



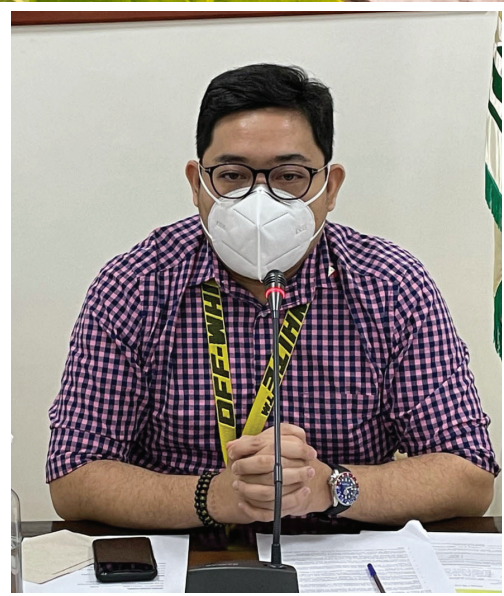
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NATIONAL TOBACCO ADMINISTRATION
34th ANNIVERSARY
Natatangi at Tapat na Adhikain

**“Overcoming Challenges
in the Face of Adversity”**

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Cover Photo: A cut portion of the winning entry of **Anne Margaret P. De Fiesta** to the National Women's Month Photo Contest sponsored by NTA. (See full photo on page 19.)

EDITORIAL

Thankful

WE marked our 34th anniversary in an unprecedented celebration under the new normal. For the first time, it was held virtually, and streamed live on Facebook, with a few members of the Top Management at the Central Office Board Room, the employees in their workstations or at home, and the staff in the Branch Offices joining us in the celebration.

Despite the absence of the usual fanfares and fellowship activities, we are very happy and thankful to see each other safe amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and have risen above all difficulties of this time. This will surely be an experience we will never forget.

For the celebration, we take pride in the significant strides that Administrator Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. and the members of the Top Management have achieved despite the changing and various challenges that the agency faces in fulfilling its mandate.

We implemented policies and procedures to keep each NTA employee safe and healthy, in strict compliance to safety and health measures, as required by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases. We achieved towards the end of the third quarter a 100% vaccination for the staff in the Central Office, and we are pleased to note that the Branch Offices are actively coordinating with the LGUs and private partners in the vaccination program for their staff.

To sustain our organization's trajectory in coping with the new normal, we continue implementing programs and projects. We learned to cope, adapt, and take actions to meet the needs of the farmers and the employees in the light of the pandemic. We continue to stand by our commitment to do a balancing act between protecting lives and ensuring livelihood at this crucial stage.

We do not exactly know what the succeeding years will bring. Whatever may come, let us carry on as NTA family, in the new normal, with great hope, faith, and dedication, focused on our mission and purpose to serve. And this is what the NTA is really about – quality public service for the tobacco farmers.

Having tried and tested by the pandemic as a family and a community, we are now stronger and even more resilient as we envision our next anniversary celebrations with a better and brighter tobacco industry. ■

From the Editor

More information officers are better than less

The Public Relations office is managed by two personnel holding regular positions, but it is in charge of the whole Communications Support Project of the agency. Through the Communications Plan that I initiated in 2014, the agency, through the issuances of separate Special Orders, designated capable employees in the Branch Offices as writer-contributors for this newsletter, anchors for the "Oras ni Mannalon ti Tabako" radio program, and videographers for the tobacco production videos. Recently under the directive of Administrator Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., we included as part of the team social media administrators of the FB accounts of the different Branch Offices to help us in information dissemination.

Some of the writer-contributors who have been with the newsletter, or earlier, when I started managing the *Philippine Tobacco News* in 2013, continue to be involved in our project, namely, Elaine Tinio, Divina Pagdilao, Felisa Aurellano, Ronald Molina, Orlando Galdones, and Candido Liangao. Some of our writers like Noralyn Idica, Gilbert Taguam and Elizabeth Biala, who are still active in the service, opted to pass the responsibility to younger and equally capable staff.

In their absence, we see promising writers like Marife Peralta, Immanouel Rafanan, and Rhonelle Sulicipan.

Our long-time OMT anchors Jose Taclas Jr., Adonis Lazo, Marcelia Pulgar, and Biala, who were part of the first batch of farmcasters when the project was revived in 2014, are still very active in the project. They were joined by promising radio anchors like Peralta, Rafanan, Ruby Dacanay, and Eulalia Elle, to name a few. Videography and social media administration are new components but we see high potentials for our team members from the Branch Offices in our information and education drives.

Without the support from their Branch Managers, our team members cannot achieve things in their respective work assignments. We also draw inspiration from Administrator Seares who included strengthening the communication network of the agency under the new normal as his priority in his administration. True enough, our information officers act as front liners in informing the public on important updates of the activities in the agency, in line with the national government platform for transparency and accountability.

(Neyo E. Valdez)



Screenshot of the council meeting [Courtesy of Provincial Government of La Union]

STEP gets endorsement from La Union

NTA presented the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP), a five-year industry development roadmap, to the Provincial Development Council in La Union during a virtual meeting held on August 19.

Fortuna C. Benosa, Corporate Planning Department Manager, presented to the council’s Executive Committee (PDC-ExeCom) headed by Gov. Francisco Emmanuel “Pacoy” R. Ortega III, the current and proposed programs and projects for La Union under the industry roadmap.

Acting NTA Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana and La Union Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay joined Benosa during the presentation and discussion of the STEP.

Also in attendance were La Union Provincial Agriculturist Ramon Laudencia, other provincial government officials, and representatives from different government agencies in the province.

After Benosa’s presentation, the PDC-ExeCom approved the endorsement of the tobacco industry roadmap to the Regional Development Council (RDC).

According to Benosa, the endorsement from the provincial council is not only a requirement for the RDC but also a good opportunity for the agency to “reach out to our partners from the local government units and work together in improving the lives of the local tobacco growers.”

Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. has described the development plans under the STEP as the agency’s mission to keep the industry sustainable in the next five years and more, while helping the farmers increase their income and productivity, and make the industry a major contributor to food security and poverty alleviation program of the government. ■



LGU support. Acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana presented the STEP to the local government of Tagudin, Ilocos Sur and some local tobacco growers. Tagudin Mayor Roque S. Verzosa, Jr. (*standing*) and the Sangguniang Bayan Members affirmed their commitment to extend full support on the industry roadmap. Mayor Verzosa ordered on the spot the allocation of a portion of the municipal demo farm site to accommodate tobacco seedling nurseries for the agency’s ISTP project. (John James B. Canosa)



Screenshot of the final day of surveillance audit

NTA passes 2nd surveillance audit for ISO

NTA passed the second surveillance audit for the recertification of its ISO 9001:2015 QMS on July 28.

The audit was conducted by the international certification body Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS) on virtual platform using Microsoft Teams in the Central Office in Ben-Lor Building in Quezon Avenue in Quezon City.

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.

During the closing meeting, SGS auditor and Team Leader Gemma Jimenea granted the agency continued certification after revealing that the audit resulted in only one minor nonconformities and three observations. Recertified are the agency's core processes, namely, Research and Development, Regulatory Services, and Technology Assistance, Extension and Production Services.

NTA first earned the ISO 9001:2008 for QMS in 2016 and transitioned to ISO 9001:2015 in 2018 for its core process, which incorporates risk management to enable the organization to identify and provide a systematic approach to risk for more efficient quality management system. It passed the 1st Surveillance Audit on July 27, 2020.

Quality Management Representative (QMR) and Corporate Planning Manager Fortuna C. Benosa and Deputy QMR and Finance Manager Ma. Teresa B. Laudencia head the Core Team of the NTA-QMS, with Dinah E. Pichay (Internal Quality Team Leader), Perla C. Manzon (Documents and Records Controller), Zenaida T. Arrojo (Quality Workplace Team Leader), and Michelle P. Nacpil (Training and Education Team Leader), as members.

Members of the QMS Process Teams are Myrna O. Lozano (Research and Development Services), Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros (Regulatory Services), Imelda N. Riñen (Technology Assistance, Extension and Production Support Services), Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay (Branch Operations), Neyo E. Valdez

(Customer Feedback/Satisfaction), and Joseph B. Benosa (Information and Communication Technology Services); with Teresita D. Dela Rosa as head of Secretariat.

Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares, Jr. and the two Deputy Administrators, Benedicto M. Savellano (Support Services) and Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana (Operations), lead the Policy and Steering Team that guides the NTA-QMS members.

In preparation for the second surveillance audit, the QMS Core members and Process Teams at the Central Office held the virtual Management Review of the implementation of the agency's QMS on July 14 and internal quality audit by the IQA team on July 5.

The annual Management Review is aimed at ensuring the continuing suitability, adequacy, effectiveness, and alignment of QMS with the strategic directions of the organization.

Included in the review were the status of actions from previous management review, changes that could affect the QMS, information on the performance and effectiveness of the QMS based on (1) customer feedback and satisfaction results, (2) project performance and conformity of products and services, and (3) performance of external provides; adequacy of resources, and effectiveness of actions taken to address risks and opportunities.

Benosa discussed the objectives and expected outputs of the management review, including status of actions, from previous management review and planning workshops, and changes in external and internal issues that are relevant to the QMS.

Those who provided inputs with their respective presentations for review were Valdez (Customer Feedback and Satisfaction Survey results), Dr. Palabay (Branch Operations), Deputy Administrator Sambrana (External and Internal Issues), Atty. Ambros, Lozano, Riñen, Pichay, Manzon, and Budget Officer V Reynaldo R. Aquino (Finance). ■



Former NTA Administrator Seares honored with TOFP awards

FORMER Administrator Dr. Robert Lizardo Seares was an honoree of The Outstanding Filipino Physician (TOFP) Posthumous 2021 given by the JCI Senate Philippines in partnership with the Philippine Medical Association.

The posthumous award was conferred to the former Administrator and 19 other physicians during the Medicine Week via a virtual awarding ceremony on September 22.

Dr. Seares of the Abra Medical Society was a medical doctor from the province of Abra, a Doctor to the Barrios and consultant and chief surgeon of the family-owned hospital in Bangued, Abra.

He finished Medicine at the Far Eastern University and passed the Medical Board exam in 1969. He had more than five decades of service to his name in the medical field, including seven years as consultant, one year as chief surgeon and three years as Physician at the Dr. Petronilo V. Seares Memorial Hospital in Bangued, Abra.

Doc Banting, as he was fondly called by his provincemates, served as the Municipal Mayor of Bangued, Abra for six years in the 80s. After his term, he went back to medical service as consultant at St. James Hospital in Vigan City, and likewise served as Municipal Health Officer in the municipalities of

Peñarrubia and Lagayan all in Abra.

In February 2017, President Rodrigo Roa Duterte appointed Doc Banting as the 10th Administrator of NTA.

