



PHILIPPINE TOBACCO NEWS

ISSN-0116-4183

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL TOBACCO ADMINISTRATION

Volume XII * No. 4

October - December 2021

Tobacco Farmers' Production Assistance *For Market-driven Production Program*



For all our efforts, the agency is guided by our Farmers First policy, so we offer subsidy for assistance and other interventions for productivity in recognition of the huge contributions of our tobacco growers to the national economy.

Administrator/CEO ROBERT VICTOR G. SEARES JR.



Natatangi at Tapat na Adhikain



BENEDICTO M. SAVELLANO
Deputy Administrator for Support Services

INSIDE

Special Feature: Office of the Deputy Administrator for Support Services

Production Assistance, p. 12 * Gulayan at Manuka, p. 14 * Research: Evaluation of Chewing Batek Tobacco, p. 20 * Aringay, La Union Top Farmers' Coop, p. 22 * LGUs Update, p. 24 * Year-End Assessment and Team-Building, p. 27

On production assistance

THE pronouncement of Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. flashed on the cover is helpful to explain the public about production assistance. This is in light of the proposal of Senator Cynthia Villar, during a Senate hearing in November on the NTA budget, to “transfer a bigger portion, if not all,” of the production assistance to augment the emergency cash assistance (ECA) given to farmers who are affected by recent calamities.

The production assistance is included in the annual National Expenditure Program (NEP), amounting to P505.5 million for the current crop year. The ECA, on the other hand, was an intervention program funded by a realigned budget as an immediate assistance to farmers during the pandemic that started in the first quarter of 2020. For this year, the agency is proposing P100 million for ECA, this time, to assist farmers whose tobacco farms were damaged by freak rains early in January and February.

Farmers are in dire need of immediate cash assistance to cushion the adverse effect of calamities and the ongoing pandemic on their livelihood. That’s why the agency is proposing for a full budget for the production assistance, in addition to the ECA budget.

While a clarificatory letter has been sent to the office of Senator Villar, we prepared the infographics, which was first posted in the official NTA FB page to call for public awareness on why the NTA, as in other government agencies related to agriculture, allots considerable sum to help our farmers produce quality tobacco as required by the global market.

To raise productivity, the NTA is keen to strengthen the production and delivery efficiency of agricultural inputs (seeds and fertilizers) and strong extension services to ensure adoption and efficiency of technology. The effectiveness of other inputs also depends largely on the type and quality of post-harvest facilities such as curing barns or sheds.

NTA allotted about 20% of its total budget under the 2022 NEP, representing all its capital outlay of P100 million for the Tobacco Farmers’ Production Assistance and another P100 million for the Curing Barn Assistance Project for every crop year. The Branch Offices distribute the assistance directly to their tobacco growers under the Tobacco Contract Growing System, in the form of cash and material inputs with a 40% subsidy.

A bulk of the production assistance, or about 38% of the total budget, goes to provision of material inputs, such as fertilizers. The rest goes to the provision of other material inputs (crop protection agents) and cash assistance for gas and oil, land preparation, payment of seedlings, fuelwood for flue-curing and labor.

After the senate hearing, the Office of Sen. Christopher Lawrence “Bong” Go released P50 million to the agency for its Emergency Cash Assistance Program, and said grant will be included in the General Appropriations Act of CY 2022 as stand-by emergency cash assistance for tobacco growers.

Increasing crop productivity, however, requires going beyond the distribution of production, facility or emergency cash assistance. Farmers must also be trained in the use of good agricultural practices in production and value-adding activities. This is achieved by organizing the farmers into clusters or corporate farming under a block farming scheme of the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP) which is now being implemented.

This approach and strategy, in our view, will lead us to our ultimate goal of increasing productivity and farmers’ income. ■



From the Editor

Being Strong and Resilient Together

THE lockdowns and suspensions of work during the pandemic have forced private and government offices to take hard decisions, and the NTA is no different. We have to do things for our safety, that we forego with a heavy heart all socializations that we normally do. It is really impossible to have a gathering due to strict safety protocol and we can’t complain.

We understand how important being together again, as if nothing happened, and revert to our normal work schedules. A silver lining came in the middle of November, with the reported rapid decline in COVID-19 cases in Metro Manila. We resumed 100% onsite reporting capacity after weeks of alternative work arrangements. By then, everyone in the Central Office had gotten their second dose of COVID vaccines and are rarin’ to work under the “new normal.”

