



# PHILIPPINE TOBACCO NEWS

ISSN-0116-4183

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL TOBACCO ADMINISTRATION

Volume XII \* No. 1

January - March 2021

**ROBERTO "Doc B" R. BONOAN, Ph.D.**

Deputy Administrator for Operations

## *Good-bye to an Industry Icon*



**INSIDE**

**Travel Report: Administrator meets Pangasinan farmers**

Administrator's Annual Report, p. 3 \* An Introduction to Block Farming Project, p. 15 \* Farmers' Testimonials, p. 18 \* Branch Updates, p. 22

## ABOUT THE COVER

Deputy Administrator for Operations **Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan**, shown here from an illustration of Roderick C. Villarín, Artist Illustrator III of the Industrial Research Department, on novelty paper made of tobacco, is considered an “industry icon,” with his long experience in the Operations Group, as head of the Industrial Research Department for more than a decade, technical coordinator for the Branch Offices for six years, and officer-in-charge of the DAOP Office from 2007 to 2011, and from January 2020 to February 2021. He got his official appointment as DAOP barely a month before his death. He knew the tobacco industry like the back of his hand, a class of his own, and established long-standing good relationship with manufacturers, research community and his colleagues, peers and subordinates at the agency. He facilitated the first official travel of Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. to Pangasinan. It was also the last visit of the DAOP to any Branch Office.



ROBERTO "Doc B" R. BONOAN, Ph.D.  
Deputy Administrator for Operations

*Good-bye to an Industry Icon*

## PHILIPPINE TOBACCO NEWS

ISSN 0110-4193

is published quarterly by the  
**Department of Agriculture -  
National Tobacco Administration**  
3rd and 4th Floor, Ben-Lor Building,  
Quezon Ave., Quezon City, Tel. Nos.  
(02) 3743987. Fax: (02) 3732095.  
Website: [www.nta.da.gov.ph](http://www.nta.da.gov.ph).

**Editor: Neyo E. Valdez**

**Technical Editors:**

**Roberto R. Bonoan, Ph.D.**

**Imelda N. Riñen**

**Fortuna C. Benosa**

**Writer/Circulation:**

**Melanie Rapiz-Parel**

**Staffwriters:**

Ilocos Norte: **Divina D. Pagdilao,  
Elaine A. Tinio**

Vigan: **Tomasito G. Taloza,  
Immanuel A. Rafanan**

Candon: **Orlando O. Galdones,  
Fayrene Kay P. Milan**

Abra: **Marife P. Peralta,  
Jomel Paolo B. Balaoro**

La Union: **Candido I. Liangao,  
Joannaliza D. Ordinate**

Pangasinan: **Alma G. Toralba,  
Ronald P. Molina**

Cagayan: **Josefa P. Correo,  
Eleanor N. Macasieb**

Isabela: **Lagrimas B. Beltran,  
Garnet Mae B. Menor**

FTSD: **Nelly U. Castro,  
Felisa R. Aurellano,  
Ma. Mercedes M. Ayco**

IRD Batac: **Imelda C. Parbo**

NTA Kadiwa: **Ricardo D.  
Casugay, Karlyn E. Dosono**

Central Office: **Mechille D. Riano,  
Eleanor A. Rapanut, Jianne M.  
Gabriel, Marissa J. Alvero**

**Consultants:**

**Branch Managers**

**Editorial Advisers:**

**Jun Fred V. Parado,  
Benedicto M. Savellano,  
Robert Victor G. Seares, Jr.**

## EDITORIAL

### Protecting the true assets of the agency

**I**N July last year, in his first anniversary message as NTA Administrator/CEO, Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. highlighted the contribution of the employees to the successes and breakthroughs of the agency in service to the tobacco growers and other stakeholders. It was a celebration during a pandemic. The agency, however, remains inspired by the strength and resilience on display in every unit, department and branch office, from the managers to the office staff and field workers despite the series of lockdowns.

When Administrator Seares said that it's about time we think highly of our employees, he means to focus agency efforts on two fronts.

First, safety of all of us is paramount. The Administrator knows that people only make positive contributions if they stay healthy, satisfied and driven to deliver assistance, while they avoid spreading the virus.

To ramp up agency efforts against COVID-19, he facilitated the distribution of free face masks, face shields and vitamin C tablets sourced from donations. He keeps on reminding the employees to follow health protocols for everyone's protection, including their families, and advising them against downplaying the effect of infection.

Second, fulfilling our mandate is the key to the continuity of our business. The agency must save the frontline employees, especially the extension workers and staff from the Operations, including the support group, to accomplish their tasks even under these challenging circumstances. Doing so is not only our duty; it is also a part of public service, helping the food sufficiency program of the government and end poverty through the agriculture sector.

Amidst challenges, and with continued perseverance and dedication, the NTA employees continue their duty to our stakeholders, while working from their homes, or at their respective work stations.

The biggest challenge came in the second week of March when there was an unprecedented spike of COVID cases due to the latest strain of the virus which is more contagious and has spread throughout the communities. When some employees were confirmed positive of COVID-19, the Administrator immediately implemented a total lockdown and worksite suspension at the Central Office, including Branch Offices with known positive cases, to prevent the further spread of the virus and facilitate a speedy and accurate contact tracing measures.

It was very unfortunate that Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan succumbed to the infection at the hospital, along with three others, while some remained under isolation or strict home quarantine.

The Administrator has been monitoring, in coordination with the Administrative Department, and our resident medical officer, Dr. Joseph Elizalde, infected employees and their families who are confined in hospitals or in home quarantine. He communicates via group chats, especially detailing action plans for the Top Management to control the situation.

The way Administrator Seares is giving the extra effort and going the extra mile to help the employees is a source of inspiration for all of us.

We are convinced that with a leader who inspires us with courage and caring heart, we will overcome this difficult situation, with the employees making a huge difference to attain our dream of a sustainable industry for the benefit of all tobacco growers and their community. ■

# Tobacco industry maintains quality service to stakeholders amidst challenges

**ROBERT VICTOR G. SEARES JR.**  
*Administrator/CEO*



Photo: Leonardo Escobar/NTA Candon

**T**HE year 2020 saw another round of rate increases in January for tobacco excise tax and new taxes for heated tobacco and vapor products with the enactment of Republic Act No. 11346, also known as the Tobacco Tax Law, posing another challenge for the industry already beset with aggressive global campaign against tobacco and smoking and global competition. The COVID-19 pandemic, which started in the first quarter, however, posed the greatest challenge for the agency.

The year also marked the transition of leadership after the untimely demise of then Administrator Dr. Robert L. Seares during the early government lockdown in March. The new Administrator and CEO, Mr. Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., was appointed by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte in June 2020 under a very unusual or unprecedented condition, succeeding his father, the late Administrator Dr. Seares. The new Administrator was faced with a daunting task to lead the agency amidst uncertainties brought about by the pandemic.

NTA senior officials rose to the occasion and helped the new leadership in carrying out the implementation of ongoing programs and projects, despite strict health and safety protocols resulting in the adoption of skeleton workforce, irregular work schedules, and restrictions in travel and gathering.

Amidst these challenges, NTA has continued to be aggressive in its performance to fulfill its twin mandate, to improve the lives of the tobacco farmers and other stakeholders, and to promote the balanced and integrated growth and development of the tobacco industry.

The Agency's accomplishments focused on priority programs, projects, and activities geared towards responding to the call of the Department of Agriculture for "Masaganang Ani at Mataas na Kita," particularly on increased productivity and income of farmers through provision of production assistance for quality production, as well as responding to the needs of the tobacco farmers and stakeholders during the pandemic.



**“Amidst these challenges, NTA has continued to be aggressive in its performance to fulfill its twin mandate, to improve the lives of the tobacco farmers and other stakeholders, and to promote the balanced and integrated growth and development of the tobacco industry...”**

## **Accomplishments 2020**

### **Immediate Aid to Farmers**

NTA's most important mission during the lockdown was to contribute to government efforts to give financial aid to our farmers affected by the lockdowns.

In compliance with the Secretary of Agriculture's directive to all Bureaus, Attached Agencies, Regional Field Offices and Banner Program Directors to refocus/realign the FY 2020 budget to enhance food productivity, supply availability, and price stability amid COVID-19, the NTA has implemented the following:

1. **Emergency Cash Assistance.** NTA was one of the first government agencies that came to the aid of the farmers during the early part of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). A total of 6,426 farmers under the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) for crop year 2019-2020 received the P13 million Emergency Cash Assistance (ECA), at P2,000 per farmer, in tobacco-growing municipalities in Region 1 and Abra. Our NTA personnel in the Branch Offices, in coordination with our partner local government units, worked on the front line to deliver the cash assistance to the farmers.

2. **Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay.** In support of the “Plant, Plant, Plant” program of the Department of Agriculture, NTA allocated P10.98 million for the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay (GMB) project, providing a total of 26,579 Sasso chicks and 6,112 packs of assorted vegetable seeds. Our farmer-cooperators were able to harvest within the year their vegetables and poultry for family consumption, while those who harvested more were able to sell them for additional income.

3. **Vegetable Seeds Distribution.** To supplement the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay project, the agency also distributed 19,922 seed packs (5 kinds of vegetable seeds per pack) to 8,321 tobacco recipients under the Vegetable Seeds Distribution project. The project covered not only contract growers under the NTA-financing scheme, but also registered contract growers of the buying firms or local government units. Our partners, the Bureau of Plant Industry and seeds providers from the private sector, helped us in sourcing our seeds supply.

### **Livelihood for Additional Farmers' Income**

NTA also took another step towards increasing income of farmers through its Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project (BCPAP). For the initiative, the agency allocated P10 million from the Tobacco Farmers Production Assistance or Investment Outlay for 2020, under its Integrated Farming and Other Income Generating Activities Project (IFOIGAP). The project provides 250 tobacco farmers, from assigned allocations of the different Branch Offices, with one ready-to-breed upgraded Brahman heifer.

With the positive response from our beneficiaries, and as most tobacco areas are still under the General Community Quarantine, NTA has proposed additional budget to expand the coverage of the Beef Cattle Production and Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay, including new livelihood programs such as Chicken Layer Assistance and Goat Production.

### **Unhampered Tobacco Trading**

NTA implemented beginning crop year 2019-2020 new floor prices, higher than the prices of all tobacco types for the last two cropping seasons. Despite the total lockdown in Luzon in early March, trading operations in Ilocos proceeded, thanks to the approval by the Department of Agriculture of the request of the agency, and in coordination with the local government units, for the unhampered delivery of tobacco, and movement of NTA staff and trading personnel in their respective areas. Major tobacco buying firms, per earlier commitment, bought all the tobacco leaves of farmers in Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley Region, and Abra.