He had said that being in the medical profession will not stop him to help the tobacco farmers earn a good profit of their produce. His appointment as administrator gave him the full responsibility to help the tobacco growers to improve their lives with the help of the government and other industry major stakeholders.

He declared that the Farmers First Policy be accorded utmost importance under his leadership, ensuring that the benefits derived from the tobacco industry shall be channelled back towards increasing productivity and uplifting the lives and welfare of tobacco farmers and their communities.

When Doc Banting died in March 2020 after three years at the helm of the agency, he left various projects and programs that promise more benefits to the local tobacco growers, such as the Farm Mechanization Project, the Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project, and the finalization of the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program, a five-year development program for growth anchored on the twin targets of increased productivity and increased farmers' income. ■



Budget Deliberation. NTA, an attached corporation of the Department of Agriculture, is involved in the deliberations on the DA's FY 2022 budget at the House of Representatives on September 27. NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. participates in the plenary via online at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City. He is joined by Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano, Corporate Planning Manager Fortuna C. Benosa, Finance Manager Ma. Teresa B. Laudencia, Budget Officer V Reynaldo Aquino, and Legal Officer Atty. Jun Fred V. Parado. The agency is pushing for an increased budget for operations, particularly in the implementation of the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program. (Alona A. Manganaan)

NTA, LGU Narvacan eye partnership on Kadiwa, other projects

THE LOCAL government of Narvacan, Ilocos Sur consulted NTA on possible partnership through the NTA Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita meat processing facility located in the municipality.

This was held during the Regular Session of the Sangguniang Bayan of Narvacan presided by Vice Mayor Pablito Sanidad, held at the town plaza on August 9.

Narvacan officials were proposing to avail of the toll slaughtering services of the NTA Kadiwa in Barangay Nanguneg and use the facility as temporary site for its slaughter services when the new slaughtering house will be constructed. Also invited in the consultation were members of the local meat vendors' association.

"This will be great opportunity for both parties in helping our tobacco farmers and local meat consumers to augment pork supply in the market. The proposal, however, must be presented first to the NTA Governing Board," said Acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana.

Sambrana also discussed with the local officials other possible cooperation and collaboration on various programs and projects under the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP) for the benefit of the local tobacco growers.

The Deputy Administrator attended the meeting, along with Dr. Mikael Benedict Carmelo G. Crisologo, consultant of NTA Kadiwa, and some members of the Operations of NTA Candon.

NTA Kadiwa, formerly the AgriPinoy Food Processing Plant and Trading Center, 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 through hog and poultry raising. The NMIS AA-accredited facility is aligned with the Kadiwa market system of the Department of Agriculture, which aims to sell major agricultural goods at a reasonable price to help poor Filipino households.

■ (John James B. Canosa)

Technology Update Workshop for CY 2021-2022

NTA convened on August 16 the Techno Updating Task Force for a one-day online workshop to come up with the recommended technologies for quality tobacco production for this coming crop year, 2021-2022.

Participants in the annual activity facilitated by the Office of the Deputy Administrator for Operations were the Branch Managers, Chief Agriculturists, and representatives from the private sector.

In his message during the opening program, Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. stressed the importance of technology updates to help meet the goal of the agency to increase yield and income of tobacco growers for another crop year.

According to acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, the workshop aims to identify mature information and technology components for inclusion in the package of technology for tobacco production of Virginia, Burley, and Native.

Sources of mature information and technology components are Research and Development (R&D) conducted by the Farm Technology and Services Department, R&D of the private sector, protocol research, National Seed Industry Council adaptability trials of tobacco variety, and farmers' best practices validated by the extension workers.

The workshop was divided into three Focus Group Discussions on Production Technology headed by NTA Vigan Manager Minerva P. Mizal for Virginia, NTA Pangasinan Chief Agriculturist Roger T. Madriaga for



TIU



AURELLANO

NTA designates new OIC for Admin Dept, 3 others

ADMINISTRATOR/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. designated Chief Accountant Milagros C. Tiu of the Finance Department as Officer-in-Charge of the Administrative Department, replacing erstwhile OIC and Human Resource Management Officer V Perla C. Manzon. This was contained in the Special Order (SO) No. 0261 s. 2021 signed by Administrator Seares on September 27. Manzon was designated OIC with the retirement of Dr. Cristina C. Lopez in 2020.

As head of Administrative Department, Tiu will also get chairmanship of the Human Resource Merit Promotion and Selection Board (HRMPSB), which is currently interviewing applicants for 108 vacant positions.

Resty C. Cambe, Accountant III of NTA Candon, was designated OIC of the Accounting Division vice Tiu, per SO No. 262, signed by Administrator Seares also on September 27. Cambe is the incoming Accountant IV of the Finance Department, having his appointment already confirmed by the NTA Governing Board.

Both Finance and Administrative Departments are under the Support Services.

Early in the third quarter, Administrator Seares also designated OICs in two major positions under the Operations Group:

Roger T. Madriaga as OIC Project Manager of Tobacco Dust Processing Plant (TDPP) and Project Development Officer IV Felisa R. Aurellano as OIC Manager of the Farm Technology and Services Department.

The new designations effective August 4 were the result of the retirement from government service of TDPP Manager Hermogenes A. Galvez and FTSD Manager Imelda N. Riñen on June 30 and July 31, respectively. ■

Burley, and NTA La Union Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay for Native Tobacco.

The results of the Protocol Research were presented by researchers accredited by the Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority, research assistants, and participating company.

Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano and Director Teofilo R. Quintal of the NTA Governing Board also attended the opening program. ■ (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)

Tobacco Regulations



Atty. Fred Liong and other JTI Officials with Administrator Seares during the plant tour (Arman Anga-angan/NTA-OAD)

Administrator Seares inspects JT plant site

ADMINISTRATOR/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. and his team paid a working visit to the plant site of JT International Asia Manufacturing Corporation in Malvar, Batangas on July 22. Joining the Administrator were NTA Regulation Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, Atty. Jun Fred V. Parado and Alona A. Manganaan of the Office of the Administrator. The plant inspection, a regular function of the tobacco regulatory agency, was facilitated by JT International officials Robert Eugenio, Atty. Fred Liong, and Atty. Jose Paolo Patajo.

According to Ambros, JT International commended the agency for its various programs and projects for the tobacco growers and for the implementation of online processes in its regulatory functions during the pandemic.

JT International, one of the major tobacco companies in the country, also confirmed their commitment to buy at least 5.6 million kilos of locally grown leaf tobacco for their raw materials for 2021 which is 20% higher than their 2020 local purchases. ■

NTA cited for completion of TRADENET Platform onboarding

NTA was awarded with a Certificate of Recognition for successfully completing the critical onboarding activities in the TradeNet Platform during the 3rd National Single Window - Technical Working Group (NSW-TWG) Virtual Meeting held on August 31.

NTA is one among the first 10 Trade Regulatory Government Agencies (TRGAs) which converted into online document processing.

The NSW-TWG was created under Executive Order No. 482, s. 2005 also known as the NSW Task Force for Cargo Clearance, comprising of 45 TRGAs. The group was further enhanced into a NSW system, now called the TradeNet Portal in line with Republic Act No. 11032 (An Act Promoting Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Delivery of Government Services).

Under the TradeNet.gov.ph portal, NTA implements the automation of all transactions, including payment system and facilitated the approval of import licenses and import/transshipment commodity clearances.

Prior to the completion of onboarding activities with the TradeNet, the NTA adopted interim online filing and processing of commodity clearances via electronic mail since the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020.

According to Regulation Department Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, the NTA and the TradeNet Secretariat are now wrapping up the pilot onboarding of five tobacco



companies, refining in the process some minor details of the NTA's TradeNet dashboard for easy access and user friendly applications.

First 10 Awardees of TradeNet Portal:

1. Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB)
2. National Tobacco Administration (NTA)
3. Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA)
4. Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Standards (BAFS)
5. Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority (FPA)
6. Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA)
7. DTI – Export Marketing Bureau (DTI-EMB)
8. Optical Media Board (OMB)
9. National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS)
10. Bureau of Customs (BOC). ■



NTA marks 34th year with virtual program

THE National Tobacco Administration celebrated its 34th Anniversary with a virtual program, attended by all the departments, branch offices and units, on July 29.

Highlights of the event were the awarding of outstanding tobacco growers and extension workers and the launching of the agency's official slogan "Natatangi at Tapat na Adhikain."

The Central Office, through the Office of the Administrator, facilitated the virtual program that was streamed via FB Live using the Zoom conferencing platform.

In his message from the NTA Board Room, Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. said that the agency made a difference in its performance this year, despite the pandemic, "thanks to the various support from the stakeholders in implementing programs for the tobacco growers."

"With all the support from the national and local government and our private partners and their trust in our leadership, the agency continues to perform its tasks with the same commitment to serve the tobacco farmers for the past 34 years," he said.

Administrator Seares highlighted his message on the annual accomplishments of the agency despite the various challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among them are the implementation of policies and procedures to keep NTA employees safe and healthy, facilitating roll-out of vaccine for the vaccination of all Central Office staff, and the release of production and



Administrator Seares delivers his anniversary message from the NTA Board Room during the live streaming. Joining him are acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, Atty. Jun Fred V. Parado, Internal Audit Service Manager Dinah E. Pichay, and Corporate Planning Manager Fortuna C. Benosa. (Arman Anga-angan)



facility assistance in the initial implementation of the Block Farming.

He also thanked the NTA employees for maintaining the same standard or quality of service to the stakeholders. He cited the recent success of the agency in the surveillance audit for its ISO recertification.

In his message, Acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana commended the NTA for their efforts amidst threat to their health and safety to ensure delivery of services to the tobacco farmers.

Gerald C. Guzman, Records Officer II of the Administrative Department served as emcee for the virtual program.

In the afternoon, the employees rejoined the virtual room for the raffle draw. Cash gifts and various kitchen items were given away to lucky winners both in the central and branch offices.

TGY winners

The second part of the event was the virtual awarding of tobacco farmers who excelled in tobacco production for Crop Years 2019-2020, through the Search for the Tobacco Growers of the Year (TGY) contest, provincial category.

Highlights of winning accomplishments of the farmers including their plaque of recognition were presented via a pre-recorded video prepared by the Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD).

FTSD Manager and TGY National Technical Committee Chairperson Imelda N. Riñen was the host of the event.