Omicron variant scare, however, came at a time when we are about to celebrate for the respite. So we planned activities with caution. Then another respite came toward the second week. No outbreak of Omicron as feared happened, and positive cases in a downtrend yet again. It came just in time for planning and preparation activities for December and year-end activities.

Then while everyone started to go malling and feeling like life has been refreshed for real, we hurried off to Zambales for the team building activities and year-end convocation (see page 27). A much needed get-together, indeed. The two-day event went very well and, I believe, everyone had a wonderful time, for a great cause and we captured so many great pictures to share with everyone.

It hit all of the right notes and it made members of the NTA family closer. We haven’t laughed so much and had so much fun in a while as everyone has been so busy dodging the virus.

And while everyone was still talking about the event after a week and the next, Metro Manila grappled with another upgrade of Alert Level (from 2 to 3). Sigh.

We can get through this again, as we are strong and resilient! **(Neyo E. Valdez)**



NTA Regulation Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros joins Administrator Seares during the six-day conference. (Arman Anga-angan)

NTA joins WHO FCTC confab, backs gov't stand

NTA participated via virtual meeting platform in the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) 9th Convention of Parties (COP 9) held on November 8 to 13.

In a statement, NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., who is also part of the Department of Agriculture's (DA) official delegation, highlighted the importance of tobacco industry in the country's economy.

"The tobacco industry in the Philippines continues to dominate the agricultural, economic, social, and political aspects of the country. It has proved that among the non-food crops in the agriculture sector, tobacco has been grown commercially, steadily contributing its part to the economy," Administrator Seares said.

"More than anything, we are continuously pushing for a balanced policy on tobacco products, in order to ensure a healthy environment while taking in the interests of our tobacco farmers, and the rest of our stakeholders," Administration Seares concluded in his statement.

The tobacco industry helps the national government curb the country's poverty by providing jobs for millions of farmers, which is vital as the world is currently slowly recovering from the onslaught brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Administrator also joined top Philippine officials in rallying support for Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. in promoting an "inclusive and participative" country position in the World Health Organization (WHO) conference on addressing the problem on smoking.

During the opening of the conference, Locsin said tobacco is a source of bad health but acknowledged that it "is also a source of good through taxation."

Locsin added that tobacco tax laws underscore the importance of tobacco use and funding of the state's most important activities. They funded government's poverty reduction, Universal Health Care, and COVID-19 recovery programs.

Locsin also noted that the tobacco industry is making progress in moving away from harmful products by introducing "products with similar satisfaction but with far less harm."

Those who gave their support for the Philippine delegation were Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III and Deputy Speaker and Ilocos Sur (1st Dist.) Rep. Deogracias Victor Savellano.

"Tobacco control approach cannot be one-dimensional. Health and economic aspects should both be considered as we have more than 2.2 million individual workers and dependents who get their income from tobacco production, trading, manufacturing and distribution," Bello said.

Savellano commended Secretary Locsin "for safeguarding the rights and welfare of all stakeholders and carrying the Philippines' position to adopt a balanced and evidence-based regulations in tobacco control."

The FCTC, a global accord under the auspices of the WHO governed by the COP composed of representatives from all signatories to the treaty, conducted the biennial meeting to discuss the progress of the treaty's implementation and policy recommendations for its member states. ■

PHILIPPINE TOBACCO NEWS

is published quarterly by the **Department of Agriculture - National Tobacco Administration**
3rd and 4th Floor, Ben-Lor Building, 1184 Quezon Ave., Quezon City, Tel. Nos. (02) 3743987. Fax: (02) 3732095. Website: www.nta.da.gov.ph.

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Acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana joins NTA Vigan Manager Minerva P. Mizal and her staff, farmer leaders, and local officials in the blessing of the Farmers' Training Center in San Juan, Ilocos Sur. (Tomasito G. Talozza)

Blessing of Tobacco Farmers' Training Center in San Juan, Ilocos Sur

by Tomasito G. Talozza

NTA Vigan had a blessing of the newly constructed Tobacco Farmers' Training Center in Bannuar, San Juan, Ilocos Sur on December 14.