Although the trading season was marked by the difficult situation brought about by the government lockdowns, the abovementioned factors contributed to higher tobacco production and a strong recovery of earnings among our contract growers.



The 2019-2020 harvest was better than the previous crop year. Volume of tobacco production/acceptances for all tobacco types (Virginia, Burley and Native) increased by 5.58%, from 46.6 M kilos valued at P3.92-B in 2019 to 49.2 M kilos, valued at P4.27 billion in 2020.

### **Charting the Course of the Industry in Next 5 Years**

NTA has made significant strides to make the agency responsive to the needs of its stakeholders in line with its commitment for a sustainable industry. In consultation with various stakeholders, the agency formulated the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP), the five-year industry roadmap, aimed at developing the Philippine tobacco sector through the use of all available resources to accelerate the modernization and industrialization of the tobacco industry, and to increase production and farmers' income.

With some enhancements to be done, the roadmap/plan was approved by the NTA Governing Board on December 16, 2020.

The Branch Offices have already established Block Farms in their respective coverage area, or a total of eight model block farms with an aggregate area of 438.35 hectares and an average of 54.8 hectares per Branch area, involving 636 farmer-cooperators.

The Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD) in Batac City has already undertaken the inventory of tobacco-based cooperatives that will serve as conduits of assistance of the proposed block farms. The FTSD personnel have also updated the Tobacco Farmers Registry and, through the Farmers' Organization Development coordinators in the branch offices, enrolled the tobacco farmers in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA), as it is being required by the Department of Agriculture for social amelioration purposes of the government.

Various components of the block farm, such as tobacco and rice production, livelihood, and farm mechanization, have been included in the plan and budget for each block farm, now ongoing finalization for approval by the NTA Board.

### **Increasing Production Assistance**

NTA continues promoting a market-oriented approach in tobacco production through the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS). This includes the adoption of a contract-growing scheme to enhance participation of the private sector in production technology transfer, production assistance, and leaf marketing.

The number of registered farmers who actually planted tobacco increased by 39%, or from 29,830 in 2018-19 tobacco season to 41,516 in 2019-2020. Tobacco farm area (in hectares) however decreased by 7%, or from 29,839 to 27,764.56 in the same period.

For crop year 2020-2021, commencing in the last quarter of this year, a total of 4,830 tobacco farmers covering 3,357 hectares were provided production assistance worth P186.34 under the NTA Financing, while 2,049 tobacco farmers covering 1,399 hectares were NTA-LGU funded, where LGUs provided the production inputs such as fertilizers and insecticides.

For the Rice Production Project, an integral component of the Integrated Farming and Other Income Generating Activities Project (IFOIGAP), NTA assisted 3,361 farmer-cooperators with an area of 2,820 hectares in Regions 1, 2 and CAR. Farmer-cooperators are granted production/credit assistance amounting to P48.5 million with a 40% subsidy.

For the Improved Tobacco Seedling Production project, NTA targeted 19.6 million seedlings to be distributed free to tobacco farmers. To produce the seedlings, farmer-cooperators were provided with technical assistance, inputs and implements worth P17.2 million. The seedlings will be bought back by the agency at P0.30 per seedling as an additional income to the seedling growers.

### **Farm Modernization**

One of the Agency's flagship programs to modernize the conduct of field activities on tobacco production is the Tobacco Farm Mechanization Program (TFMP). This includes the application of new technologies and using farm machineries and equipment to increase the farmer's efficiencies of labor utilization and reduce the cost of production.

For 2020, NTA allotted P27.92 million for the distribution of four-wheel tractors to 26 farmers' cooperatives and associations in tobacco-growing provinces. The tractors are expected to service a total of 1,517 hectares. The initial fund for the program was sourced from the Corporate Fund and it was proposed that future funding will be sourced from the Tobacco Fund (RA 4155).

NTA also addresses the tobacco farmers' need for new flue-curing barns and air-curing sheds through the Curing Barn Assistance Project (CBAP), with a P100 million budget, which have been provided under Tier 1 by the Department of Budget and Management. The farmers availed of the assistance to construct new barns or replace old/damaged ones that have

been destroyed by calamities that hit the region in the recent years. To date, 1,002 farmers availed of the assistance for flue curing barn construction/repair amounting to P29.9 million while 2,529 farmers benefitted from curing shed construction/repair worth P61.4 million.

The installation of the solar-powered irrigation system (SPIS) is included in the farm mechanization component of the Block Farms, which is expected to be implemented in the upcoming cropping season. NTA is set to establish eight more SPIS in eight tobacco-growing areas, or one for each Tobacco Block Farm.

As of May 2020, the agency has completed the installation of the last of the nine SPIS, which started in 2018, in various tobacco-growing areas in Northern Luzon.

To fine-tune the implementation of the SPIS, the Operations Group conducted in October the technical capability training for all 31 registered Agricultural and Biosystems Engineers of the agency.

With the training, the Branch Office project implementers can now determine, with the help of our engineers, the baseline information needed in the site and other relevant information such as rainfall and wind velocity, for a resilient and effective system during operation.

### **Online Transaction via TradeNet**

The NTA Governing Board approved on October 13 the guidelines and procedure for the mandatory online transactions in its regulatory functions. Mandatory online transactions include application, processing and issuance of license to import, export and transship tobacco leaf, tobacco products, heated tobacco products, other tobacco-related supplies, materials and spare parts, and application, processing and issuance of import/export/transshipment commodity clearances. Said guidelines and procedure are requirements for the integration of the regulatory processes into a fully online and interoperable platform with other trade regulatory government agencies (TRGAs) with TradeNet, the Philippine government's online trading facilitation portal.

Aside from streamlining agency processes in compliance with the requirements of Ease in Doing Business and Efficient Government Services Delivery Act of 2018, NTA has adopted no-contact policy to protect the health of our clients and employees in compliance with the government directive for stringent social distancing and community quarantine measures to contain the spread of COVID 19.

By the start of the tobacco trading, the agency issued licenses to 36 trading centers, Permit and Authority to Purchase to 14 wholesale tobacco dealers, and Permit and Authority to Redry to three redrying plants, 39 Licenses/Authority to Export, 63 Licenses/Authority to Import, 13 Authority to Transship leaf tobacco and tobacco products, and 25 Accreditations to Manufacturers.

NTA also signed, along with 29 other government bodies, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for inter-agency cooperation initiated by the Bureau of Customs (BOC) to strengthen border control capabilities of the government with the NTA to render consultation, coordination and cooperation with the BOC in trade facilitation, prevention of smuggling and provision of support mechanism on border control.

### **Commitment to Highest Level of Service to Customers**

The NTA got recommendation for the continuation of its ISO 9001:2015 QMS certification as a result of the 1st surveillance audit on July 27. The audit was conducted by the international certification body Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS) on virtual platform using Microsoft Teams.

With the continuation of certification, the agency is again recognized by the standard-setting body for its commitment to providing customers with the highest level of products and services within the organization's policy and objectives.

### **Strengthening Manpower Capability**

NTA recognizes that people are key to every success, and that the agency's employees are its greatest asset. The agency retained all Job Orders in recognition of their vast experience working for the agency and to give them equal opportunities, along with the regular staff, to boost their morale in spite of the pandemic. Before the year ended, 11 of these hardworking JOs were given original appointments, along with 14 of our staff who were promoted in various positions.

NTA conducted in November an orientation on the selection and promotion process and policies on appointments, with a resource person from the Civil Service Commission. Since then the agency has accelerated the filling-up of vacant plantilla positions, starting with the publication of 29 vacancies, to enhance manpower capability of the agency for its upcoming projects under the STEP, and to boost employment in government.



**We will continue our collective efforts to improve the economic lives of our farmers, and the rest of the stakeholders under the “new normal” and for the sustainability of the industry.**

## Looking Forward to 2021

The ongoing pandemic and effects of recent calamities on tobacco farms give the Agency more resolve to assist the tobacco growers. They are essential to our economy, the backbone of the industry, and they should be given the support that they deserve.

### Full Implementation of STEP

NTA has high hopes of a more sustainable tobacco industry with the initial implementation of the five-year development plan. It will fully adopt the Block Farming Approach with at least 25 hectares per block farm for a total of about 27,700 hectares of tobacco-rice farm involving about 41,500 farmers in the next five years.

NTA will request P7-billion annually from the Tobacco Fund and corporate resources to fund various projects and programs under the five-year roadmap, including specific programs, projects and activities needed to implement the various components of the Block Farms. The ultimate aim is to double the income of farmers and revert to the 80 million kilos annual production of tobacco by 2025.

### More Livelihood Projects

As the Agency rolls out block farming for tobacco production next cropping season, the Operations Group are proposing priority projects worth P597 million for 2021.

These include new livelihood programs such as Chicken Layer Assistance and Goat Production, with P24.8 million combined budget, and the expanded coverage of the Beef Cattle Production, or additional 500 heads of ready-to-breed Brahman heifer, and Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay, with P31.2 million combined budget. The last two projects were introduced last year with P20 million budget in support of the food sufficiency program of the Department of Agriculture and part of the intervention to support the farmers during the pandemic.

The agri-industrial business corridors by the DA will be actively pursued through the Block Farm Model Approach. NTA proposed additional funds to expand the coverage of the NTA Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita in Narvacan and for the sustainability of the hog-fattening project to benefit more farmer-cooperators and contribute to the food sufficiency program of the government.

### Farm Mechanization and Modernization

NTA has allotted P51.5 million for the purchase of 28 four-wheel tractors in various HPs and 16 power tillers to various farmers' association and cooperatives.

As infrastructure investments, it has proposed P10 million for the Solar-Powered Irrigation System.

While it continues funding post-harvest facilities for improved quality tobacco with our Curing Barn Assistance Project, NTA will conduct research on the solar-powered curing barn in two selected sites in tobacco areas.

### More Programs for Sustainability

NTA will also work on the establishment of Digital Agriculture for our various activities in soil and water quality monitoring in selected municipalities, continuous updates on the Tobacco Farmers Registry, development of Facility Maps of the Agency, and human resource information.

NTA will continue our efforts for climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, with our Renewable Fuelwood Development program and the provision of technical expertise and facilities through our Pest Clinic and Quick Response System.

The agency will continue to develop and promote global trade and exports by additional funding for our Agricultural Research, particularly in Tobacco Production Management to increase yield and decrease the cost of production. This will include enhanced tobacco seed production, distribution of hybrid seeds, tobacco cultural management, crop protection, and protocol research on fertilizers and pesticides.

