIO G. SAMBRANA
Manager, Pangasinan Branch Office



Mechanizing the Tobacco Industry

FARM mechanization will play a major role in achieving a sustainable Philippine tobacco industry. It addresses the problem on the scarcity of labor which has been discouraging tobacco growers in their farming venture.

At present, most of our farmers still use the carabao and plow in tobacco production, which is labor-intensive and has proven to be expensive. Compounding their problems are the high costs of manual labor for other field activities and farm inputs which result in higher production cost and less income.

The challenge right now for the industry stakeholders is how to equip these farmers with the latest farm mechanization technology in order to make them more productive and have a higher income at par with their counterparts in other nations.

Farm mechanization is not easy to implement because of the high cost of investment in purchasing the equipment. To attain maximum benefits, mechanization requires additional cost for trainings on the management and operations of the equipment. The farmers are also saddled with the problem of maximizing the utilization of the equipment because most of them have farm size that is too small (0.65 ha per farmer) for farm mechanization. This is the reason farmers are required to form an association or cooperative so that their farm lands will be grouped together for maximum machine utilization. Bayanihan system will also be harnessed to address the problem on scarcity of manual labor.

Among the field activities that can be mechanized are land preparations, transplanting, fertilizer application and watering, harvesting and curing.

Farm mechanization is achievable with the support of the local government units that are receiving millions of pesos from the share of the tobacco excise tax. Utilization of the fund for the tobacco industry should be their top priority.

In farm mechanization, we can see a bright rays of the sun for a sustainable tobacco industry.

* * *

When I first entered in the government service 40 years ago, I was asked by my senior officials of the defunct Philippine Virginia Tobacco Administration (PVTa): "Why did I join the tobacco industry when this is already a sunset industry?" This was a challenge rather than a distraction for me. So I focused on my work as an agricultural engineer/researcher pursuing researches on the curing managements of flue-cured and air-cured tobacco.

With the leadership of Dr. Adolfo Necesito and Engr. Cecilio Costales of the PVTa Research Department and Engineering Division, respectively, we conducted researches on saving fuelwood by improving the traditional curing barns and curing system of tobacco farmers. We also tested solar-aided curing barns to help reduce dependency of the industry on fuelwood as source of energy for flue-curing, and coal briquette as fuel for flue-curing. We came up with a program or a scheme that brought together the different sectors of industry in addressing the different issues affecting the tobacco industry, especially fuelwood. In this program, the tobacco farmers shouldered 50 percent of the cost of fuel, 25 percent for the provincial government of La Union, and 25 percent for the tie-up company.

The stakeholders working together in one direction ensures a sustainable tobacco industry.

My stay in the tobacco industry in general and the NTA in particular will probably be the first and last industry/office that I served as a government employee. I enjoyed staying in the service for 40 years. Hardwork, perseverance, aggressiveness and work focus helped me rose from the rank as an Agricultural Engineer to Extension Specialist to Division Chief and finally as a Department Manager III performing functions as a Branch Manager of the Pangasinan Branch Office.

While there are some sectors claiming that the tobacco industry is a twilight industry, my impression is that the industry will remain robust in the next decades. In fact, tobacco buyers are still looking for expansion areas for tobacco production. ■

Pangasinan Branch cites top Rice Project, TCGS collectors

NTA Pangasinan awarded certificates of recognition for excellent performance to seven extension workers (EWs) who have shown outstanding performance in recovering the financial assistance they extended to their farmer cooperators under the Rice Wet Season 2018 component of the Integrated Farming and Other Income Generating Activities Projects (IFOIGAP).

The certificates were awarded by Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana and Chief Agriculturist Engr. Roger T. Madriaga in a simple ceremony during the Branch year-end convocation last December.

According to Manager Sambrana, the branch office has rationalized the process of recognizing and rewarding EWs in implementing NTA programs and projects. "We evaluate the performance of EWs every end of the cropping season and rank them using evaluation parameters such as the ability to collect 100% of all loan and on time," he said.