Provincial awardees for each category are Reynante Oreiro of Ubbog, Bacnotan, La Union (Virginia Neutral); Rodrigo Yago of Ar-arusip, Badoc, Ilocos Norte (Virginia Improved); Rodolfo Dasmariñas of Allangigan 2nd, Candon City (Virginia Improved); Dominador Orallo of Butubut Norte, Balaoan, La Union (Virginia Improved); Noel Villanueva of Aramal, San Fabian, Pangasinan (Burley Neutral); Felix Salazar of Dungao, Sto. Niño, Cagayan (Burley Improved); John Baldos of San Placido, Roxas, Isabela (Burley Improved); Jomar Magora of Unag, Amulung, Cagayan (Cigar Filler); Sonny Estefanio of Samon, Sta. Maria, Pangasinan (Batek); and Emelyn Timbreza of Parian Oeste, Bauang, La Union (Batek).

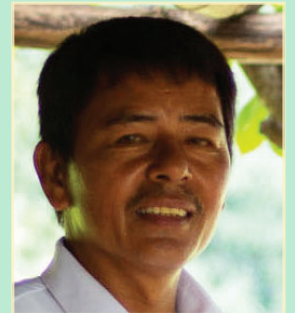
The TGY Awards also cited extension workers who assisted the provincial winners. They are Ambrocio R. Nisperos Jr. (La Union), Rosemarie T. Soriano (Ilocos Norte), Reynaldo L. Padillon (Candon), Ariel R. Calica (La Union), Rose Anne S. Dismaya (Pangasinan), Edna R. Simeon (Cagayan), Edgar R. Lagasca (Isabela), Orlando B. Arugay (Cagayan), Ronaldo P. Molina (Pangasinan), and Emily M. Abubo (La Union).

The contest recognizes the continuing efforts of tobacco growers who show innovativeness, efficiency, compliance with Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), and who protect

see next page



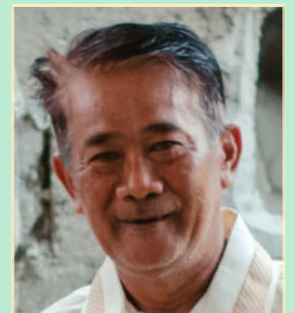
Yago



Oreiro



Dasmariñas



Orallo



Villanueva



Salazar



Baldos



Magora



Estefanio



Timbreza

Messages

I EXTEND my sincerest gratitude to all the industry stakeholders and our farmers for continuously working together with the government striking a delicate balance between the interest of the industry and the welfare of the general public.

I also thank the NTA for successfully steering the industry for more than three decades. It is my hope that this event will inspire you to further contribute to the achievement of our national goals. Rest assured that the government will continue to support the NTA and will help to ensure that the industry continues to move forward amidst changing and challenging times.

-- **Sen. Christopher Lawrence “Bong” Go**



KAILANGAN natin masiguro ang tultoy-tuloy na pagyabong ng kabuhayan ng ating mga kababayan na umaasa sa pagtatanim ng tabako habang sinisiguro ang kalugusan ng bawat mamamayan.

To the TGY Awardees: *Salamat sa patuloy ninyong pagsusumikap na mapalago ang sektor.* We recognize your contributions to the country’s economic recovery especially during this pandemic.

To the NTA: Continue to serve well in making the best possible future for all tobacco industry stakeholders, especially for our smallholder farmers and their families.

Let’s continue to secure a sustainable and progressive future for the Philippine tobacco industry.

-- **Secretary William D. Dar, Department of Agriculture**



Deputy Administrator for Support Services **Benedicto M. Savellano** (2nd frame, lower row) joins Central and Branch Office staff via Zoom video teleconferencing in their respective areas.

CONTINUED from page 9

the environment and demonstrate application of science and technology-based knowledge, while practicing their profession and getting the maximum income from their labor.

New agency tagline

The agency also launched its latest tagline *Natatangi at Tapat na Adhikain*, through a video presentation prepared by the Public Relations unit of the Office of the Administrator.

The tagline focuses on excellent service and good governance in pursuing major programs and activities for the coming years, and pave the way for sustainable tobacco industry.

With the sudden shift to the new normal, it strengthens the institutional capability of the agency to better respond to the needs of the industry.

Among the strategies that will be undertaken under the tagline will be the full implementation of block farming, close partnership with the LGUs and private sector, technology and innovation in production, education and training, market and promotion, improved infrastructure, and upholding Ease of Doing Business. ■



#TAGLINE

NTA will focus on excellent service and good governance in pursuing major programs and activities for the coming years, and pave the way for sustainable tobacco industry. With the sudden shift to the “new normal,” it will strengthen the institutional capability of the agency to better respond to the needs of the industry.

NATATANGI *(Eng. special, distinct, unequalled)*

With the implementation of the five-year development program for the agency, the NTA aims to undertake changes and improvement in its services, and raise above standards its efforts in helping the tobacco growers. Programs shall be aligned with the four pillars of the OneDA agenda: Consolidation; Modernization; Industrialization; and Professionalization.

Key strategies

Market-Driven Quality Tobacco Production through:

1. Technology and innovation in production – Continuing adoption of up-to-date technology and good agricultural practices in tobacco production, and implementation of various programs for market-driven quality tobacco production
2. Market and promotion – Exploration of markets for local tobacco leaf and tobacco products.

Full implementation of block farming – All components of the block farm such as farm mechanization, crop diversification, post-harvest and market support, and agribusiness shall be implemented in all areas covered by the Branch Offices.

Sustained partnerships with the LGUs and private sector – Institutionalization of partnership with local government units of tobacco-growing areas in program/project implementation in the block farm, and in the implementation of programs/projects funded by their share from the tobacco excise tax. Active participation and partnership with the private sector in establishing more agri-based industries in the countryside.

Education and Training – For the NTA extension workers and support staff, capability training relevant to new programs and projects. For farmers and members of the cooperatives, education and training to improve their entrepreneurship and farm business management.

Improved infrastructure – Construction of the new Central Office Building for a safe workplace, improvement and maintenance of the Branch Offices, and construction of farmers’ training centers and mini soil laboratory.

TAPAT *(Eng. honest, devoted)*

Our commitment to serve shall include transparency in operations and accountability for our actions.

Key strategy

Ease of Doing Business – NTA will adopt a transparent, accountable, efficient and fully automated regulatory systems and procedures, and in operations and procurement system for its various programs and projects.

ADHIKAIN *(Eng. goal, objective)*

We will be focused on our goal to serve our farmers and other stakeholders towards the achievement of an improved quality of life of the tobacco farmers and other stakeholders through increased productivity and other income-generating activities.

Key strategy

The five-year development plan (STEP) which is consistent with our vision, mission and mandate, shall be our main source of reference in annual planning and budget. ■



Overcoming Challenges in the Face of Adversity

Message of Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. during the celebration of the 34th Founding Anniversary of the National Tobacco Administration on July 29.

UNANG-UNA sa lahat ako ay nagpapasalamat sa ating mga unsung heroes, our farmers, our stakeholders, and to all our employees. Sa ating mga Department and Branch Managers and all members of the NTA Governing Board, thank you for giving me the chance to serve the agency even in these very challenging times.

Salamat din kay Pangulong Rodrigo Roa Duterte, Senator Bong Go, at kay Agriculture Secretary William Dar sa tiwala sa ating kakayahan at sa patuloy na pagsuporta sa ating mga programa para sa pagpapaunlad sa kabuhayan ng mga magsasaka ng tabako.

Despite the changing and various challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Tobacco Administration continues to perform its mandate with the same commitment it has shown for the past 34 years, serving the tobacco growers under our leadership.

Allow me to enumerate some of the important accomplishments for the past year.

We implemented policies and procedures to keep NTA employees safe and healthy, in strict compliance to safety and health measures, as required by the Inter-Agency Task Force.

We facilitated the roll-out of vaccine for the vaccination (1st to 2nd dose) of all Central Office staff, in coordination with the National Government and the city government of Quezon City. The agency has already achieved 100% vaccination of employees in the Central Office. We are confident that with collective efforts from the LGUs and our private partners in the Branch Offices, NTA will be able to achieve all our staff in the Branch Offices to be fully inoculated, safe and healthy before they resume their regular on-site work schedules.

We completed the formulation of the very ambitious program, the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP), the agency's five-year industry development program, as the agency aims to undertake changes and improvement in its services, and raise above standards in helping local tobacco growers. This roadmap initiated during the term of my father will utilize the Tobacco Fund to implement various programs and projects.

For the initial implementation of the STEP, our Branch Offices have already established Block Farm models 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. It is expected that block farming will increase the yield and income of our farmers.

For CY 2020-2021, we released P187 million for the production/financial assistance, with a 40% subsidy on fertilizers/pesticides, to 5,946 tobacco farmers tilling an aggregate area of 4,108 hectares.

We turned over last month the first-ever unit of the solar-aided curing barn (SACB) to a farmer-leader in Ilocos Norte. This demonstrates the latest technology in tobacco production and improve quality and at the same time reduce our fuelwood consumption.





For the livelihood program, we increased beneficiaries and coverage area of the Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project, from 250 last year to 500 beneficiaries with more areas covered in tobacco-growing provinces.

We also increased production assistance of the Rice Production Program from P49 million last year to P69 million this year, to benefit 7,100 rice-corn farmers in major tobacco areas.

To have a more solid basis for policy formulation, especially in designing programs for the tobacco sector and for social amelioration purposes of the government, our personnel at the Farm Technology and Services Department are continuously updating our farmers' database, with digitized registration of about 40,400 (target) tobacco farmers through the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA).

Also for the initial implementation of the block farming scheme, we distributed farm machineries worth P53 million to farmers' cooperatives. Focusing on farm mechanization on the block farm is not just working to the benefit of our tobacco growers, but also propelling a paradigm shift in tobacco production.

We also relaunched this tobacco off-season the Gulayan and Manukan sa Barangay and Vegetable Seeds Distribution that were initiated last year as a continuous intervention to enhance food productivity, supply availability, and price stability amid COVID-19.

For the tobacco trading, we gained success in close coordination with the local government units, for the unhampered delivery of tobacco, and movement of NTA staff and trading personnel in their respective areas. We also got the commitment of the buying firms to buy all the tobacco leaves of their contract growers.

We intensified the implementation of the policy on "ease of doing business" in all NTA transactions with the release of our Citizens Charter handbook and our current policy of online transaction in all our regulatory processes; and the integration of these processes into a fully online and interoperable platform with other trade regulatory government agencies via the TradeNet.

When the lockdowns were at their most restrictive, we saw the need for improving our communication and information dissemination capabilities. We were able to enhance the NTA official website and social media page to give relevant updates and serve as a venue for our stakeholders to air feedbacks, issues and concerns.

Finally, I am proud to report to you that we are able to hurdle the ISO 9001:2015 second surveillance audit for its ISO recertification, *patunay na napakasipag at napaka-competitive ang ating mga empleyado kapag kapakanan ng ahensia ang pinag-uusapan*. We rise to the challenge even in the face of adversity.

With this, I thank the NTA employees for supporting me in our cause and that is to improve our office and our services. I am proud to say that we are doing a lot of changes in this agency, and this is not possible without the support and the confidence that you are giving us.