With our state-of-the-art equipment under the Industrial Research Department, NTA will continue to test tobacco leaves and tobacco products to protect consumers against the hazardous substances of the cigarettes.

I HAVE full confidence in my co-workers at the NTA, together with our various stakeholders and partners, that we will move forward in our mandates to serve the farmers despite the challenges. We will continue our collective efforts to improve the economic lives of our farmers, and the rest of the stakeholders under the "new normal" and for the sustainability of the industry.

We are known to be a resilient agency, and so I have a firm belief that we will get through these tough times. -oOo-



# P597-M proposed for priority projects

by **Melanie Rapiz-Parel**

NTA has proposed priority projects worth P597-million for 2021 as it rolls out block farming for tobacco production next cropping season.

The performance and fiscal targets for the priority projects were presented during the virtual meeting of Operations Group presided by Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan on January 6.

These include new livelihood programs such as Chicken Layer Assistance and Goat Production, with P24.8-million combined budget, and the expanded coverage of the Beef Cattle Production and Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay Project, with P31.2-million budget. The last two projects were introduced last year with P20-million budget in support of the food sufficiency program of the Department of Agriculture and part of the intervention to support the farmers

during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Bonoan, the coverage expansion of the livelihood programs was upon the directive of Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., in response to the request of farmers to include more beneficiaries, which will be clustered for a package of production assistance under the tobacco block farm program.

Tobacco Block Farming is a new model of tobacco production introduced under the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP), the five-year development roadmap of the industry, to increase farmers' income and productivity.

This is on top of the regular projects such as the expanded Tobacco Contract Growing System, rice production, curing barn assistance, improved tobacco seedling production, solar-powered irrigation system, and tobacco farm

mechanization program, worth P520.45 million in all, with request for alignment of additional budget from the Tobacco Fund. Last year, the agency had P345.19-million budget for the same projects.

Other projects, such as the hog fattening program under the NTA Kadiwa, vegetable seeds distribution, solar-powered irrigation system, and Kahuyang Pangkabuhayan at Pangkalikasan (KPP), are financed by the Corporate Funds.

According to Bonoan, the agency has started the pilot of tobacco block farming in the Branch Offices, or eight model farms in tobacco-growing provinces.

"Full implementation of the block farming will start in July in time for the Rice Wet Season to ensure the success of the agribusiness scheme and the extent of its importance to the tobacco growers," said Bonoan. ■



## Potential expansion area, block farming in Sugpon, I. Sur

Sugpon Mayor Daniel C. Laño Jr. (4th from right) gives NTA Candon a tour to a potential production area in Barangay Balbalayang. (John James Canosa)

SUGPON, Ilocos Sur Mayor Daniel C. Laño Jr. took NTA Candon Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana and other senior staff on a tour to a potential area for expansion of tobacco production under the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS), including the proposed Block Farm area in Barangay Balbalayang.

The tour, held on February 24, included visitation of the beneficiaries of the TCGS and the Curing Barn Assistance Program and possible construction of small water impounding project. This was preceded by the presentation of Manager Sambrana to the local executive of the flagship programs included in the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP), and possible counterpart programs of the local government that benefit local tobacco growers.

According to Sambrana, the site in Balbalayang is

conducive production area considering the availability of abundant water supply and high elevation which are factors for quality tobacco production.

Sugpon, a 5th class upland municipality in southern Ilocos Sur, has 13.45 hectares of tobacco farm tilled by 28 registered tobacco growers in the current tobacco season.

With Sambrana during the tour were acting Chief Agriculturist Adonis D. Lazo, Acting Supervising TPRO Amelia Veronica L. Lacaden, Acting Area Supervisor Oliva C. Galdones, and Team Leader Reynaldo L. Padillon.

The NTA Candon has also visited last week local executives of Sta. Maria, Narvacan, Nagbukel and Burgos in the second district of Ilocos Sur, the branch coverage area, for the discussion on Block Farming and other key strategies under the STEP to increase production and farmers' income. ■





Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar (in blue cap) at a tobacco farm in Brgy. Silag, Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur. (inset) The Secretary led the distribution of facility and financial aid to tobacco growers in Ilocos Sur in his earlier visit to NTA Candon in December. (Marcelino C. Ancheta)

## Secretary Dar personally visits tobacco farm

by Resty C. Cambe

AGRICULTURE Secretary William D. Dar visited on January 16 the Tobacco Block Farm model in Barangay Silag in Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur to see firsthand the implementation of farm clustering in tobacco production and various projects under the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP).

The Secretary saw the grown tobacco under the Tobacco Contract Growing System and had a tour with NTA Candon Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana in the farm area to see the implementation of the livelihood programs of the pilot farm, such as the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay, Beef Cattle Production Project, Improved Tobacco Seedling Production, and Curing Barn Assistance Project.

The Secretary also had an opportunity to engage the local tobacco growers in a brief dialog.

With the Secretary during the visit were Asst. Secretary for Strategic Communications Noel Reyes, DA Regional Director Nestor Domenden, Sta. Maria Mayor Brigido Camarillo, and other local officials.

The Tobacco Block Farm model in

Sta. Maria, one of the eight pilot/model Block Farms in major tobacco areas in the country, had an aggregate area of 58.5 hectares involving 60 farmers from the adjacent barangays of Silag, Ag-agrao, and Pacang.

The NTA has tapped tobacco growers who are willing to be organized into farm clusters for more efficient farming activities and undertake the integrated development of the area.

Before the farm visit, the Secretary led the ceremonial distribution of facility and financial assistance to 30 tobacco growers from the second district of Ilocos Sur, held at the NTA Candon Branch Office in Candon City on December 28.

The Secretary handed out eight power-tillers to qualified cooperatives under the Farm Mechanization Program, cash assistance to beneficiaries of the Curing Barn Assistance Project, and farm inputs to the beneficiaries of the Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project.

Also present in the distribution were Director Domenden, Candon City Mayor Ericson G. Singson, Mayor Camarillo, and NTA Governing Board Member Teofilo R. Quintal.

According to Sambrana, the Branch Office has 309 beneficiaries for the curing barn assistance and 50 beneficiaries for the cattle production assistance.

In his message, Secretary Dar announced that in addition to the farm mechanization, financial and facility assistance and other projects included in the STEP, other projects and programs may be included and approved for funding during the initial year of its implementation in 2021. Among the projects he mentioned were solar barns for tobacco curing and construction of rainwater basin.

He also took note of the request of Cesario Gapatan, president of the local chapter of the National Federation of Tobacco Growers Association and Cooperatives, to expand the coverage of the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay and Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project, to benefit more farmers.

“These are reasonable enough for approval and funding,” he said as he called for the full utilization of the Tobacco Fund to finance livelihood assistance and projects covered by the STEP. ■

# NTA Kadiwa tapped to help ease pork shortage in Metro

THE NTA Governing Board on January 19 approved an additional P10 million budget for its Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita to maximize its slaughtering and meat processing capacity to augment pork supply in the market.

Agriculture Secretary and NTA Board Chairman William D. Dar in his recent visit to the slaughtering and meat processing facility in Narvacan, Ilocos Sur, directed the agency to expand the product coverage of the NTA Kadiwa to the National Capital Region to meet the high demand and help stabilize price.

Prices of pork in Metro Manila markets had gone up from 380 to 400 pesos per kilo as many hog raisers had gone bankrupt last year because of the pandemic that resulted in a minimal source of hogs.

According to NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., the NTA will assist the government, through the Department of Agriculture, to stop the continuous rise of prices of pork in NCR markets.

The P10-million budget represents the initial budgetary requirement to purchase live hogs from the Ilocos provinces and Abra.

“The hogs will be sourced from ASF protected zones to ensure safety of the consuming public,” Administrator Seares said.

He added that the hogs will be slaughtered at the NTA Kadiwa and the meat will be delivered to the NCR through the Kadiwa Food Terminals of the Department of Agriculture, at an average volume of 5,000 metric tons per day.

The project will be a collaboration between the NTA Kadiwa, the DA Central Office through the Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service/Division with the Food Terminal, Inc.

The NTA Kadiwa, an NMIS “AA” accredited facility, had a maximum capacity to slaughter 80 hogs and fabricate 6 tons of pork per day.

“The initial target for slaughtering will be 520 live hogs or 52,000 kilos live weight from second week of February to first week of March,” added Administrator Seares.

Kadiwa is a market system initiated by the DA to trade agricultural goods at a reasonable low price to the end users. This is a direct link between the farmers/fisherfolks to the consuming public.

NTA Kadiwa is a major component of the agency’s intervention program that seeks to provide tobacco farmers with additional sources of income outside their regular trade.

The agency is currently implementing under the NTA Kadiwa program a hog fattening project, poultry dressing, and the TESDA-accredited Training School for Slaughtering. ■



**License to Operate.** NTA Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita acting Project Manager Felicisimo T. Lazo received the License to Operate (LTO) Slaughtering/Fabrication of Hogs for Domestic Trade from the National Meat Inspection Service through Dr. Domingo Bartolome Gonzaga, Supervising Meat Control Officer of NMIS Region 1, on February 10. (Karlyn Dosono)



## KADIWA ON WHEELS

Napindan Covered Court  
Brgy. Napindan, Taguig City



## NTA joins Kadiwa on Wheels in Taguig City

THE NTA Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita delivered 507.5 kilos of choice cut pork meat to the Department of Agriculture’s Kadiwa on Wheels in Napindan Covered Court, Brgy. Napindan, Taguig City on February 5.

According to NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., the delivery of pork meat from the NTA slaughtering and meat processing facility in Narvacan, Ilocos Sur, is in support of the government efforts through the DA to augment pork supply in the National Capital Region.

NTA coordinated with the DA Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service (DA-AMAS) for the retail selling of quality pork meat from the hog-raisers who are mostly farmers. Fish and vegetables direct from farmers were also sold at the Kadiwa on Wheels.

Baby ribs, lean meat, pork belly, and pork chop cuts from NTA Kadiwa were sold at P290 per kilo and mix bones and pata slice for P270.

NTA Kadiwa purchases live hogs from ASF-free areas in Ilocos provinces and Abra to ensure safety of the consuming public. (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)

# Region 2 branch offices hold seminar on tobacco production, block farm tour



NTA Cagayan Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda tours participants to the Model Block Farm in Brgy. Masical in Baggao. (Joven Erico E. Reyes)

THE NTA Branch Offices in Isabela and Cagayan conducted a joint orientation seminar on Improved Burley and Cigar Filler Tobacco Production for their Operations Staff, held on February 16-17 at the Organic Building of the Department of Agriculture in Tuguegarao City.

Participants were directed on the second day to the model Block Farm in Barangay Masical in Baggao, Cagayan for an onsite observation on the application of the production technology (seed variety, fertilizer application, irrigation, pests and diseases control).