The awardees from rank 1 to 7 were Alma G. Toralba, Senior TPRO; Myrna P. Galaraga, Agriculturist II; Rechie B. Vallo, TPRO I; Yolanda S. Ignacio, TPRO I; Lorna S. Espanto, TPRO I; Eulalia Z. Ele, TPRO III; and Marlon G. Facun, TPRO I.

Toralba was also awarded, along with Edna C. Perlaoan, TPRO I, for excellence performance in IFOIGAP Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) for crop year 2017-2018, during the branch celebration of the NTA anniversary in July last year. ■



From left: Alma G. Toralba (Awardee); Senior TPRO Elizabeth Q. Biala, Supervising Agriculturist; and Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana.



Farmer Dominador Salindong of Brgy. Carmay in Rosales tested the tractor cultivator in his farm, assisted by a personnel from Harbest AgriBusiness Corp.

Pangasinan farmers group get tractor cultivators

AS part of the agency's Farm Mechanization Program, NTA Pangasinan distributed seven units of tractor cultivator worth P235,000 to qualified farmers association and cooperative members under a loan program with 20% subsidy payable in seven years.

The recipients are Aramal-Tocok Federation of Free Farmers Multi-Purpose Cooperative of Aramal, San Fabian; Barangobong Rice, Corn, Tobacco Farmers Association, Inc. of Barangobong, Villasis; Amamperez Tobacco, Corn and Vegetable Farmers Association of Amamperez, Villasis; Leet Erfe Banzai Tobacco Farmers Association, Inc. of Leet, Sta. Barbara; Manaoag Palay Tobacco Farmers Association, Inc. of Manaoag, Pangasinan; Alcala Tobacco, Rice and Corn Agri Cooperative of San Pedro Apartado, Alcala; and Laoac High Value Crops Farmers of Laoac, Pangasinan.

The cultivators were tested with the farmers by the suppliers and in the presence of Farmers Organization Development (FOD) coordinator of the Branch Office in Carmay, Rosales on January 7.

According to NTA Pangasinan Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, farmers can speed up their field activities, they will be more productive and get more field work done amidst the scarcity and limited supply of labor force.

"Working in the field is easier and can attract younger generation to work in farm, too," he added. (Marlon G. Facun)



Tarlac farmers get fertilizer subsidy

THE Local Government Unit (LGU) of San Manuel, Tarlac headed by Municipal Mayor Benjamin D. Tesoro, extended production assistance in the form of fertilizers to the tobacco farmers from its nine tobacco-growing barangays for crop year 2018-2019. The distribution of assistance was held on December 14, 2018.

The production inputs were in addition to the production assistance from the National Tobacco Administration and the Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. (ULPI) given to 295 farmer-beneficiaries with a total area of 126.25 hectares.

The fertilizers were given in a per hectare basis as follows: four bags of 46-0-0; two bags of basal (10-18-24), and one bag sulfate (21-0-0).

According to the office of Mayor Tesoro, the funds used for this year's project come from the excise tax share of the municipalities per Republic Act 8240.

The farmers are also provided technical assistance by the Branch extension workers and their counterpart from the private sector (ULPI) to ensure compliance to the recommended tobacco production technology.

The distribution of assistance was made possible through the close coordination of Mayor Tesoro, NTA Pangasinan Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, and Milanie R. Rivera, ULPI Project Manager. (Alma G. Toralba)

NTA sets up solar-powered irrigation in Pangasinan

NTA Pangasinan Manager Engr. Cesario Sambrana said the branch office has installed solar-powered irrigation system (SPIS) in San Fabian.

The recipient of the SPIS project is Aramal-Tocok Federation of Free Farmers Multi-Purpose Cooperative in Barangay Aramal in San Fabian.

The SPIS project in Pangasinan is part of the eight solar irrigation projects incorporated into the Integrated Demonstration/Model Farm and Extension Training Laboratory by the National Tobacco Administration.

According to Sambrana, the irrigation system is expected to increase the volume of production in the area, enhance quality of tobacco, and reduce irrigation cost, as the water will be available during the dry months due to the abundance of sunlight that powers the solar panels.