In closing, I remind everyone that we will work collectively and together, we can effectively focus on excellent service and good governance in pursuing major programs and activities for the coming years, and pave the way for sustainable tobacco industry.

Agyamanak unay! ■

Synchronized tree planting in tobacco areas



Maratudo, Magsingal, Ilocos Sur. NTA Vigan



San Francisco Norte, Sudipen, La Union. NTA La Union

THE Synchronized Tree Planting (STP) activities, now on its ninth year as a regular event of the celebrations of the NTA Anniversary, were held in various areas in major tobacco growing provinces. A total of 867,724 million tree seedlings were actually planted this year in Regions 1, 2 and CAR, participated in by government agencies, state universities and colleges, local government units, and other groups.

The tree-planting activity is supplementary to the NTA's livelihood assistance under its Kahuyang Pangkabuhayan at Pangkalikasan (KPP) module, a component of its Renewable Fuelwood Energy Farm Development Project and Restoration of Ecological Integrity Program. It aims to address the fuelwood and other forest resources requirement of the farmers in the flue curing of Virginia tobacco, as well as assist in the reforestation efforts of the tobacco growing regions.

Abra

NTA Abra opened the activity with the planting of more than 800 seedlings of gmelina by the local government of Pilar headed by Mayor Mark Roland B. Somera and Vice Mayor Jaja Josefina S. Disono, and planting volunteers from different government offices and sectors.

This was held at Barangay Poblacion, Pilar, Abra on July 28.

Mayor Somera, in his message, commended NTA Abra for bringing the activity to the Municipality of Pilar and vowed to continue promoting the environmental practices and sustainability of the industry through development projects for the tobacco growers.

On the same day, tree-planting activities were also held in Peñarrubia, Pidigan, and San Isidro. This was followed by planting activities in 20 other planting sites in the province from July 29 to August 23.

In all, NTA Abra planted 67,300 tree seedlings in the annual activities involving 808 green volunteers from various sectors.

Pangasinan

NTA Pangasinan started the planting activities in three areas: Mangandingay in San Manuel, Tarlac; Calmay in Laoac, Pangasinan; and Vacante in Alcala, Pangasinan on July 30.

This was followed by planting activities in various greening sites in Manaoag, Sta. Maria, Balungao, Rosales, Asingan, San Fabian, Malasiqui, Alcala, Sta. Barbara, Villasis, Mapandan, Bauambang in Pangasinan, and in Talogtog, Nueva Ecija.

In all, the Branch Office with 2,628 planting volunteers in various planting sites were able to plant 94,037 tree seedlings. This is more than double the 44,348 tree seedlings actually planted in 2020.

La Union

NTA La Union conducted the annual Synchronized Tree Planting (STP) activities amidst intermittent rain on August 6 in San Francisco Norte and Bigbiga in Sudipen La Union.

Planting volunteers were barangay officials, health workers, residents, and members of the Confederation of Samahang

Ilocano Inc., Sudipen, La Union Chapter.

The volunteers planted different species of hardwood and fruit tree seedlings, sourced from the seedling nurseries of the Kahuyang Pangkabuhayan at Pangkalikasan (KPP) farmer cooperators. Another tree planting activity was also held in Barangay Narra Oeste, San Fernando City on August 13.

Vigan

In Ilocos Sur, NTA Vigan headed by Branch Manager Minerva P. Mizal, along with 111 volunteers, mostly tobacco farmers, took part in the tree planting activities in different planting sites in Cabugao, San Juan, Magsingal, and San Ildefonso on August 6.

Manager Mizal and her staff had to hike and cross a river on foot to reach the planting site in barangay Maratudo in Magsingal.

NTA Vigan has targeted to plant 25,000 seedlings of gmelina, mahogany, and ipil-ipil to each of the barangays in the first district of Ilocos Sur.

Ilocos Norte, other areas

NTA Ilocos Norte conducted tree-planting activities in Nagpatayan, Bangsar, Imelda and Caribquib in Banna and in Aglipay, Bulbulala, Bungro, Dalayap and Puritac in Pinili, Ilocos Norte on July 30 to kick off this year's STP activities in the province.

About 120,000 tree seedlings, mostly gmelina and mahogany trees, were planted on various sites by a total of 11,776 planting volunteers in the duration of the activities. Greening sites included hillsides, along barangay roads, a dumpsite in Piddig, and at the model farm in Batac City.

Other NTA Branch Offices and the Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD) joined the activities on July 30 in their respective coverage areas: NTA Candon in Sto. Tomas, Candon City and in Sulvec, Narvacan, Ilocos Sur; FTSD in Parangopong Experimental Research Station, Parangopong, Batac City; NTA Cagayan in Marobbob, Amulung, Cagayan; and NTA Isabela in Yeban Norte, Benito Soliven and Aga, Delfin Albano, Isabela. ■

Rice production kicks off block farming



Rice Production

NTA La Union visited on August 17 the rice production sites in Sudipen and Bangar as part of its project monitoring activities for the Rice Wet Season Project for CY 2021. For the current rice season, NTA La Union provides production assistance to 841 tobacco-rice farmers from different municipalities in La Union. (Gerylle Vanmarie Palabay)

NTA started early August the distribution of production assistance for its Rice Wet Season Project for CY 2021, under its Integrated Farming and Other Income-Generating Activities Program.

Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. signed the release of the P71 million budget for the production assistance to farmer-cooperators from major tobacco-producing areas, based on the cropping pattern of the area. Farmers from the Ilocos provinces, La Union, Pangasinan, and Abra are given assistance for rice production, while those in Cagayan and Isabela, for corn production.

This year's budget is higher than the P49.5 million released last year for rice production. The agency also increased the number of farmers from 3,537 to 4,855, and coverage area from 2,829 to 3,951 hectares.

Administrator Seares said that the rice-corn program will officially start the block farming scheme for tobacco production areas in the country, as required under the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP) to increase quality production and farmers' income.

Beginning this crop year, the agency will only provide production and facility assistance to the farmers' associations and cooperatives forming the block farms, not to individual farmers.

"Under the STEP, small farms will be consolidated to create bigger farms with common service facilities such as farm tractors, curing barns, irrigation, among others, thus enhancing farm efficiency and reducing production cost," said Administrator Seares.

Acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, who also heads the NTA Pangasinan and NTA Candon in concurrent capacity, attended the distribution of rice production assistance to 42 block farmers in Tagudin, Ilocos Sur on July 2.

He met with Tagudin Mayor Roque S. Verzosa, Jr., Vice Mayor Bernardo F. Tovera, and other local officials to discuss block farming and other strategies to keep the tobacco industry sustainable.

"As in other local officials in tobacco-growing areas that we have met, Mayor Verzosa and his officials gave us the same commitment to extend full support to our program and various



NTA Candon conducts orientation program and distribution of production assistance to farmer cooperators and block farm members under the RICE Wet Season Project in Candon, Galimuyod, San Emilio and Narvacan. (Rosella A. Dosono)

efforts of the agency for the benefit of the local farmers," Sambrana said.

NTA Candon has organized a total of 35 block farms in 16 of the 20 tobacco-growing municipalities in the second district of Ilocos Sur. The farmers' associations/cooperatives that form the block farms are all beneficiaries of the rice program.

In Bauang, La Union, NTA La Union released the cash portion of the P7-million assistance for the Rice Wet Season Project to 841 farmer-cooperators, tilling an aggregate area of 602.45 hectares, from different municipalities.

The cash portion, with 40% subsidy, will cover the amount to purchase certified seeds, and tractor/animal rental for land preparation, fuel for irrigation, and fertilizers.

Before the release on June 30, La Union Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay met with the farmer leaders to discuss the mechanics and implementing rules and regulations of rice production under the block farm.

In Ilocos Norte, NTA Ilocos Norte officer-in-charge Luzviminda U. Padayao released the cash portion of the P9-million assistance for rice program in the province after a brief orientation of the program with cluster leaders in the province, held at the NTA Office in Batac City on June 30. ■

Gulayan at Manukan

NTA started the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay on April 2020 as an intervention program in support of the tobacco growers in 2020. This is one of the refocused projects of the agency to enhance food productivity, supply availability, and price stability amid COVID-19. For the second year, priority is given to the farmers affected by freak rains in the first quarter this year. A total of 1,342 tobacco farmers received 4,002 vegetable seed packs and 33,350 day-old chicks.



[Photo: Ferdimark R. Rosario]

Ilocos Norte

NTA Ilocos Norte distributed free vegetable seeds and day-old chicks to 75 farmer-cooperators of the agency's Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay (GMB) project.

Each farmer got one GMB module comprising 1 pack of seeds of various vegetables with organic fertilizers, 25 heads of Sasso chicks, with booster, starter, grower and pack of vitamins.

NTA Ilocos Norte officer-in-charge Luzviminda U. Padayao handed modules to nine farmers during the launching of the distribution at the Branch Office in Batac City on September 27.

Six of the farmers were from Banna, and the rest from Sarrat, Batac City, and Dingras.

The Branch Office brought the rest of the modules on the same day to 66 more farmer beneficiaries in separate distribution sites in Pinili, Badoc, and Banna.

This was the third distribution of modules by the Branch Office since the start of the implementation of the project last year. The Branch office distributed 40 modules during the launching of the program, and 60 modules in the next cropping season. ■

Ilocos Sur

NTA Vigan distributed 8,400 day-old broiler chicks to GMB farmer-cooperators on September 18, at the NTA Training Center in San Juan, Ilocos Sur.

Each farmer received 40 chicks, 5 kg booster; 10 kg starter, 10 kg grower, and a pack of Vetracin.

According to Branch Manager Minerva P. Mizal, the recipients were the 210 tobacco farmers of the second district of Ilocos Sur whose tobacco plants were damaged by freak rains in the province during the early months of 2021.

Acting Branch Chief Agriculturist Noralyn I. Idica, along with Supervising TPRO and GMB Project Coordinator Jose A. Taclas Jr. and Senior TPRO Tomasito G. Taloza, supervised the inspection and distribution of the broiler chicks to the farmers at the drop-off point in San Juan. ■



[Photo: Minerva P. Mizal]

Cagayan

NTA Cagayan distributed vegetable seeds and free-range chicken (Sasso) and other inputs to 12 GMB farmer-cooperators in two locations, Barangay Battung in Tuao and Barangay Masical in Baggao, Cagayan on September 7. The beneficiaries were the 12 tobacco farmers whose tobacco areas were affected by freak rains early this year.