NTA Cagayan Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda said that the seminar provided the staff updates on the Package of Technology on tobacco production.

“We have to fully equip them with

the proper technologies in helping the tobacco farmers increase their yield, improved the quality of tobacco, thus increasing their income,” said Riazonda, who is also the designated Branch Manager of NTA Isabela in concurrent capacity.

Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, in a videocall, stressed on the implementation of the Block Farming for tobacco cooperatives or associations as the flagship project of the agency for the next five years. Two model Block Farms have been set up in Cagayan, one in Baggao and the other in Tuao.

According to Bonoan, these block farms are demonstration farms that showcase the technology on integrated farming approach.

Rosie G. Aquino, DA Regional Technical Director of Research and

Regulation, commended NTA Cagayan and Isabela for giving their staff opportunity to learn updates on tobacco technology. Adela Teneza, ULPI Director for Agronomy, gave a lecture on the Sustainable Tobacco Program.

All Operations Staff, 11 from NTA Cagayan and 14 from NTA Isabela, joined the field tour facilitated by Manager Riazonda, assisted by Chief Agriculturists Gilbert A. Taguiam (Cagayan) and Joefrey T. Bautista (Isabela). Fernando Andres of the NTA Farm Technology and Services Department, and two agronomists from ULPI, Paul Lucero and Jay Andres, also joined the field tour, highlighted by discussion on the various field activities in the block farm in the presence of the tobacco growers. ■

## Integrated Farming in Cagayan Block Farm

TOBACCO grower Pablito Batara improves productivity by integrating vegetable farming in tobacco production in his farm in Masical, Baggao, Cagayan. According to NTA Cagayan Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda, Batara was a beneficiary of the NTA Vegetable Seeds Distribution project last year, and one of the 52 tobacco-corn farmers who comprise the Block Farm in Masical, one of the two block farm sites in Cagayan.

Riazonda and her staff visited Batara's 200-square-meter lot planted to eggplant, corn, mustard, string beans, onions, tomato, and pechay, during the monitoring of newly transplanted tobacco under the Block Farming Project of NTA Cagayan on February 8.

With the Block Farm Project under the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program, NTA is promoting integrated farming system through vegetable production, legume and corn production, and planting fruit-bearing trees. If the integrated/diversified area is multiplied in a Block Farm, especially complemented with marketing opportunities, it translates into a higher income for the farmers. ■ (Glynee P. Marcelo)





## Administrator Seares meets Pangasinan farmers in first official travel

*Farm visit and dialogue with farmers in Villasis*

**I**N COMPLIANCE with a Special Order, I joined acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan in his travel to Villasis, Pangasinan on January 29 for the Farmer's Visit, Farmers Dialogue, and Distribution of Tractors. We joined Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. in a separate vehicle, with Executive Assistant Alona A. Manganaan and other staff from the Office of the Administrator in another vehicle.

The focus of the farm visit was to meet tobacco growers whose tobacco farms were affected by the recent flooding in the province and discuss on short and long-term assistance.

Since day one in office, Administrator Seares has been wanting to meet farmers and other stakeholders personally for a face-to-face dialog and consultation. He assumed office at the middle of the year, and due to travel restrictions due to the pandemic, he interacted with the branch managers, particularly from the Operations Group, department managers, and traders and manufacturers from one virtual meeting to another.

Dr. Bonoan arranged the first official travel of the Administrator to Pangasinan, the nearest branch office from the Central Office in Quezon City, with all the safety and health protocol, and appropriate travel and quarantine passes, in coordination with NTA Pangasinan Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### Farm Visit in Amamperez, Villasis, Pangasinan

Administrator Seares, along with Dr. Bonoan, Manager Sambrana and senior officers of NTA Pangasinan, left the Villasis office just after a 30-minute respite, including breakfast and brief meet and greet with the employees. Technical Staff from Leads Agri Products joined us in the convoy.

We proceeded to Barangay Amamperez and met some 40 farmers who are members of the Amamperez Tobacco, Corn and Vegetables Farmers Association headed by their president Jessie Raymundo.

Raymundo said some portion of his Native tobacco farm was flooded, causing wilting of the tobacco plants.

"The affected plants can no longer be recovered, which means less production and less income," he said in Ilokano,

"it was an act of Nature, so we have to accept it and have to find ways to make up with our loss."

Administrator Seares assured of NTA support to those whose farms were affected by the recent freak rain in Pangasinan and nearby provinces on January 22-24. This may be in the form of cash assistance, but subject to the approval of the NTA Governing board per damage assessment report by the Branch Office, or livelihood assistance such as cattle raising or Gulayan at Manukan Project.

He added that the affected farmers could also avail of the restructuring of their production assistance for tobacco.

According to Manager Sambrana, the damaged crops cannot be considered for crop insurance as there was no typhoon signal, which is required for the claims per existing policy.

Deputy Administrator Bonoan said that farmers cannot sow seeds again, and replanting may be done using buffer seedlings available, but this time may be very late to grow tobacco.



*Distribution of tractors at the NTA extension office in Rosales*



*Farmers' Dialogue in Brgy. Macayo, Alcala*



*Plant visit at the tobacco processing facility in Brgy. Gualsic, Alcala*

He added that some crops submerged by the flood can be saved by foliar biostimulants, as tested by NTA Ilocos Norte in some damaged farms in Ilocos Norte. Technical Staff from Leads Agri gave the farmers bottles of foliar for testing in their damaged crops.

### **Farmers' Dialogue in Macayo, Alcala**

Administrator Seares and party met some 50 farmer members of the Tobacco Block Farm in Alcala in a brief dialogue held at the barangay plaza.

The Administrator discussed the benefits of Tobacco Block Farming, as the key strategy for increased production and farmers' income under the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP). Distribution of production, facility and livelihood assistance from the agency will be facilitated through cooperatives and associations comprising the tobacco block farms. He also reminded the farmers to monitor movements of tobacco during the trading season, particularly on checking the requirements of Certificate of Purchase for buyers of tobacco in the locality, to protect production data which will be the basis in the computation of tobacco excise tax shares of the local government unit.

### **Visit at Mascadas processing facility in Gualsic, Alcala**

On our way to Rosales, Administrator Seares and party visited the processing facility of locally produced chewing tobacco "Mascadas" in Brgy. Gualsic in Alcala. Brgy. Chairman and field canvasser Jomar Callejo gave us a tour at the processing facility. According to Manager Sambrana, the facility is expected to buy the Native Batek production of the Tobacco Block Farm in Alcala as value-adding activity for the farmer members.

### **Farmers' Meeting and Distribution of Tractors in Carmay East, Rosales**

Administrator Seares and party proceeded to NTA Pangasinan Area Office in Carmay East in Rosales for the farmers' dialogue and ceremonial distribution of tractors. Also present in the meeting were Pangasinan 6th District Rep. and Deputy Speaker Conrado Estrella III, Rosales Vice Mayor Enrique Cosue, Balungao Vice Mayor Phillip Peralta, and NAFTAC Pangasinan President Saturnino Distor.

In his message, Deputy Speaker Estrella commended the NTA for its active support to the farmers. He reported on

his plan to import cattle for distribution to the farmers as part of the livelihood program of his district.

Administrator Seares reported to the Deputy Speaker that the NTA has the Beef Cattle Production that started last year for selected tobacco growers with the number of beneficiaries to be increased in the current cropping season. He also reported various projects of the agency such as the Solar-Powered Irrigation System project, the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay, Vegetable Seedling Distribution, and the Farm Mechanization Program.

He announced the approval by the NTA Governing Board of the STEP, the five-year industry development roadmap. The funds for programs and projects, especially in the various components of the Tobacco Block Farm, will be sourced from the Tobacco Fund under RA 4155, at P5-billion a year for the next five years. He asked Deputy Speaker Estrella, and other congressional and local leaders of the Northern Alliance for their endorsement in the proposal of the agency for the national government to allow the NTA to use the fund through automatic appropriations. This is to facilitate the funding of projects and programs for implementation under the STEP to benefit tobacco growers and their communities.

After the meeting, Administrator Seares joined Deputy Speaker Estrella and the local officials in the distribution of tractors, two 90-HP and four 52-HP Massey Ferguson, to the farmers cooperatives/associations through their farmer leaders.



Meeting with NTA Pangasinan staff

### NTA Pangasinan Staff Meeting with the Administrator

Manager Sambrana presided a brief meeting between the Administrator and the NTA Pangasinan staff. The Administrator commended the staff for their warm welcome to his party and in their active participation in the implementation of various programs and projects of the agency. Among those discussed in the open forum were the status of Job Order hires, recruitment and promotion, and travel allowances.

WE left Rosales at around 3 in the afternoon. It was a mission fully accomplished for the Administrator, but he knew it was only the beginning. Meetings with farmers in person had established open communication, and we felt a sense of togetherness and shared goal which somehow gave us the relief in spite of the pandemic.

Dr. Bonoan has said he will arrange for another provincial travel with the Administrator, but this, again, will depend on situations beyond provincial borders. ■

**C**ONSOLIDATION of small and medium-sized farms is one of the eight paradigms that Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar is building on to make farming more efficient, thus increasing farm productivity and income of farmers.

Block farming is just one of the strategies or approaches of farm consolidation, which includes farm-clustering, contiguous farming, trust farming, contract farming, and corporate farming.

A block farm is a composite area of several farm clusters, with close proximity, in a barangay or adjoining barangays in a municipality. A farm cluster, on the other hand, as defined in tobacco farming, is a contiguous or semi-contiguous area of not less than five hectares within a barangay.

When Secretary Dar directed the NTA Governing Board, to chart the course for the tobacco industry with a five-year development plan, the agency formulated this year the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP) with Block Farming, or farm clustering of cooperatives and associations, as main strategy.

With the block farming as a land consolidation model, the agency now veers away from a highly individualized farming activity to one that is organized farm clusters/cooperatives, and ultimately become a cooperative and partnership.

The plan to introduce block farming in tobacco production is also seen to complement the efforts of the agency to improve productivity through farm mechanization, and increasing income through value-adding activities and livelihood programs, improved agricultural infrastructures, capability training and agribusiness undertakings.

Block farming is expected to transform the traditional small-scale tobacco farmers to become part of a larger commercial agri-food supply-and-consumer chain/network, thru more efficient farm production activities.

This is also a means by which small farmers gain experience in managing bigger farms, thus making the farmers become more competitive and resilient, and strong enough to face challenges affecting the tobacco industry. One of these challenges is the powerful lobby



# An Introduction to Block Farming Project

## Fresh approach to increasing farm productivity and income

Photo: John James Canosa

against cigarette smoking, which affects production of raw materials.