Each NTA solar-powered irrigation system, amounting to P615,000, is designed to irrigate a minimum of 10 hectares of tobacco/rice area, representing one farm-cluster. (Marlon G. Facun)

NTA Director Wilson Victorio (in white shorts) joined NTA Pangasinan headed by Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana and Supervising TPRO Elizabeth Q. Biala in a visit to one SPIS site at the farm of tobacco grower Marlinda Sion in San Fabian.





(From left): Loreto S. Reyes, Supervising TPRO; Chief Agriculturist Roman J. Raganit Jr.; NTA Scholar Nathaniel C. Aglosolos and his father Fermin Aglosolos; Branch Manager Estrella G. De Peralta; and Merly S. Sison, Senior TPRO.

NTA Scholarship Program. GRANTEES of the NTA Scholarship Program of the Candon Branch Office for Academic Year (AY) 2018-2019 received their checks bearing the amount for stipend and allowance during the briefing and awarding held at the Branch Office conference room in Candon City on January 11. Among them was 18-year-old Nathaniel C. Aglosolos (in photo, 3rd from left) who is currently enrolled as freshman student of BS in Information Technology at the Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College in Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur.

NTA Candon has awarded 45 of its allotment of 66 scholarship grants to first year college students of the second district of Ilocos Sur, all but two of them were present with their parents or guardians during the briefing. This brings to a total of 67 scholars for the Branch Office, 22 of them are expected to graduate in May this year.

NTA resumed last year its scholarship program, under the Tobacco Farmers' Dependents Scholarship Program (TFDSP), after the suspension in 2016 because of the senior high school program, which delayed enrollment for college freshman.

Before the suspension, NTA Candon awarded 892 scholarship grants to deserving college students in a five-year period, or from AY 2011-12 to AY 2015-16.

According to Dr. Cristina C. Lopez, Administrative Department Manager and TFDSP Chairperson, new slots for 243 scholars, distributed among the eight NTA Branch Offices, were available before the opening of classes of the current academic year. The grants were offered to deserving college students who are dependents of tobacco growers in tobacco-growing provinces. *(Estrella G. De Peralta)*

Farm Tractor Support Project. NTA ILOCOS NORTE officials checked on the furrowing activity of a tiller using the multi-purpose cultivator at the Burley Improved farm of tobacco grower Danny Cadiante in Brgy. Nambaran, Bacarra, Ilocos Norte. Cadiante is a member of the North Eastern Bacarra Farmers Association (NEBFA), one of six cooperatives/associations who each received hand tractor, under the Irrigation Facility Assistance and Farm Tractor Support Project of NTA.

According to NEBFA Chairman Nestor Padron, the association earns extra income by renting out the cultivator to their farmer members.

Other beneficiaries of multipurpose cultivators under the Farm Tractor Support Project in Ilocos Norte are Sirmata MPCI (Multipurpose Cooperative Inc.) of Alay, Badoc; Malampa

Curing Barn Assistance Project. NTA ABRA awarded P6.06 million cash assistance for the repair, improvement and construction of curing barn/shed to the tobacco growers in the province, during the orientation on Curing Barn Assistance Project (CBAP) held February 1 in Dolores, Abra.

A total of 228 tobacco growers received P20,000 each for repair and improvement, while 30 received P50,000 each for the construction of curing barns/sheds.

NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares, assisted by Abra Branch Manager Esmeralda G. Valera, awarded the checks to the beneficiaries during the ceremonial release held after the project orientation. The event was also graced by NTA Director Danilo C. Trongco and Dolores Mayor Robert Victor G. Seares.

NTA is implementing the Curing Barn Assistance Program (CBAP) to promote the use of the NTA-prescribed efficient curing sheds; and help the farmers increase their income through the production of properly cured leaf with these prescribed sheds.