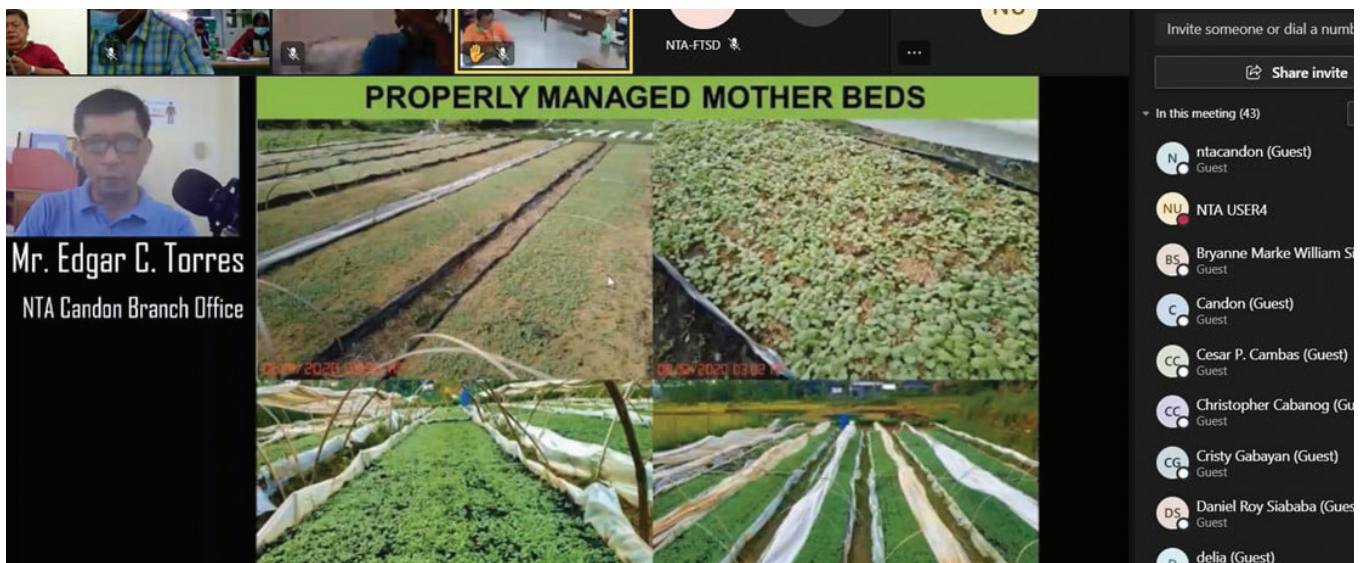
According to Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda, the project promotes diversified backyard gardening and free-range chicken raising as a source of additional income for the tobacco farmers.

With Manager Riazonda during the distribution were Alicia A. Malab, Supervising TPRO; Engr. Elmerante A. Ginez, Cashier II; and Engr. Orlando B. Arugay, TPRO I and Acting Area Supervisor. ■



[Photo: Orlando B. Arugay]

Improved Tobacco Seedlings Production



Screenshot of the lecture on seedling production

NTA opens tobacco season with seedling production training

NTA provided training for its 170 extension workers on approved technology for seedling production under the Improved Tobacco Seedling Production (ITSP) Project.

The training held on September 22 was facilitated by the Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD), in coordination with the Office of the Deputy Administrator for Operations.

According to acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, the training ensures efficient implementation of the project as it gives refresher course for the Operations staff to review the fundamentals on seedling production.

The extension workers who attended the virtual training will then form the pool of trainers in their respective branch offices to assist qualified tobacco seedling growers (TSGs).

Under the ITSP, now on its third year of implementation, the agency provides P20 million worth of production assistance to 250 TSGs to produce sufficient tobacco seedlings

of good, uniform, strong and healthy quality.

The TSGs from the six Branch Offices (Region 1 and Abra) are expected to produce a total of 30 million seedlings, based on a six-hectare module. The seedlings will be bought by the agency and given free to farmer-cooperators of the block farm projects.

Last year, the agency was able to produce about 19 million seedlings from 161 qualified tobacco seedling growers.

Edgar C. Torres, Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer of NTA Candon, presented the package of technology in a pre-recorded ITSP project presentation. FTSD officer-in-charge Felisa R. Aurellano and Supervising Science Research Specialist Randy I. Abella presented the project rationale and the implementing guidelines, respectively.

La Union Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay served as moderator during the open forum held after the presentation and message by Director Teofilo R. Quintal of the NTA Governing Board. ■ (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)



Interview with Dir. Nestor C. Casela

Member, NTA Governing Board



What's keeping him optimistic about the future of the tobacco industry?

How long have you been in the industry, Director?

I've been in the tobacco industry for almost 40 years now. This is where I spent my productive years, of course, without regrets, since this industry provided me the opportunity to serve all the stakeholders, especially the tobacco farmers.

I became part of the tobacco industry when I was employed as an agriculturist of the Philippine Virginia Tobacco Administration (PVTVA). After the merger of PVTVA and all tobacco agencies, forming the National Tobacco Administration, I continued my service with the new agency. Then, through the years, I was given levels of promotions.

I was the Branch Manager of Ilocos Norte for 16 years then later appointed as Deputy Administrator for Operations under the administration of Atty. Carlito S. Encarnacion. I came out of retirement in 2017 when I was appointed to the current NTA Governing Board.

How far has the agency achieved in terms of helping our tobacco growers and their communities?

The agency has gained significant accomplishments in its mandate to help uplift the living conditions of the farmers. These include functional and sustainable programs and projects like the provision of production assistance to the tobacco farmers that goes along with technical assistance provided by the agency through the extension workers, in the application of the recommended good agricultural practices to increase crop yield and improve the quality of tobacco.

To improve the livelihood of tobacco farmers, we provide additional income to tobacco farmers through the dispersal of chicken and cattle and distribution of vegetable seeds. We have the Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita project of Secretary William Dar where the agency purchases the hogs, as raw materials for various meat products, as an added value and purportedly to realize income for the agency.

All of these production assistance and programs are included in the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP), vigorously being pushed by NTA for more programs for tobacco farmers and sustained budget for implementation.

These programs are aligned with the Department of Agriculture's Reform Agenda by Secretary Dar, considering the principles of consolidation, mechanization, industrialization, and professionalization.

How does IFOIGAP differ from the STEP?

The IFOIGAP (Integrated Farming and Other Income-Generating Activities Program) envisions to improve the living conditions of the tobacco farmers. This encompasses not only tobacco but other crops, and other livestock intended to increase income of tobacco growers, not only from tobacco production but from other sources.

The STEP is more comprehensive; it encompasses more programs, projects, and initiatives of the NTA, including those under the IFOIGAP, for the development of the farmers. The big difference is the implementation of block farming, as a key strategy, in tobacco production, which have component projects and bigger funding requirements.

What is the NTA Governing Board doing now?

The Board approved the STEP as proposed by NTA management. We could see the nobility of intention of the STEP, with all its component projects that ultimately benefit the industry stakeholders, especially our farmers. With the approval, NTA is expected to be more functional and will be more receptive in addressing all the problems of the industry.

There is huge amount money that had been collected by the government under RA 4155 (Tobacco Fund). Unfortunately, there has been difficulty through the years in securing funding from DBM through this fund. We are hopeful, however, that with the vigorous commitment and leadership of Administrator JR Seares, NTA will be able to pursue these development projects under the STEP, using the Tobacco Fund.

The Board approved the resolution providing a 40% subsidy to the tobacco farmers availing of the production assistance from NTA. This is set to reduce the cost of production of the farmers.

Recognizing the importance of research as a catalyst of development, the Board approved various activities for research proposed by the NTA Management. Technology is dynamic so research is important in improving technologies in the production of the crop.

The Board also approved all initiatives for manpower developments as requested by the NTA management, knowing that they are the best resources of the agency in effecting efficiency and effectivity in the workplace. For the farmers, we will organize them, train them, give their associations

or cooperatives legal personality—all these will empower them to interact with other government agencies or local government units in terms of coming up with development efforts for their associations.

We are very supportive of the NTA management in its pursuit for better agency and, if we mean better agency, it's the agency that provides timely and appropriate services to the stakeholders particularly the farmers.

What will make the industry sustainable for the years to come?

The industry is still surviving despite the insurmountable problems that beset it. These problems include the stringent regulation in trading especially in the quality requirement of the crop, the smuggling of tobacco finished products, high taxation rates, the illicit manufacturing of cigarettes brought about by the proliferation of small mobile cigarette manufacturing, the unrelenting propaganda against smoking, to name a few.

I am embolden to forecast a better future for the industry. Provided, however, that all the industry stakeholders continue to undertake the strategic collaborations presently in place, and strengthen them further to negate the perennial issues and challenges the industry is facing. If we can sustain this, the industry will be better off in the years to come.

Do you think our farmers are doing well in tobacco production? Any words of advice for them?

I have one important advice. Farmers should recognize their responsibility in offering their cooperation for the further development of the industry. On the aspect of the production process, they should follow the recommended good agricultural practices in tobacco production, and follow the advice of our technical personnel in the Branch Offices to improve their yield. I urge the farmers to be responsible of their obligations.

The direction of the private sector, or the traders, and the NTA, is towards the production of high flavored tobacco. I encourage the farmers to enter this contract growing program, and ensure the adoption of the recommended technologies. This would answer the need for high quality tobacco of our traders.

Farmers should be more receptive, and adopt innovation and technology improvement in the production process. ■

NTA Pangasinan staff wins Women's Month Photo tilt

A PHOTO of women farmers harvesting Burley entered in the NTA 2021 Women's Month Photo Contest by Anne Margaret P. De Fiesta, KPP Surveyor of NTA Pangasinan, won First Prize. The photo was taken at a Burley farm in Barangay Capulaan in Balungao, Pangasinan on March this year.

The contest is in line with the celebration of the National Women's Month by the National Tobacco Administration, through the Gender and Development (GAD) Executive Committee. The winning photo captures the essential representation of this year's theme "JUANA, LABAN SA PANDEMYA: KAYA!"

Other winners were Gerylle Vanmarie T. Palabay, NTA La Union, second prize; and Aryann Pamela G. Sangil, NTA La Union, third prize. Mon Darvin C. Tejano, NTA La Union, and Daniel Roy A. Siababa of NTA Vigan got consolation prizes.

The winners were announced by Fortuna C. Benosa, Corporate Planning Manager and NTA GAD Focal Person, during the 34th NTA Anniversary celebrations on July 29.

Winning entries depict the important role played by Filipino women involved in the tobacco industry in leadership, power and decision making to survive the pandemic for herself, for her family and the community in general.

Winning photographers received cash prizes: P5,000 for the first prize winner; P3,000 for the second prize; P2,000 for the third prize; and P1,000 each for the consolation prizes.

Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano was the chairperson of the Board of Judges, with the Department Managers in the Central Office as members, in coordination with the Public Relations unit of the Office of the Administrator as Secretariat.

The contest ran from February 24 to March 24, 2021. ■



FIRST PRIZE. Anne Margaret P. De Fiesta, NTA Pangasinan.