Block farming also offers a model of technology development and financing for small tobacco growers. It also aims at targeting the youth and at improving agriculture and farming as a business. For its part, NTA will be providing financing for farm inputs, labor, and training.

### Components

Within the block farm are the component projects and programs, such as tobacco-rice production, marketing, and livelihood programs, with new projects such as the farm mechanization and agribusiness enterprise.

The interventions and projects will be implemented using the agency's core functions: Technology Assistance, Extension and Production Support Services, Research and Development, Regulatory Services, and Institutional Development.

For the livelihood component, for instance, NTA can now promote integrated farming system through vegetable production, legume and corn production (fodder production), and planting fruit-bearing trees. Block farm members will be provided financial and marketing assistance for the vegetable production. For the succeeding years, the block farms shall be self-financing but will still be assisted by NTA in the marketing aspect.

NTA will also provide tobacco growers and their families livelihood training on food processing for agri-fishery products such as rice, munggo corn, vegetables, fruits, fish, mussels, mushroom, and meat. The One-Town-One Product policy of the local government units shall be considered to ensure better access to

markets. Health and wellness, buying and selling agricultural inputs and products through the cooperatives and service provider of selected farm activities using available farm machineries are also considered in the Block Farm.

### Model Block Farms

For the initial implementation, a Model Block Farm will be set up in each of the eight Branch Offices. The Branch Offices will tap tobacco growers who are willing to be organized into farm clusters, and eventually will be composite of block farms, for more efficient farming and undertake the integrated development of an area.

The Branch Offices will revisit their existing farm clusters under the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) project to reposition existing farms or direct the location of new farms, so as to identify and set up future radiation areas for block farming, until all tobacco-farming communities shall be covered with the scheme.

They will consolidate coverage areas for economies of scale, and fast-track the delivery of production, extension and marketing services that support their farming activities such as accessing inputs and credit; providing technical assistance; introducing value-adding activities such as processing and storage; and business marketing of farm products. The net result will be the professionalization of the management system of the farmers' organization.

The block farm shall consist of 50 hectares and 75 farmers. The Production Assistance Component identifies the various crops/livestock/fisheries that are recommended in each block farm. Tobacco and rice production will be the

crops to be granted with 40% subsidy. The second component is the Capital Outlay consisting mostly for Farm Machineries, some of which will be availed of by the cooperatives/association who will meet the criteria set by the Agency under its Tobacco Farm Mechanization Project (TFMP). The capital outlay component varies depending upon the location and tobacco type planted.

### Strategy of Implementation

Upon finalization of the location of the model block farms, the Branch Offices will conduct a participatory rural appraisal in their respective coverage area. They will meet concerned "people on the ground," or the farmer-members, cooperative officials, barangay and local officials, among others. They shall also conduct survey/interview of the farmer-members, for their comprehensive profile.

The NTA shall likewise conduct consultations/meetings with collaborating agencies with regard to their roles in the implementation of the development interventions in the block farming agribusiness ventures.

AS a centerpiece program, tobacco block farming will continue to be enhanced and evolve over the coming years, as it goes through a process of trust building and synergistic collaboration among sectors for the achievement of the unified development as envisioned, for the ultimate benefit of all stakeholders, especially the improvement of the economic lives of tobacco-rice farmers.

-oOo-

**Source:** Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP): Five-year Development Industry Roadmap prepared by the Corporate Planning Department

# NTA mourns death of an ‘industry icon’

***Doc B .... are you reading this? This is so heartbreaking...!***

This comment and more from co-workers and friends of Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan flooded social media after his sudden death in the early morning of March 17 due to COVID-19 infection. He was 62.

Amidst posting and comments expressing sadness and disbelief are offerings of prayers and salutation and tributes.

Dr. Bonoan, who has been described as a “pillar” of the agency, an “industry icon,” and the “best DAOP” for his vast experience and knowledge in research and Branch Operations, contracted the virus a few days before, having a flu-like symptoms, while attending meetings either in virtual platform or in his office.

NTA Administrator Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. said he was “deeply saddened” by the death of Dr. Bonoan whom he described as his most worthy adviser since “my arrival in NTA.”

Dr. Bonoan was the officer-in-charge of the agency, in concurrent capacity as Deputy Administrator for Operations (DAOP), from March 16, 2020 until Administrator Seares assumed the position as NTA Administrator in June 2021.

Dr. Bonoan was appointed OIC of the Office of the DAOP in January 2021 and got his official appointment from Malacañang in February 17, and took his oath of office before Administrator Seares on February 22.



Photo: Jano P. Belleza



“...a truly great leader who has served the agency with distinction, integrity and excellence.”

Administrator Seares said that he was fully confident in Dr. Bonoan’s management capability having been an exceptional manager known for his unimpeachable character and vast knowledge of the tobacco industry, especially on research and technology development and Branch Operations. He had been with the tobacco industry for 42 years.

“*Maraming maraming salamat, Doc, for guiding me all throughout, your service and dedication is one of a kind. Thank you for being loyal to NTA until your last day. Tinawagan mo pa ako to inform me of your condition and the procedure that you will be undergoing... Nasa hospital bed ka na, gusto mo pang magpa-meeting, iba ka talaga, Doc,*” the Administrator said in a comment to an FB post honoring the late Deputy Administrator.

In a separate message, he prayed that Dr. Bonoan’s family may find solace knowing that he left behind an impeccable legacy of public service.

NTA Ilocos Norte OIC Luzviminda U. Padayao thanked Doc B, as he was fondly called by his co-workers at NTA, “for the unselfish mentoring and coaching moves you had given us. Thank you for greatly inspiring and motivating us to work and give our best service and to go on despite our age.”

Corporate Planning Department Manager Fortuna C. Benosa also described Doc B, a friend, mentor, and an inspiration to all. “Thanks for everything. We pray for your eternal repose.”

NTA Vigan Branch Manager Minerva P. Mizal shocked by the news of his death, said that it was the hardest blow to endure because “you suddenly left us and really, a piece of my heart is forever broken.”

“Suddenly, I began to realize, while in tears, *na tomorrow might not come! Now, I live by this new motto: today is what I have!... Doc, thank you for everything! Ikaw yung boss ko na nasasabi ko ang aking saloobin kasi you are very open and approachable,*” she said.

Since February, Mizal had been working closely with Dr. Bonoan, along with Benosa and the Branch Managers, in the finalization of the Implementing Guidelines for the Block Farming, as a key strategy for the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP).

“*Mahirap mag-good-bye sa taong nasasabi mo lahat ang gusto at ayaw mo sa kanya,* but our God loves us all, and we don’t know what He has in store for us. So long, Doc B...” commented Imelda N. Riñen, manager of Farm Technology and Services Department.

NTA Cagayan Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda

described Doc B, as a humble/committed leader, a friend and a brother. “We thank you for your goodness and for all the support....we will treasure all the memories and all the technical expertise that you have taught us. With our full salute to our newly appointed DAOP.”

NTA La Union Branch, in a tribute video posted in their FB page, said “we will most definitely yearn for your guidance and cheerful smile, Doc B. Your passing may mean that you’re no longer with us, physically but we believe that you will always be with us in spirit.”

NTA La Union Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay posted this in a comment: “Thanks, Doc B, for everything!.. I’ll just treasure the best of times and the challenges we met during our nearly four decades of being a servant leader/follower, since we started our gov’t career in the then PTRTC-Batac in the early 80’s! Rest in eternal peace, my dear friend.”

Barely a week before his death, Dr. Bonoan also took his oath office before Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar at his office at the DA Central Office in Visayas Ave., Quezon City.

For three months that he was the Acting Administrator last year, Dr. Bonoan directed very efficiently the operations of the agency amidst the series of lockdowns during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic. He initiated the implementation of various intervention programs for the tobacco growers, coordinated closely with the local government units during the trading operations, and spearheaded a series of consultation with various stakeholders for the STEP.

Few people came to the role with as much experience as Dr. Bonoan. For decades, he held the biggest department, the Industrial Research Department. He served in concurrent capacity as acting Deputy Administrator from 2007 to 2011, and Technical Coordinator for the Branch Offices for the next seven years.

He was honored with awards throughout his career in the NTA. He was a two-time Outstanding Employee of the Year awardee, a distinguished record of his work ethic, leadership and dedicated service to the agency and the tobacco industry.

NTA lost Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, a truly great leader who has served the agency with distinction, integrity and excellence. His passing is indeed a tragic loss to NTA and the tobacco industry.

Rest in peace, Doc B. (PR/OAD)



## Testimonials

### Tobacco Farm Mechanization Program

Tobacco grower **Jessie Raymundo** is the president of Amamperez Tobacco, Corn Vegetables Farmers Association, one of the beneficiary associations of the NTA Tobacco Farm Mechanization Program in Pangasinan. Raymundo and three other farmers personally received for their association the 90-HP Massey Ferguson from NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. during the ceremonial distribution of farm machineries last January 29 in Rosales, Pangasinan.

“Agyamankami iti NTA iti daytoy naipaay kadakami a traktora, nangnangruna ditoy lugarmi, kasapulanmi unay daytoy iti panagtalonmi. Sapay koma ta saankayo a maum-uma a tumultulong kadakami!”

- Neyo E. Valdez



### Tobacco Contract Growing System

For over 25 years, tobacco production has become one of the major sources of income for farmer **Leo Bermudez**, 59, and his wife **Mary Ann**, 49, of Barangay Macarcarmay in Bangued, Abra. Two of their children are college graduates, while the youngest is currently enrolled in BS Criminology at the Abra Valley Colleges. To earn bigger income for the family after rice farming during the wet season, Leo decided to plant tobacco as a cooperator of the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS). For good performance for the past cropping seasons, Leo has been qualified for production assistance in two other major projects of the agency: the Curing Barn Assistance Project and the Rice Production Wet Season.

“Dakkal ti maitultulong ti panagmula iti tabako kadakami ta isu ti maysa a pangal-alanmi iti pagbibigami, ken nakatulong iti panagbasa dagiti annakmi. Nasayaat ta adda latta dagiti production assistance nangruna iti subsidy nga ipapaay ti NTA kadagiti proyekto para iti pagimbagan dagiti mannalon.”