NTA Abra also released checks bearing the amount for stipend and allowance to 18 scholars under the Tobacco Farmers' Dependents Scholarship Program for school year 2018-2019; and checks for 16 farmers who are beneficiaries of the Kahuyang Pangkabuhayan at Pangkalikasan (KPP) Program. *(Melanie Rapiz-Parel)*



Agrarian Reform Cooperative of Nambaran, Bacarra; Pandan Tobacco Growers and Credit Cooperative of Sta. Magdalena, Sarrat; Pasuquin Tobacco Growers Association, Inc. of Dadaeman, Pasuquin; and Salukag MPCI of Bulbulala, Vintar.

The agency, under the irrigation facility assistance, also provides tobacco growers with cash assistance to be used exclusively for the purchase of small irrigation system facilities like water pumps and its accessories.

Padron joined NTA Ilocos Norte OIC Manager Luzviminda U. Padayao, Area Supervisors Engr. Jesusa D. Calano, Saturnino A. Agatep and Divina D. Pagdilao, and assisting extension worker Marzel E. Manzanias during the Branch Office Project Visitation of Area 3 on January 16. *(Jesusa D. Calano)*

NEWS FROM MINDANAO

by Ma. Mercedes M. Ayco

Alubijid farmers gets training on coop basic

SOME 55 members of Alubijid Tobacco Farmers Credit Cooperative (AIToFaCC) attended training on the fundamentals of cooperative, jointly organized by the local government of Alubijid, Misamis Oriental and the National Tobacco Administration, held at Brgy. Loguilo on February 26.

AIToFaCC was created after the merger of the farmer association of four barangays, Lumbo, Molocboloc, Loguilo and Lanao (LuMoLoLa farmers association), spearheaded by the local government.

Speakers, from MASS-SPECC who are accredited of the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA), discussed the fundamentals of cooperative and on the coop's Article of Cooperation and By-Laws. A workshop on the vision, mission and goals of cooperative was conducted on the second day.

The participants also received sprayers and fertilizers from the LGU Alubijid.

Alubijid, a recipient of tobacco excise tax per Republic Act 8240, for Burley and native tobacco producers, has been consistent in giving assistance to their tobacco growers who are members of registered cooperatives or associations. ■

Sarangani hosted training on Virginia tobacco production

TWO members of the NTA Governing Board, and two senior officials of the agency, in coordination with the provincial government of Sarangani, spearheaded the training on Virginia Tobacco Production, held at the Kasfala Conference Room, Provincial Capitol Building in Alabel, Sarangani on January 16.

The participants were farmers and representatives from the provinces of Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat, Cotabato and Maguindanao.

NTA Directors Wilfredo C. Martinez and Danilo C. Trongco, along with NTA La Union Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay and FTSD Manager Imelda N. Riñen, met local officials and the participants during the training, aimed at opening door for the expansion of tobacco production in Region 12.

Manager Riñen discussed the overview of the tobacco industry and the tobacco production project, including pests and diseases, while Manager Palabay expounded the mandates, programs and projects and the agency. Engr. Supang lectured on seedbedding and seedling care and management.

The participants had their practicum, based on training module, on January 17 at a farm site in Sitio Toning in Barangay Malandag in Malungon, Sarangani.

In May 2018, Director Martinez attended a consultation meetings and dialogues in Cotabato City, and visited potential area for Virginia production in Datu Odin Sinsuat in Maguindanao and in Alabel and Malongon in Sarangani. ■



Members of the Alubijid Tobacco Farmers Cooperative



TOBACCO and corn grower Norberto A. Aragoza collects corn cobs and corn stalks that he used as fuelwood supplement for curing using the anawang furnace, as required by the NTA Curing Barn Assistance Project (CBAP). With the use of corn waste materials, he was able to save 40% to 50% fuelwood. He said that using corn cobs and corn stalks save the environment from hazardous effect of burning waste materials in the field. Aragoza, 53 years old and a barangay Tanod of Dangdangla, San Juan, La Union, was a provincial winner of the Tobacco Growers of the Year (TGY) Virginia Neutral Category in 2017, making him qualified for the National TGY Awards. (Sinfrosa N. Valmonte)