SECOND PRIZE. Gerylle Vanmarie T. Palabay, NTA La Union; **THIRD PRIZE.** Aryann Pamela G. Sangil, NTA La Union.

INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE

QUICK GLANCE: DEPARTMENT PROFILE

- No. of Plantilla Positions: **5** (With on-going restructuring per GCG MO No. 2018-09 that created two new Divisions in the IAS)
- No. of JO Hiree: **1**

INTERNAL AUDITORS AS ENABLERS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

AS a component of the internal control system, internal audit is a strategic function in ensuring good governance throughout the Agency. The role of the internal auditor is not about fault-finding, neither investigative, nor punitive. As one of the accountability mechanisms in the NTA, the IAS reviews the degree of compliance of internal controls with laws and policies under the authority of the Administrator and the Governing Board/Audit Committee.

More than ever, IAS roles have evolved beyond the regulatory compliance responsibilities, by diving deeper into the vital facets of the NTA operations to provide insights in support of improvements and value creation. In addition to the regular management, operations, and compliance audits, IAS has focused on these value-adding activities:

- 1) **Risk Management:** The IAS facilitates the risk management undertaking of the Departments and Divisions. This includes risk assessment (identification, analysis, and evaluation) and risk treatment activities to determine present and future risks, the risk levels/scores, and the preparation of action plans to mitigate impact of these risks. This activity allows Departments to remain forward-looking and solution-oriented while ensuring service continuity.
- 2) **Internal Quality Audit (IQA) for ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Systems.** An annual activity, the IAS conducts internal quality audit of the Agency management systems prior to the 3rd party Surveillance/Recertification audits. During the IQA, Agency processes, systems and procedures are audited to determine their effectiveness to ensure achievement of objectives, their compliance to laws, rules and policies, and conformity with the requirements of the ISO Standards. An added value of the IQA is the identification of best practices, as well as areas for potential improvement.
- 3) **Citizen's Charter continuing review.** First published by the IAS in 2009, the NTA Citizen's Charter had undergone two revisions (2013 and 2021). The 2021 Citizen's Charter incorporated the changes to the RA 9485 or the Anti-Red Tape Act (ARTA) of 2007, as amended by Republic Act 11032, "An Act Promoting Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Delivery of Government Services."
- 4) **Consulting and advisory to Management and Governing Board/Audit Committee** on the extent of adequacy of internal controls instituted by the Agency to safeguard assets, to check accuracy and reliability of data, to adhere to policies, to comply with laws, rules and regulations, and to ensure economical, efficient and effective operations.

Giving equal focus on these value-adding activities, IAS can maximize its potential as the Agency's defense to dive into organizational operations, people, finances and processes to uncover any risks and constraints that could impact quality service delivery and mission-accomplishment. Ultimately, it is all about aligning the NTA goals through the balanced functionalities of internal audit. ■

(L-R: Rochelle C. De Peralta, Internal Auditor I; Rosalie P. Catura, Internal Auditor II; Dinah E. Pichay, Department Manager III; Charity P. Garcia, Internal Auditor IV; Krisyleen C. Jayme, Administrative Aide III (JO)



Internal auditing beyond the COVID-19 pandemic

OVER eighteen months since the pandemic impacted on the way we do things at work - from the way we communicate with our own teams and with other units in the NTA to the way we conduct our day-to-day processes, we have grown to adapt to these changes which may endure as long as the virus lingers and mutates even into new variants.

For a profession that relies mostly on face-to-face meetings, access to physical evidence, and on-site visits to gather and validate data and information, we at the IAS were probably the most reluctant to adopt the virtual transition because there are controls that cannot be validated remotely. The disruptive effect of mandatory lockdowns, however, has forced us to adopt alternative ways to perform our functions: the use of technology to conduct audits, employing innovative means of gathering and analyzing evidence, greater reliance on technology for basic communication, a continuous approach to assessing risks, and the hybrid workplace model.

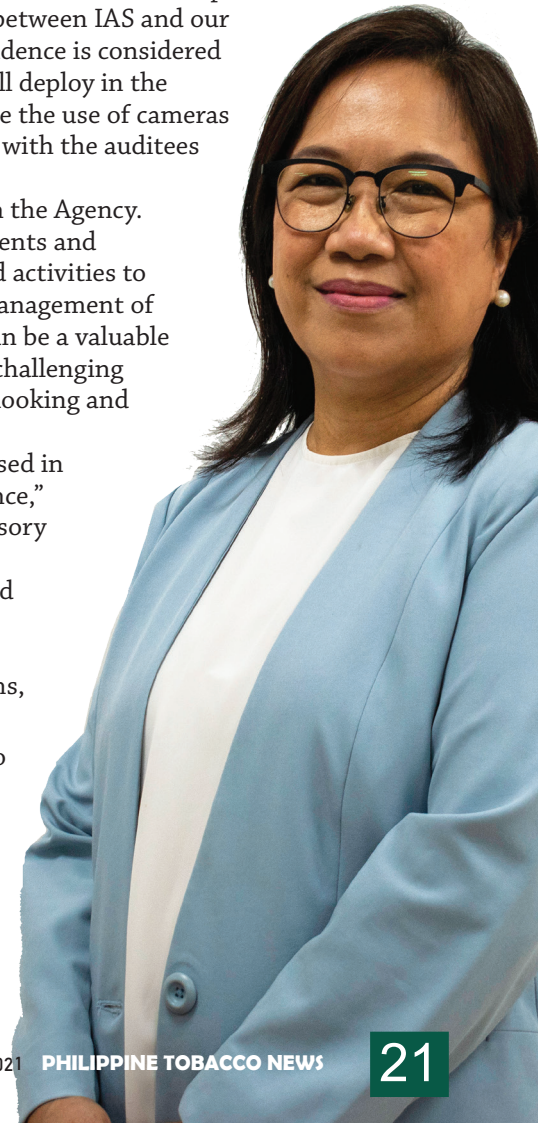
The use of technology to conduct audits was put to test during the CY 2020 and CY 2021 internal quality audit (IQA). While CY 2020 IQA was a combination of virtual and face-to-face interviews, CY 2021 IQA was entirely virtual via MS Teams platform, and we concluded that remote auditing is doable! A survey conducted to assess acceptability of the virtual platform also showed that 44.4% of our auditees favor remote audit, a surprisingly high number relative to our expectations.

So, how has COVID-19 changed IAS operations today and in the future?

- (1) The use of technology will be more critical to conducting internal audits. Thanks to sophistication of existing technologies, IAS auditors overcame the remote setback by showing a greater reliance on a collective array of virtual platforms and communications media (MS Teams, Zoom, FB messenger, viber, and the ever-dependable e-mails, etc.) to help us continue achieving day-to-day objectives from home.
- (2) We will be more focused on innovative means to gather and analyze evidence/data as part of internal audit processes. While the value of in-person interaction between IAS and our auditees, and the physical examination of documents and other evidence is considered the strongest basis for our conclusions, one creative solution we will deploy in the process of working around lockdowns and travel restrictions may be the use of cameras and/or video documentation using mobile phones, in coordination with the auditees themselves, as audit partners.
- (3) We will focus more on emerging risks and their possible impacts on the Agency. We will continue to facilitate risk assessment activities of Departments and Divisions. As management implements new processes, systems and activities to address the evolving needs due to the pandemic, IAS may advise management of potential vulnerabilities or gaps that may not be considered. We can be a valuable voice in providing a perspective on risks and their mitigation, and challenging assumptions. This will allow the different units to remain forward-looking and solution-oriented, while ensuring service continuity.
- (4) We will add more value through advisory and consulting. As discussed in the article (p. 20), "Internal Auditors as Enablers of Good Governance," the IAS will continue to perform value-adding, consulting and advisory functions. In providing these advisory roles, however, we continue to ensure that IAS is not a decision-maker and its independence and objectivity are not compromised.
- (5) Our face-to-face meetings will be replaced with virtual meetings using video streaming technologies (FB messenger, Viber, MS Teams, Zoom, etc.)

We are now gradually learning to live with the virus, and slowly getting to a "better normal." Nothing is forever, but it is unlikely that we will return to the way things were before the pandemic. Yet, one thing is certain: NTA, in general, and IAS, in particular, has proved its ability to be agile, innovative, and productive in an environment where priorities can shift overnight.

"There's always an opportunity with crisis. Just as it forces an individual to look inside himself, it forces a company to reexamine its policies and practices." -- Judy Smith



Scale-Up Production & Demonstration Trials on the Use of Tobacco Leaf Extract Emulsion for Controlling Sucking Insects of Vegetables

by R. J. Alcoy, M. J. C. Vives, I. C. Parbo, S. D. Abad, C. A. Cabigan, N. U. Castro, and R. R. Bonoan



TLEE setup exhibiting minimal wilting of eggplant in Dingras, Ilocos Norte. 2018

Rationale/Background of the Study

In line with the Organic Agriculture Program of the Department of Agriculture, tobacco leaf extract emulsion (TLEE) was developed to limit the use of synthetic pesticides in vegetable farms.

Insect infestation is one of the factors that result in lower crop yield. It is commonly managed by using synthetic or chemical-based pesticides. However, the indiscriminate use of synthetic pesticides causes environmental problems, such as resurgence of pests, accumulation of toxic residues in the environment, and destruction of beneficial fauna. To address this concern, plant extracts are utilized as organic pesticides to control sucking insect pests that feed on vegetables. Organic pesticides are readily available, biodegradable, and relatively safer to use.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted to optimize and scale up the production of TLEE and to test its efficacy against the insect pests that feed on vegetables, such as cabbage, cauliflower, eggplant, and sitao.

Experimental Design

Farmer cooperators (FCs) from Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, and Pangasinan were selected to participate in the study. The FCs cultivated either eggplant, pole and bush sitao, or cabbage. To compare the efficacy of TLEE, the FC's farm area was equally divided into two areas. Commercially available pesticide was applied to half of the crops while the remaining half was treated with TLEE.

Field testing was conducted in two cropping seasons: January to June

2018 and July to December 2018. There were 16 FCs during the first cropping season and 20 FCs during the second cropping season. The FCs in each branch office were assisted by a technician in the conduct of experiments and monitored their activities, such as data record-keeping (e.g., treatments used, volume of treatment, frequency of treatment application, and crop yield) and documentation. To evaluate the effect of TLEE, a rating scale survey and interview with the FCs were conducted. TLEE was assessed based on the FCs satisfaction, efficacy, ease of handling, occurrence of hazardous reaction, and reemergence of insect pests.

Locale of the Study

Field demonstration trials were conducted in Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, and Pangasinan.