-- Marife P. Peralta



# “Go back to farming”

*a decision that changed his life and family*



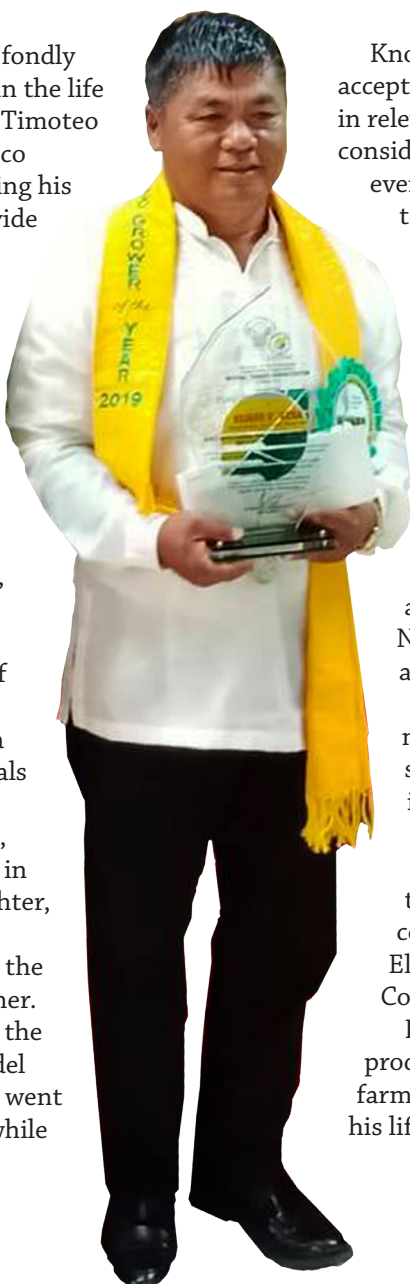
Tobacco Grower of the Year  
National Level, 2018

By Immanuel A. Rafanan

**E**LIGIO V. VEGA or “Ely,” as he is fondly called, recalled how he grew up in the life of farming, with his father, the late Timoteo T. Vega, one of the prominent tobacco farmers in San Juan, Ilocos Sur during his time. Ely’s parents managed to provide all the needs of the family and even sent Ely and his four siblings to Manila for their schooling, all thanks to tobacco farming. It was not surprising then that Ely would follow in his father’s path: till the soil and provide for the family.

During his teenage years, Ely would help on the field after school, but when he went to college, he focused more on his studies. Ely graduated at the De Ocampo Memorial College with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree in 1988. After his graduation, he worked as a nurse in various schools and hospitals and after three years, he decided to return to San Juan. He met his wife, Arlyn in 1993 and they got married in 1994, and were blessed with a daughter, Elaine, a year later.

Ely and Arlyn continued farming the land that Ely inherited from his father. With their hard work and diligence, the couple were both recognized as model farmers in their municipality. Arlyn went on to become a cooperative leader while Ely continued his work in the farm.



Known for their enterprising nature, their readiness to accept of innovation and their willingness to participate in relevant farm activities, the Vega couple are always considered by the NTA, the private tobacco companies, or even the local government units, whenever new farming technologies are introduced and tobacco production researches are conducted.

Ely adheres strictly to the recommended technologies and applies the best practices in tobacco farming. He works closely with his assisting extension worker Victor V. Valledor, Agriculturist I, of NTA Vigan Branch Office, for quality tobacco production.

His success in tobacco production did not go unnoticed by the NTA. He was awarded the Tobacco Grower of the Year – Provincial Level for Virginia Improved Flavor (VIF) Category in 2016, and eventually won the Tobacco Grower of the Year – National Level for the same category in 2018, besting all other VIF growers in the country.

When asked what he will do after he received the most prestigious award in tobacco production, Ely said that he “will return to tobacco farming, as there is no other crop as profitable as tobacco.”

On January 31, 2020, Ely received the Father Jose Burgos Special Awardee in Agriculture from the Provincial Government of Ilocos Sur during the celebration of the Kannawidan Festival in Ilocos Sur. Ely has also been serving his community as Barangay Councillor.

His two prestigious awards and success in tobacco production only prove that his decision to go back to farming 27 years ago is the best so far that he has made in his life. -oOo-

# NTA, LGUs renew cooperation for tobacco trading

NTA has expected full cooperation from the local government units for the delivery of cured tobacco to buying stations.

Before the February 15 official opening of tobacco trading season in the Ilocos Region, NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. has sent official communications to the governors of tobacco-growing provinces in the region, requesting free passage for tobacco growers to deliver their produce to the traders passing through or within their respective areas.

“We are aware that these provinces have established strict border checkpoints and health protocols in view of the Covid-19 pandemic, so we have to write our local leaders to give our farmers assistance during trading,” said Administrator Seares.

NTA also sent similar requests at the onset of the pandemic last year for the unhampered delivery of tobacco and movement of NTA staff and trading personnel in their respective areas, in coordination with the Department of Agriculture through the food lane conduct pass.

“Through proper coordination with our partners from the LGUs and the private sector, our contract growers were able to sell all their produce to their contracted leaf buyers last trading season despite the lockdown,” added Administrator Seares.

The volume of tobacco acceptances in buying stations for all tobacco types (Virginia, Burley and Native) reached 49.2 M kilos, a 5.58% increase from the 46.6 million kilos in the preceding trading year.

The Ilocos Region, the top tobacco-producing region in the country, accounts about 62% of the total acceptances from all buying stations in trading year 2020.

To strengthen enforcement and close monitoring of trading operations, the NTA Regulation Department has conducted the virtual orientation-seminar on the Revised Trading Rules and Regulations governing the trading of locally grown tobacco to NTA staff in charge of the trading, local leaf buyers, and buying station operators on March 3.

NTA Branch Offices in Region 1, where the buying stations



Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. joins the opening of the Virtual Orientation Seminar on the Approved Harmonized Grading System for Locally Grown Virginia Tobacco spearheaded by the NTA Industrial Research Department (IRD) on February 23. In his message, he enjoins the agriculturists, tobacco production and regulation officers, and researchers from the branch offices who are participating in the two-day online seminar to “make a difference in the service of the farmers” with their assistance in the proper application of grading and classification based on NTA standards during the trading operations. *(Melanie Rapiz-Parel)*

are located, have already received requests for the official opening from registered/licensed buying stations. Trading operations in Region 2 are expected to start in the first week of April.

The agency has set February 28 as the deadline for the filing of applications for license and authority to buy or permit and authority to purchase, among other requirements to buy tobacco leaf for trading year 2021. ■



**Calibration of weights.** NTA La Union headed by Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay calibrated weighing scales to ensure the accuracy of weighing and measuring instruments at the start of the trading operations in Continental Leaf (Conleaf) Buying Stations for Virginia, Burley and Native tobacco in Barangay Bulala, Bacnotan, La Union on March 10. According to Emma Beth B. Fantastico, Branch Chief Agriculturist, about 2,000 kilos of Virginia leaf were traded on the opening day.

The team from NTA La Union also calibrated buying stations before the trading operations at the Trans Manila Inc. (TMI) and Associated Anglo-American Tobacco Corp. on March 4, and Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. (ULPI) on March 8, all located in Sta. Rita, Agoo, and at the Agripina Estalilla Buying Station in Caba on March 10. *(Gerylle Vanmarie Palabay)*



Formal launching of the monitoring point in Ilocos Norte-Abra Boundary in Nueva Era (Kleng Domingo/MAO Nueva Era)

## Tobacco monitoring points set in Ilocos Norte

by Divina D. Pagdilao

### *RD holds virtual seminar on trading rules*

THE Regulation Department (RD) conducted the orientation and training seminar of the 2018 Revised Trading Rules and Regulations on Locally Grown Leaf Tobacco on March 3. This was held for the first time with the participants, licensed field canvassers and representatives from leaf buying stations in tobacco-growing provinces, joining via teleconferencing.

In a message, Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. stressed on the proper accomplishment of trading forms, such as the Purchase Invoice Voucher and Certificate of Purchase, to achieve the accuracy of tobacco deliveries sold by farmers, as this will serve as basis for the share of tobacco excise taxes for each beneficiary LGU.

RD Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros opened the seminar with the discussion on the legal basis of the Trading Rules and Regulations (TPRO). Chief Tobacco Production and Regulation Officers Engr. Alex L. Borje and Eleanor A. Rapanut discussed the salient features of the trading rules and regulations, and the system and procedure in the proper accomplishment and reporting vital trading forms, respectively.

Primitivo M. Abalos Jr., Senior TPRO, discussed the violations in the conduct of trading and the corresponding penalties. An open forum followed after the presentation.

Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, in his closing message, reminded all personnel involved in the trading to observe health and safety protocol being imposed by the local government units in their areas.

The Branch Offices will conduct a localized meeting on trading rules for field canvassers and trading operators who were not able to participate in the online orientation seminar. A similar orientation will also be conducted for all TPROs in the Branch Offices. ■

NTA Ilocos Norte has established tobacco monitoring points in two major exits in the province, in cooperation with the Provincial Government, the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the local government units sharing boundaries with adjacent provinces.

The formal launching of the monitoring points in Ilocos Norte-Abra Boundary in Nueva Era and in Ilocos Norte-Ilocos Sur boundary in Badoc was held simultaneously on March 15.

According to NTA Ilocos Norte officer-in-charge Luzviminda U. Padayao, the transport of tobacco outside the province will be monitored in the checkpoints as a protocol in ensuring that tobacco production in Ilocos Norte are documented. She added that this will help them monitor the volume of production in the province in relation to area planted, and ensure that the local government units will get an equitable share from the tobacco excise tax under Republic Acts 7171 and 8240.

“We can also check if the leaf buyers involved in the transport have certificate of authority to buy issued by the NTA,” she added.

The coordination of the agency, the provincial government, and PNP was discussed during the Orientation on Tobacco Monitoring for Trading Year 2021, which was attended by Ilocos Norte Gov. Matthew Marcos Manotoc and NTA Governing Board Member Nestor C. Casela, held at the NTA Gallery in Batac City on March 10.

The launching of the Nueva Era monitoring site in Barangay Poblacion was graced by PNP Provincial Director PCol. Christopher N. Abrahano, Edwin C. Carino (representing the provincial government), Lolita Raposas of the Provincial Agriculture Office, Nueva Era Mayor Aldrin R. Garvida, Vice Mayor Caroline Garvida, and Municipal Agriculturist Kleng Domingo. PNP Deputy Provincial Director PLtCol Randy C. Baoit, Badoc LGU Administrative Officer Janice Gorospe (representing Mayor Maximo D. Cajigal), Municipal Agriculturist Leonora Escarda, and representatives from the Provincial Government, attended the launching of the Badoc monitoring site in Barangay Sta. Cruz.

NTA senior officials, headed by Divina D. Pagdilao, acting Chief of Operations, and Saturnino Agatep, acting Senior Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer, facilitated the twin launching of monitoring sites. ■

## Dispersal of beef cattle for Abra farmers

by Ella Mae Agbusac

NTA started the second phase of its Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project (BCPAP) with the distribution of beef cattle to 70 farmers in Abra on March 18.

From the said number, 36 were from the villages of Villavieja, Bolbolo, Dintan and Ocup in Pilar, and 34 from the other tobacco-growing municipalities of Dolores, Tayum, Pidigan, San Quintin, Villaviciosa, Peñarrubia, Bangued, and Luba.

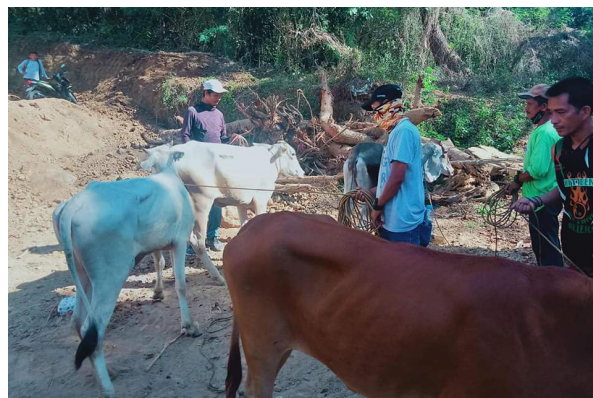
The distribution was facilitated by Project Consultant Dr. Mikael Benedict Carmelo G. Crisologo and a team of extension workers from NTA Abra headed by area supervisor Julio A. Barbosa.

According to Dr. Crisologo, NTA Abra distributed 45 beef cattle for the first batch of beneficiaries during the initial phase of the project last year.

The dispersal of ready-to-breed upgraded Brahman heifers is part of the livestock component of the agency's five-year industry development plan, or the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP), to increase productivity and farmers' income.

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. ordered last year the immediate implementation of the second phase of the Beef Cattle Production, along with other livelihood programs such as the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay, with coverage area expansion and increased number of beneficiaries.

In all, the agency will be distributing 500 beef cattle to farmer-cooperators under its Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) project for the second phase of the project, which is twice the number of the 250 beef cattle in the first phase. ■



## Farm Tractor Distribution in La Union

SEVEN tobacco-based-cooperatives and farmers associations in La Union each received from NTA La Union one unit of Massey Ferguson 40-HP farm tractor under the Tobacco Farm Mechanization Project. The ceremonial distribution spearheaded by Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay was held on February 18 at the NTA La Union Office in Bauang, La Union. Last year, the Branch Office distributed five units of Kubota 36-HP farm tractors to La Union farmers under the same project, as part of the effort of the agency to speed up the farm activities of the local tobacco growers and to reduce their production costs. (Aryan Pamela Sangil)



Ilocos Norte



La Union



Abra

## On-farm visits for annual TGY contest

THE NTA Branch Offices focused field works during the first quarter for the on-farm evaluation of top performing tobacco growers who are nominated for the Tobacco Growers of the Year (TGY) contest.

The TGY Technical Committee of each Branch Office in tobacco-growing provinces will select the provincial winner for each tobacco type (Virginia, Burley and Native) and sub-type for the current crop year based on set criteria.

TGY recognizes the continuing efforts of tobacco growers who show innovativeness, efficiency, compliance with Good Agricultural Practices, and who protect the environment and demonstrate application of science and technology-based knowledge during tobacco production.

Other criteria for evaluation of winners include cleanliness of surroundings, absence of non-tobacco related materials in work area, assessment of curing barns or sheds, quality of cured leaves and yield per hectare, and completeness and timeliness of records.

In Ilocos Norte, the TGY Branch Technical Committee, headed by NTA Ilocos Norte officer-in-charge Luzviminda U. Padayao, checked on the crop stand of the Virginia Improved Flavor tobacco of Danilo Laforteza in Banna, Ilocos Norte, on February 11.

The Branch Technical Committee, after the on-farm visits of TGY contestants in Pinili and Sarrat on the same day, has already completed on-farm visitations of 18 of the 21 nominated tobacco growers vying for the provincial level in Ilocos Norte.

In Abra, Minerva P. Mizal, manager in charge of NTA Abra, visited on February 12 the Virginia Improved Flavor tobacco farm of contract grower Vicente Pira, one of the 11 farmers in Abra vying for the TGY provincial level, in Barangay Vicalabaan, San Quintin. Mizal and her team also conducted on-farm visits to other TGY contestants in Pilar town.

The TGY Branch Technical Committee evaluated the tobacco based on crop stand which includes uniformity of plants, disease incidence and insect damage, including the adoption of recommended variety, fertilizer application, and recommended Crop Protection Agents.

In Ilocos Sur, NTA Candon has completed as of February 10 on-farm visits to all 41 contestants vying for the provincial level award in the second district of Ilocos Sur. According to Adonis D. Lazo, acting head of the Branch Operations, the TGY Branch Technical Committee has started pre-evaluation to select eight tobacco growers who will compete for the next round of evaluation for the provincial title.

In La Union, the Branch Office completed the evaluation of tobacco farmers vying for the Tobacco Growers of the Year (TGY) Award, provincial level, for crop year 2020-2021.

The TGY Branch Technical Committee, headed by Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay, visited all the contestants for the evaluation: six farmers of Virginia Improved Flavor in the First District of the province and four farmers of Native Batek in the Second District.

They are, for Virginia Improved Flavor, Richard Comadre of Camiling, Balaoan; Olidan of Butubut Sur, Balaoan, Nick Navalta of Calliat, Balaoan; Pedro Navor of Patpata, Balaoan; Reynaldo Gatmen of Cadapli, Bangar; and Michelle Valdez Pagaan, Santol; and, for Native Batek, Elena Rimando of Payocpoc Norte Weste, Bauang; Virgilio Garcia Sr. of Cupang, Sto. Tomas; Leonardo Hidalgo of Payocpoc Norte Weste, Bauang; and Mark Jerome Tejano of Nagrebcan, Bauang.

NTA Branch Offices in Vigan (covering the first district of Ilocos Sur), Pangasinan, Isabela and Cagayan have also conducted monitoring and on-farm visitation of their respective contestants for the annual award.

The provincial winners will compete for the National Contest scheduled next year. ■

## Administrator suspends onsite work, presents lockdown actions

WITH reports of peaking up of COVID-19 cases in the National Capital Region, and with confirmed and suspected cases among Central Office (CO) employees, Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. suspended onsite work on March 12. This was extended in subsequent memorandum towards the end of the month extending until April 2, 2021.

This was to mitigate further transmission and facilitate speedy and accurate contact tracing measures.

Heads of various departments and units were authorized to adopt work-from-home (WFH) arrangements for continuity and rendition of basic services, especially in the frontline offices of Regulation and Finance Departments.

In a message to the employees, Administrator Seares assured employees that the NTA Management “is doing its best to cushion the impact” of lockdowns due to COVID-19 on the agency, enumerating the following actions:

- Continue to assist, even in his personal capacity and resources, all those who need immediate and urgent attention, to the extent possible.
- Coordinate with top management officials to create/activate the Risk Management Committee to review policies on health, well-being, and safety, including service continuity, and alternative work arrangements.
- Coordinate with the Private Sector for the availment/procurement of COVID vaccines for NTA employees.
- Conduct redisinfection of CO prior to reporting back to work. All Branch Offices are enjoined to do the same.
- Require swab test results from all employees upon return to work.

“We continue to pray for those still in hospitals/facilities and those in self-isolation/quarantine. Let us support each other’s safety and well-being through prayers. Your NTA family is here for all of you,” he said. ■



“Get vaccinated.” As the virus still exists, Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. highlights healthy lifestyle in his pep talk on the second Monday of March at the Central Office, maintaining that the virus can be prevented by vaccines. He thus enjoins the employees to take the vaccines if these are offered to them and says he is willing to be the first person in the agency to get the jab.



**Certificates of Commendation.** The two deputy administrators and five department managers received from Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. Certificates of Commendation for serving as an inspiration and role model in leadership in their respective areas and departments in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. They were especially cited, along with the Branch Managers, for their quick response to serve the farmers and other stakeholders under difficult situation last year. The awarding of citations was held after the Monday flag ceremony at the Central Office in Quezon City on February 22.

**L-R:** Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros (Regulation Department), Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano, Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, Fortuna C. Benosa (Corporate Planning), Ma. Teresa B. Laudencia (Finance), Dinah E. Pichay (Internal Audit Service), and Perla C. Manzon (Administrative Department). **(Melanie Rapiz-Parel)**





# NTA starts inventory of real property landholdings

by **Melanie Rapiz-Parel**

TO prepare a year-end inventory and update of NTA real property landholdings, the members of the Assets Inventory and Management (AIM) Committee of the agency convened for the first time via online on February 18, upon the directive of Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr.

According to Atty. Jun Fred V. Parado, NTA Legal Officer and focal person for the AIM Committee, the meeting discussed the landholdings of the eight tobacco agencies that were merged into NTA in July 1987, and various efforts of the agency relative to assets inventory and management.

The NTA AIM Committee was created on July 3, 2019 per Special Order No. 0535 s. 2019, to implement the pertinent provisions of Executive Order Nos. 116 and 245, and the Proposed Action Plan for Inventory of NTA Properties, approved by the NTA Governing Board by virtue of Board Resolution No. 1065-2019 on May 17, 2019.

The current membership of the AIM Committee, represented by each Branch Office and each unit and department concerned with real properties, was reconstituted per Special Order No. 0555 s. 2020 dated December 29, 2020 signed by Administrator Seares.

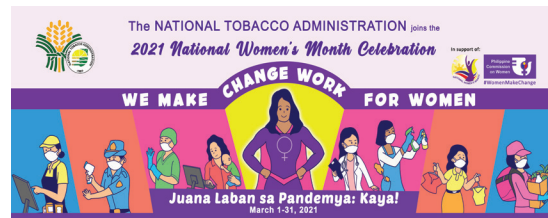
The AIM Committee members will be primarily responsible in the provision of information and updates on NTA properties. Administrator Seares has directed the Branch Offices, in a memorandum dated January 22, 2022, to submit a year-end inventory of all NTA properties within their jurisdiction, complete with evidence/s of ownership.

Deputy Administrator for Support Services (DASS) Benedicto M. Savellano also attended the meeting exercising his oversight function over the committee. He challenged the committee members to work not only in identifying and protecting NTA landholdings, but also in exploring possibilities of converting the landholdings into active incomes.

DASS Savellano joined participants from the Central Office: Atty. Parado, Reynaldo R. Aquino, Budget Officer V (Finance); and Zenaida T. Arrojo, Supply Officer V (Administrative Department), at the NTA Training Room in Quezon City.