Significant Finding and Implication

Prior to TLEE treatment application, the test crops were infested with green leafhoppers, aphids, stem borers, thrips, and whiteflies in all locations of the field demonstration trials. Eggplants were infested with sucking pests and some had cupped leaves with thick brownish to yellowish edges. Whiteflies, cutworms, and diamond-back moth were most prevalent in cabbage and cauliflower. Egg masses of cutworms were also present on the underside of cabbage leaves.

TLEE treatment effectively controlled insect infestation and improved the growth of plants. Pole and bush sitao grew healthy, robust, with greener leaves, and produced more flowers and pods. Those sprayed with commercially available insecticide had pale green leaves, infested with green leafhopper, and produced less flowers and pods. Interestingly, the TLEE-treated bush sitao produced normal-sized pods even when there was limited water supply. When used for growing cauliflowers, TLEE was observed effective at controlling the newly hatched and first instar larvae of diamond-back moth and cutworm if sprayed on time. TLEE-treated cabbage had few damaged heads.

The TLEE-treated eggplants in Ilocos Norte produced more branches with normal leaves and more fruits. There were less number of stem borer-infected plants; thus, wilting was minimal. The effects of TLEE and commercially available insecticide on eggplant were comparable as observed by the FCs in La Union. In Pangasinan, some FCs reported that TLEE treatment reduced the population of whiteflies on their crops.

Results of the rating scale survey showed that 75% of the FCs expressed satisfaction with the use of TLEE in addressing insect pest infestation. TLEE effectively controlled sucking insects on their crops and reduced the amount of use of commercially available pesticides to at most 70% as well as crop damage to less than 20%. In addition, 100% of the FCs agreed that the developed biopesticide was easy to prepare and use. They also expressed willingness to avail of the product once available in the market.

In conclusion, TLEE is effective in controlling crop insect pest infestation. It is a cheaper alternative to conventional farming method, and relatively safer to use. ■



Cabbage setup in San Juan, Ilocos Sur. 2nd cropping season, 2018.

FARMER'S PRACTICE SETUP

TLEE SETUP



Comparison of farmer's practice setup and TLEE setup in (a) Ilocos Norte and (b) La Union. 1st cropping season, 2018.



Different sucking insects present in the test crops, 2018.



220 tobacco growers get financial aid from Quirino, Isabela

TWO HUNDRED TWENTY tobacco growers received financial assistance from the local government of Quirino, Isabela.

The farmer beneficiaries came from the barangays of Manoaog, Sto. Domingo, San Vicente and San Jose, Quirino Isabela.

The distribution, held on July 19 at the town's *bagsakan* center, was spearheaded by the local officials headed by Quirino Mayor Edward D. Juan and NTA Isabela headed by Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda.

According to Mayor Juan, the assistance came from the LGU's share from the tobacco excise tax collection for locally

manufactured tobacco pursuant to Republic Act (RA) 8240. He added that the LGU also utilized their tax shares to purchase 22 brand new mini-dump trucks to be distributed to the tobacco-producing barangays.

Also present during the distribution were senior official from NTA Isabela: Joefrey T. Bautista, Chief Agriculturist; Lorelie B. Figarola, Accountant III; Perpetuo C. Dalloran, Senior TPRO; and Lagrimas B. Beltran, Acting TPRO III.

Quirino, Isabela has been the highest tobacco producing municipality in the Isabela for four consecutive years. ■

Rosario (LU) coop is DILEEP-Kabuhayan beneficiary

MEMBERS of the Brownleaf Farmers' Association of Rosario, La Union, Incorporated (BFARLU, Inc.), an NTA-assisted tobacco farmers' association, received one 4-wheel tractor with rotary tillers and three hand tractors with trailers from the local government of Rosario, La Union, through the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Integrated Livelihood Emergency Employment Program-Kabuhayan (DILEEP-Kabuhayan).

Said release was made possible through the assistance of NTA La Union and the municipal Public Employment Service Office (PESO).

Cristilita O. Mamungay, BFARLU acting president, received the tractors from Mayor Bellarmin A. Flores II and DOLE Regional Director Atty. Evelyn R. Ramos during turnover ceremony on September 1 at the Rosario Municipal Covered Court.

Also in attendance were Veronica A. Corsino, DOLE La Union Field Office Head; Engr. Juanito M. Quinto Jr, MPDC of Rosario; staff from NTA La Union; officers and members of BFARLU, Inc and two other Rosario-based associations, BUED CIS DAM IRRIGATORS Service Association, Inc., and Inabaan Sur Planters-Irrigators Association, both recipients of similar farm machineries.

DILEEP-Kabuhayan, as a flagship program of the DOLE, provides grant assistance for capacity-building on livelihood and entrepreneurial ventures for vulnerable and marginalized workers through their associations, cooperatives, and other accredited co-partners. ■



[Text and Photo: Kristin Mae S. Castañeda]

Sta. Maria, I. Sur builds multi-purpose centers from RA 7171, 8240 shares

THE LOCAL government of Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur released on August 13 photos of projects under construction funded by the share of municipality from the collection of tobacco excise taxes under Republic Act 7171 (Virginia) and 8240 (Burley and Native tobacco): (1) multi-purpose center located at Bia-o Elementary School and (2) farmers' multi-purpose building, both located in Brgy. Bia-o.

In another post, Sta. Maria LGU posted photos of the ongoing construction of seawall in the coastal barangay funded by the provincial shares from the tobacco excise tax collections.

The Sta. Maria Ilocos Sur FB account captioned the photos "BUILD, BUILD, BUILD" and indicated the sources of fund.

Former NTA Candon Branch Manager Estrella G. De Peralta shared the photos in her own FB account and thanked the tobacco growers for their contribution to the construction of infrastructures that benefit the tobacco-growing community.

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. in recent pronouncements has commended local executives who have used a bulk of their resources sourced from their shares of the tobacco excise tax to set up programs and projects for the benefit of their local farmers. (NTA Candon) ■



Multi-purpose center



Farmers multi-purpose building

Badoc farmers get inputs for tobacco production

THE LOCAL government of Badoc, Ilocos Norte released material inputs for tobacco production this crop year 2021-2022. Beneficiaries were 502 tobacco growers from the 16 tobacco-growing barangays of the municipality. Badoc Mayor Maximo D. Cajigal, Vice Mayor Alwyn Rubio and other local officials turned over bags of fertilizers, crop protection agents and suckercides to the farmers during the distribution held at the Ferdinand E. Marcos Sports Complex on September 7. Also present to facilitate the distribution were Area Supervisor Rosemarie T. Soriano and Michael John P. Dahilig, TPRO I, of NTA Ilocos Norte. ■



[Text and Photo: Rosemarie T. Soriano]

Roxas, Isabela tobacco growers get tillers

THE Roxas Tobacco Farmers Agricultural Cooperative received three units of rotary tillers with trailer from the local government of Roxas, Isabela, headed by Mayor Jonathan Jose C. Calderon.

NTA Isabela, headed by Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda and Chief Agriculturist Joefrey T. Bautista, graced the turnover of facility assistance held during the 73rd Araw ng Roxas on July 4 at the town's center.

According to the NTA Isabela, the amount used for the purchase of the tractors is part of the LGU's share from the excise tax collection of the national government for locally manufactured tobacco pursuant to Republic Act (RA) 8240.

For crop year 2020-2021, Roxas town had 1,230 Burley and Native tobacco growers, planting an aggregate area of 982 hectares. ■

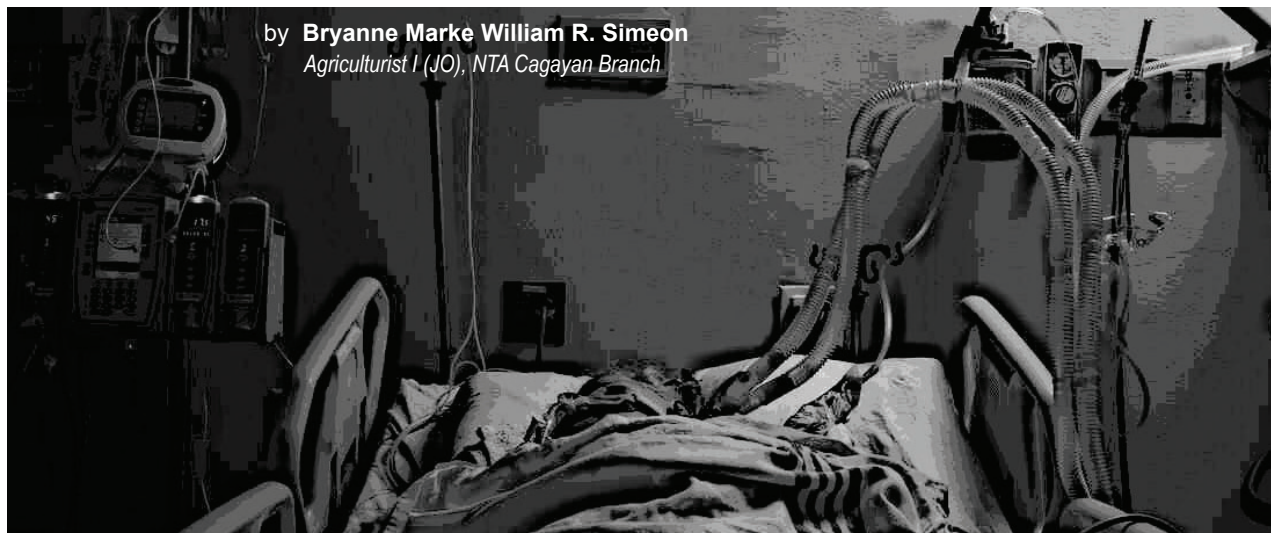
[Photos: NTA Isabela]



Fighting COVID-19

is a *Lonely War*

by **Bryanne Marke William R. Simeon**
Agriculturist I (JO), NTA Cagayan Branch



WHEN I learned about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) early last year, I was a bit skeptical. However, when I was presented with increasing number of cases, and when people around me started contracting the virus, I started to believe the hard facts and that I was in possible danger.

I experienced in late April 2021 dry cough and colds, two known symptoms of the virus, although these are also common in other illnesses. Then I learned that one of my colleagues at work was tested positive of the virus, and I was exposed to him a couple of days before I got the symptoms.

I got the real scare of my life when on April 27, 2021, after undergoing RT-PCR test I was found to have the virus infection. I was fetched by an ambulance from our house to the municipal quarantine facility.

What made my fight against the virus more difficult was the distress and the loneliness that I felt for being isolated for 14 days. Here I had nothing else to do and no other person to talk to. I never felt so alone in my life. The silence was deafening. I was able to hear every sound around me. I felt like a prisoner waiting for my daily ration of food.

On the first night of my isolation, I was coughing continuously, affecting my breathing. I took Chinese herbal

medicine to feel better. I cannot help but to be anxious and to overthink about things that were beyond my control. I kept asking myself. What if I infected my parents? What if they both get hospitalized by this virus? Every inch of my being was asking questions. There were lots of “what ifs” playing in my mind.