Participants from the Branch Offices joined the meeting via Zoom. They are the Administrative Officers representing their respective Branch Managers: Felicisimo T. Lazo (Abra), Noralyn I. Idica (Vigan), Josefa P. Correo (Cagayan), Teodulo B. Benitez, Jr. (Isabela), Magdalena N. Mamuyac (Pangasinan), Orlando O. Galdones (Candon), Elaine A. Tinio (Ilocos Norte), and Albert C. Casison (La Union). ■

## Women's Month Celebration



NTA opened the agency-wide celebration of the National Women's Month with a flag-raising ceremony attended by Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., other members of the Top Management, senior officers and staff in purple shirts on March 1 at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City.

Fortuna C. Benosa, Manager of Corporate Planning Department and Gender and Development (GAD) Focal Person, gave the reason behind the celebration and this year's theme "Juana Laban sa Pandemya: Kaya!" and announced the line-up of the month-long activities.

Among the activities conducted in the Central and Branch Offices were video showing of GAD-related clips, wearing of purple shirts every Monday to signify support for women's empowerment and gender equality, and weekly talks on the rights of women and other relevant topics, and photography contest for the NTA employees. ■



Presentation of the enhance website (Mechille D. Riano)

## NTA enhances website, teleconferencing ability

NTA held the formal launching of its newly enhanced website on January 8 at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City.

The agency collaborated with the website development team of PMPI Creative Suites to improve the design for easy navigation and provide a more comprehensive source of agency information and services.

According to Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., the requirement is an effective online presence with a good quality website and social media links.

“With unavoidable restrictions on travel, mass gathering and other related activities, people now turn to and rely on the Internet for relevant information. This has become the norm especially during the Covid-19 pandemic,” said Seares.

Mindful of these circumstances, the agency decided on a design that would reflect a more accessible format with well-organized menu options and simpler navigation, with direct access to all vital information about NTA.

The new site has more dynamic features than its previous design, and offers search capabilities with quick links on programs and projects, production services, technology information, breakthrough products, publications, relevant laws, updates and pertinent statistics on the performance of the local tobacco industry.

In addition, the website includes a range of resources and tools designed to help tobacco manufacturers, exporters, importers and transshippers apply for licenses, permits or commodity clearances. There will be a quick link to the TradeNet, the Philippine government’s online trading facilitation portal.

Deputy Administrators Benedicto M. Savellano (Support Services) and Roberto R. Bonoan (Operations), and the managers and senior officers of various departments and units of the Central Office were present on the launching, facilitated by the Public Relations (PR) unit of the Office of the Administrator.

The PR unit, in coordination with the Management Information System Division (MISD) of the Corporate Planning Department, will be in charge of the day-to-day updates of the website.

The strengthening of the communication and information capability of the agency under the new normal has been the utmost priority of Administrator Seares since middle of last year when he took the helm of the tobacco regulatory agency.

NTA has already upgraded its technological resources under the “new normal” with the procurement of high-definition wide-

screen television sets for video conferencing for the Branch Offices.

Four units of Videosonic 65” LED Interactive Flat Panel Display was delivered to the Branch Offices in Ilocos Norte, La Union, Candon City, and Vigan City on the first week of February.

“The reality of virtual meeting is a social distancing measure to keep everyone safe from the virus. We can continue our work in service to our tobacco farmers and other stakeholders through effective communication and coordination in the comfort of our offices,” said Administrator Seares.

According to MISD, in charge of the procurement, the rest of the branch offices, in Pangasinan, Abra, Isabela, and Cagayan, including the Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD) in Batac City will also receive their respective units in the second quarter this year.

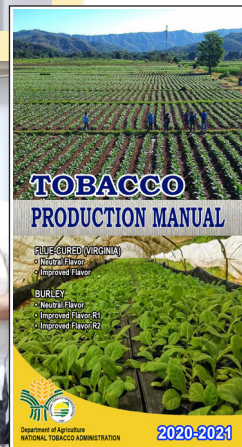
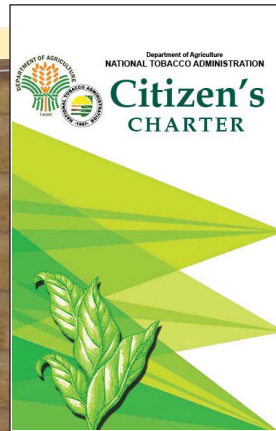
The MISD has also facilitated the upgrading of Internet speed in the Central Office and the branch offices and the procurement of upgraded laptops to be distributed to top officials and senior staff this year.

The NTA Central Office first acquired in October last year three units of Viewsonic 98 inches, UHD Interactive Flat Panel Display, now displayed in the Training Room, Board Room, and Research Room. ■



NTA Ilocos Norte received the wide-screen monitor/TV with moveable TV Rack on February 18. (L-R: Divina D. Pagdilao, OIC Branch Operations; OIC Manager Luzviminda U. Padayao; Administrative Officer V Elaine A. Tinio; and Accountant III Valentino Valdez) (NTA Ilocos Norte)

# NTA releases Citizen's Charter handbook for stakeholders



Photos: Melanie Rapiz-Parel

NTA has started the distribution of the revised NTA Citizen's Charter Handbook to its various stakeholders, as part of information dissemination on the enhanced and more simplified process of frontline services of the agency.

The handbook (2021 edition) was officially launched on February 10 with the presentation of copies to Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano and Deputy Administrator for Operations Roberto R. Bonoan.

Dinah E. Pichay, Internal Audit Service Manager and Focal Person on the Citizen's Charter, said that the revised charter has complied with the Section 6 of the Republic Act No. 11032, otherwise known as the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018.

The said provision requires government agencies to set up their updated Citizen's Charter in billboards, websites, or in the form of published materials detailing a comprehensive and uniform checklist of requirements for each type of application or request, the procedure to obtain a particular service, the maximum time to conclude the process, among other requirements.

Administrator Seares said that the revised NTA Citizen's Charter, an open public document, will properly inform all our industry stakeholders about our brand of quality government service worthy of public trust and confidence as embodied in the NTA Quality Policy.

"This is a testament of the Agency's wholehearted response to President Rodrigo Roa Duterte's challenge to revolutionize the delivery of government services through increased operational efficiency and responsive, client-centric management of programs, projects, and activities," he said.

According to Pichay, there had been amendments on the past eight years after the release of the 2013 edition.

"Now the charter is formally updated to agree to the national government effort to streamline government processes, eliminate corrupt practices, and cut red tape in the bureaucracy," Pichay said.

Pichay and her staff at the IAS consolidated the updated version and prepared the content draft. The Public Relations unit of the Office of the Administrator was in charge of the design and printing of the handbook.

The service standards of the revised NTA Citizen's Charter are already posted in the official website of the agency. ■

## New tobacco production manual launched

NTA launched last February 15 the latest edition of the Tobacco Production Manual (Virginia and Burley) by the NTA Techno Updating Task Force.

NTA Administration/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. received copies of the manual for Crop Year 2020 and 2021 from Acting Deputy Administrator for Operations and Task Force Chair Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan.

The publication, a component of the NTA Communications Support Program, will serve as general reference materials for extension workers, Science Research Specialists and other Extension Service Providers in assisting tobacco farmers on updated quality leaf production technology.

Part of the agency's thrust for sustainable industry is to provide technology assistance to the tobacco growers for quality production.

"Our farmers must follow the updated package of technology for the production of quality leaves that meet the standards of both the local and global markets, in an environmentally sustainable manner, and get the maximum return from their tobacco farming enterprises," Administrator Seares said in his message.

The updated information and technology components of the manual were prepared during the online workshop of the Techno Updating Task Force members held in August last year.

Bonoan said that the members were identified experts in tobacco production from the NTA Branch Offices in collaboration with experts from the private sector. ■



Central Office new regular employees (L-R) Gerald C. Guzman, Jano P. Belleza, Melanie R. Parel, Maylene B. Afos, and Diane Joyce O. Trinidad, with Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. and Administrative Department OIC Perla C. Mazon.

## Promotions and Appointment

NTA promoted six of its staff and one transferee from other agency, and issued regular appointments to seven others. The promotions and appointments were signed by Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. November last year and approved by the Civil Service Commission on January 19.

Newly promoted and appointed employees are as follows:

Evangeline C. Cabigan – Senior Science Research Specialist, Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD)  
 Patricia A. Inocente – Community Development Officer III, FTSD

Melanie R. Parel – Public Relations Officer III, Office of the Administrator

Marielle Cristy B. Beloy – Accountant II, Abra Branch

Rhonelle P. Sulicipan – Tobacco Production and Regulation

Officer (TPRO) III, FTSD

Olivia C. Galdones – Agriculturist II, Candon Branch

Marcelia P. Pulgar – Agriculturist II, Candon Branch

Charito A. Masiglat – TPRO III, Candon Branch

Felicitas T. Tagad – TPRO III, Vigan Branch

Gerald C. Guzman – Records Officer II, Administrative Dept.

Dianne Joyce O. Trinidad – TPRO I, Regulation Department

Maylene B. Afos – Financial Analyst I, Finance Department

Jano P. Belleza – Secretary I, Industrial Research Department

Anthony B. Baytan – Driver II, Abra Branch

In addition, the NTA Governing Board also confirmed the promotion of 6 staff and appointments of 7 others, including the position of Attorney V, during the Regular Board Meeting on January 19. ■

## Welcome to the NTA family, Director Jessie Pat M. Serna!



DIRECTOR Jessie Pat M. Serna formally took his Oath of Office as Member of the NTA Governing Board before Agriculture Secretary and NTA Board Chair William D. Dar on March 4 at the Office of the Secretary in the Department of Agriculture Compound in Quezon City. Director Serna will represent the Tobacco Manufacturers Sector, replacing Rodolfo F. Salanga. Prior to his appointment, Director Serna was a Sangguniang Bayan Member of Cabugao, Ilocos Sur, worked on a family business, and served as consultant in a tobacco company.

After his induction witnessed by his family, he attended his first Board Meeting on the same day held at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City. **(Mechille D. Riano)**



## QAD Building closed

NTA suspends work at the NTA Quality Assurance Laboratory Building starting February 4 for the safety of the staff during the demolition of the Old NTA Building (Central Office) on the same NTA compound in Quezon City.

The staff of the three Divisions of the NTA-IRD: Techno-Laboratory Services and Instrumentation, Quality Assurance, and Market Research and Development now hold temporary office at the 4th Floor of Ben-Lor Building, 1184 Quezon Avenue, in Quezon City.

Requests for chemical analysis of cigarettes, nicotine, tar and carbon monoxide will not be accepted until further notice. Only requests for physical characteristics of cigarettes will be accepted.