My only sense of relief, which helped me cope with quarantine stress, was the assistance given by my colleagues and loved ones who provided me with foods, and who continuously prayed for me.

After my 14-day quarantine in the facility, I spent another seven days at home to complete the 21-day quarantine.

At that time I thought I was done dealing with the virus, but I was wrong. There was nothing that could prepare me and my family for what was coming in our way. My father was rushed to the hospital on June 26. He was diagnosed with heart complication, and he was also a confirmed case of COVID-19.

My dad was admitted to a government facility which is the referral hospital for patients positive with the virus. Because of the danger of contracting the virus from him, my mom and I were advised by the doctors not to go with him inside the hospital. We requested that at least one of us will

be allowed to take care of my father. They agreed with a condition that we have to sign a waiver.

The anxiety and fear I felt when I had the virus heightened when my father got the virus. The feeling that you cannot stay beside the person you love the most and take care of him made me unable to sleep at home. So, I decided to sleep at the parking lot of the hospital to let myself feel closer to him and be ready anytime.

Stress and fatigue got into my mom in the four days that she was taking care of my dad in the hospital. She requested me to do the task in her stead. It was on the 30th of June when I replaced my mom in taking care of my dad.

I remember, while I was walking to the COVID ward, I could hear clearly the coughs of patients blending with sobs of people, echoing into the corridors. The ambiance in itself was really depressing. The depression was aggravated when I looked at my dad lying in his hospital bed. My dad smiled when he saw me, but, obviously, it was a forced smile. He looked emaciated, gone was his strong and muscular body that he had days before he was admitted. A nasal cannula was attached to his nose to help him breath.

It was extremely hard to see the person you love suffer that way. But

Mababa ang Presyo ng Tabako?

“Gusto ko sana maiparating sa National Tobacco Administration ang concern namin regarding sa presyo ng tabako dito sa Isabela, Cagayan Valley, dahil hindi kasi naaakasyunan ang concern na ito. Para sa mga farmers ay masyadong bumaba ang presyo at para naman ito sa lahat. Sana ay mabantayan naman ito ng NTA.” -- A concerned farmer

--oOo--

my father never allowed us to see that he was suffering. He even smiled from time to time to assure me that he was okay and that everything will be alright.

My dad had a diarrhea in the morning of July 2. That was the first time I saw him worn out. I would call the nurses from time to time, because I was afraid of what might have happened to him. Things had settled down around lunchtime so with his diarrhea, but after an hour or so, his condition worsened. He was hallucinating and stuttering that I barely understood his words. He told me to sign something, because someone will fetch him later that day. I told him to get stronger so that we can go home soon.

After our conversation, he fell asleep. At 4:00 in the afternoon, the nurse administered insulin to my dad and that time I felt something was not right. My dad did not flinch or react when he was injected. I tried to wake him up, but he was not responding. The nurse helped me in waking him up, but still he did not respond. I began to panic and I jolted him hard but, there was no response.

It was also frustrating, because it was only the nurse and I who had to do the difficult task of reviving my father. The doctor and the other nurses were outside the door, just giving their instructions. After a while, the doctor told me that we need to intubate my dad. But before the doctor could intubate my dad, he suffered a stroke and his heart beat stopped. They tried to revive him for several minutes.

I was so helpless knowing that I could not do anything but cry and pray beside the door. Everything fell apart the moment I knew my father had lost his bout against the virus. I lost my hero, best friend, and confidant in everything good or bad in my life.

Having contracted the virus is traumatic enough, and losing someone due to the virus is worse. My father's death left a huge scar in my heart. A scar so deep that would never heal.

This pandemic should not be taken lightly, because one exposure could put your life or the life of the one you care for at risk. Be vigilant and strictly follow COVID-19 protocols.

The road to recovery is a lonely struggle. Let us stop risking each other's lives. The war is not yet over. ■

NAGPAPASALAMAT ang NTA Isabela sa pagpuna ng ating magsasaka sa presyo ng tabako na maaring sanhi ng pagbaba ng kanilang kita nitong nagdaang anihan at pagbebenta ng kanilang ani.

Nais naming ipabatid sa kinaaukulan na ang presyo ng tabako ay may basehan (floor price/base price per grade) kada grado.

Ang floor price ay pinag-uusapan, pinagkakasunduan at inaaprobahan sa isang pagpupulong (tri-partite conference) ng tatlong kalahok; farmer representative, contracting buyer firm at NTA. Ito ay ginaganap pagkatapos ng dalawang sunod na taon sa pagtatanim ng tabako para may magamit ang mga bumibili.

Ang hindi pagsunod ng buyer firm sa napagkasunduan at inaprobang presyo ng tabako sa naturang pagpupulong ay may karampatang kaparusahan na pagmulta o di kaya pagkabilanggo at ito ay serious offense. Ito'y nakasaad sa Trading Rules and Regulation (Reg. XIV, a.1).

Kaya naninindigan ang opisina na walang nagawang pagbaba o di kaya hindi pagsunod ng mga buyer firm sa presyo ng tabako dahil ito ay lubusang binabantayan ng mga kawani ng opisina (Tobacco Production and Regulation Officers) mula sa umpisa ng pagbili hanggang sa huling araw.

Ang ating mga kawani ay nasa mga buying station araw-araw na nagbabantay at kung meron mang taliwas o hindi pagkakaintindihan sa pagitan ng mga magsasaka at mga classifiers tungkol sa grado ng kanilang tabako ay agarang binibigyang lunas ng ating opisina sa pamamagitan ng Mediation o Arbitration. Sa ganitong pagkakataon ay mamagitan ang opisina at itinatama ang grado sa bulto ng tabako ng magsasaka. Ang gawaing ito ay ginagawa at tinutupad kalahok ang buyer firm at ang magsasaka.

Matagumpay ang mga nangyayaring mediation o arbitration dahil sa kooperasyon ng bawat kalahok at sa kanilang pagsasang-ayon sa solusyon sa bawat problemang binibigyang-lunas.

Bagamat inaamin ng opisina na may pagbabago sa kita ng mga magsasaka ngayon kumpara sa nagdaang taniman ng tabako, gusto naming ipaliwanag na ang pagbabagong ito ay hindi sanhi ng pagbaba ng presyo kundi sa pagbaba ng kalidad ng tabako ng mga magsasaka. Ang aning dahon ng tabako ay nabibili alinsunod sa kanyang klase o kalidad na may karampatang presyo.

Nais din naming ipabatid na nitong huling pagtatanim ay hindi masyadong maganda ang panahon na nagdulot ng di magandang kalidad ng dahon ng tabako ng mga magsasaka.

Naramdaman natin na mula sa buwan ng Marso hanggang Hunyo noong nakaraang taon ay halos walang ulan sa buong rehiyon na nagdulot ng masyadong mainit na panahon na sanhi naman ng agarang pagkatuyo ng dahon (flash cured) at manila-nilaw (yellowish) na kulay.

Alam din natin na kung hindi hinay-hinay ang pagpapatuyo at pagkundiyon (curing and conditioning/fermentation) ng dahon ng tabako ay magiging matigas at kulubot (sleak tobacco/lesser elasticity) ito. Ang ganitong uri ng dahon ay nakakakuha lamang ng mababang klase (low grade). Ito ang dahilan kung bakit bumaba ang kita sa tabako sa taong ito dahil hindi gaanong maganda ang panahon.

Alam namin na ito ang hinaing ng mga magsasaka kung bakit bumaba ang kanilang kita at hindi ang pagbaba ng presyo. Sa lahat ng produkto sa bukid ay ang panahon (weather) ang pangunahing sanhi na magdulot ng kasaganaan ng ating ani.

Sa nangyaring pagbaba sa kita ng ating magsasaka, kami rin po ay lubos na nalulungkot.

Ang inyong lingkod,

CORAZON R. RIAZONDA, Ph.D.

Department Manager III, NTA Cagayan



DUTERTE Legacy: PLANT, PLANT, PLANT



RECORD PALAY PROD'N

- 19.44 M MT in 2020
- 90% rice self-sufficiency
- More affordable rice available



RECORD CORN PROD'N

- Highest production in 20 years at 6.01 M MT in 2020
- Lowest inflation rate at -2.53% in 2020



LIVESTOCK PROD'N

- Six LGUs in Batangas declared ASF-free
- Implemented "Bantay ASF sa Barangay" & hog repopulation program
- Produced record chicken output, at 1.93 M MT in 2019; chicken eggs, at 605,790 MT in 2020; duck eggs, at 50,480 MT in 2020



HIGH-VALUE CROPS PROD'N

- Banana's highest export volume reached 4.4 M MT in 2019
- Onion is at 90% sufficiency level in 2020



FISHERY PROJECTS

- 29,620 units of fiberglass reinforced plastic boats distributed
- 680 community fish landing centers established
- 60 regional and municipal fish ports constructed/rehabilitated



KADIWA NI ANI AT KITA

- Total sales to date of Php7.7 B
- Served 3.8 M households



URBAN AGRICULTURE

- 2,400+ urban gardens nationwide in partnership with 200 LGUs, private sector entities, civil society groups



INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

- Completed 5,291 (4,108km) Farm to Market Roads projects;
- Constructed and rehabilitated 49,154 Small-Scale Irrigation Projects;
- Constructed 78,359m irrigation canals;
- Constructed and upgraded 13,064 production facilities and 1,085 postharvest facilities.

A food-secure and resilient Philippines with empowered and prosperous farmers and fisherfolk.



NATIONAL TOBACCO ADMINISTRATION
nta.da.gov.ph

Tobacco Grower of the Year

"Ti tabako ti kanayon a makatultulong kadakami iti panagtalonmi. Makaurnongkami iti aramatenmi iti sumaruno a panagmumula, ken dadduma pay a kasapulanmi. Gapu pay kadagiti apitmi, napatarimaanko ti pagtaenganmi. Nakatulung unay ti financial assistance manipud iti NTA iti panagmulami iti tabako, ken uray pay iti pagay; adda pay ipapaayda para iti panagpugonmi. Agyamanak iti NTA kadagiti programa ken serbisioda kadakami nga agmulmula. Nangnangruna kadakayo amin a mangidadaulo iti ahensia, ni Apo Administrator Robert Victor Seares Jr. ken ti OIC Manager ti NTA Ilocos Norte, ma'm Luzviminda U. Padayao."



Rodrigo A. Yago, 66, of Brgy. Ar-arusip, Badoc, Ilocos Norte, is one of the winners of the Tobacco Growers of the Year award, Branch Level for crop year 2019-2020. He was recognized, among other criteria, for achieving the maximum income from their labor.

The TGY winner for CY 2019-2020 had an average yield of 3,200 kg/ha and net income of P133,519 per hectare, with ROI of 145%. (NTA Ilocos Norte)