The blessing, led by Rev. Fr. George Tabangcura, was attended by Acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, NTA Vigan Manager Minerva P. Mizal, San Juan LGU Officials headed by Mayor Ma. Elaine A. Sarmiento, Vice Mayor Benjamin V. Sarmiento, and members of the Sangguniang Bayan, tobacco farmer-leaders headed by Bernard R. Vicente and Arlyn Vega, the NAFTAC National President and Secretary, respectively.

Mizal expressed her profound gratitude to the LGU of San Juan, for providing the space for the construction of the two-story training center, and for their unwavering support to the tobacco farmers and to the programs and projects of NTA.

The training center will be used by tobacco farmers for various tobacco production seminars and livelihood trainings and will also serve as a venue for the launching programs and events of the Vigan Branch Office and the continuing capability enhancement programs of its personnel. It is strategically situated at the center of the First District of Ilocos Sur, guaranteeing easy accessibility to all tobacco farmers within the district.

The groundbreaking ceremony of the training center was conducted in January 2020, but construction was suspended during the lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. ■

NAFTAC reelects president, other officers

BERNARD R. Vicente, farmer leader of Sinait, Ilocos Sur, was given another term as Chairman of the National Federation of Tobacco Farmers Association and Cooperatives (NAFTAC) in the elections held during the virtual Consultative Meeting of farmer leaders organized by the Operations Group of NTA on December 10.

Vicente was elected for his first term in July 2018, replacing Mario C. Cabasal.

Bienvenido G. Millare, chairman of NAFTAC Abra Chapter, was also reelected as Executive Vice Chairman of the organization.

Other elected officers: Cesario Gapatan of Candon Branch, Vice-Chairman (Virginia Neutral); Orlando Valenciano of Ilocos Norte, Vice-Chairman (Virginia Improved Flavor); Saturnino Distor of Pangasinan, Vice-Chairman (Burley Neutral); Zosimo Solito of Isabela, Vice-Chairman (Burley Improved Flavor); Reymund Piñon of Cagayan, Vice-Chairman

(Native Cigar Filler); Franklin Dumpit of La Union, Vice-Chairman (Native Batek); Arlyn Vega of Vigan, Secretary; Nestor Padron of Ilocos Norte, Treasurer; and Donie Bernardino of Isabela, Auditor.

Vicente and the officers took their oath of office via virtual induction administered by Acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana.

NAFTAC, organized in 2011, is the duly recognized partner of NTA in bringing about significant developments in the social and economic lives of the farmer-members and the tobacco-farming community in General.

Prior to the elections, the farmer leaders participated in the discussion of Sustainable Tobacco Production, Good Agricultural and Labor Practices, proposed utilization of funds from excise taxes under Republic Acts 7171, 8240, and 4155 and other issues and concerns. ■



Farmer leader Bernard Vicente joins the NAFTAC elections and the preceding stakeholders' consultation from NTA Vigan Branch Office in Bantay, Ilocos Sur. (Tomasito G. Talozza)



NTA brings 'ayuda' to Typhoon Maring victims

by Immanouel A. Rafanan

NTA Vigan, with the help of Trans-Manila, Inc. and volunteers, conducted relief operations for typhoon Maring victims in Barangay Butir in Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur on October 20.

The Branch Office turned over much-needed bottles of drinking water, food packs, including rice and assorted groceries, blankets, and hygiene kits to 125 households from the three sitios of the barangay. The volunteer staff, headed by NTA Vigan Manager Minerva P. Mizal, helped in the distribution, in coordination with Butir Barangay Chairman Arnel Peralta.

Butir is one of the hardest hit barangays during the onslaught of typhoon Maring on October 12, causing billions of pesos of damages in properties, infrastructures, and agricultural crops in Ilocos Sur and other parts of Luzon.

According to Mizal, the Branch Office initiated the fund drive from donations of their own staff, then donations from

various groups, institutions and individuals poured in after an information of the drive was posted in FB.

Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. donated a month's worth of his salary to the victims of Typhoon Maring. He has instructed the Finance Department to send his November salary to the victims in Ilocos through the Branch Offices in areas affected by the typhoon.

Other individuals who gave their donations were NTA managers, retirees from Vigan Branch, the head of a local leaf buying firm, and some generous friends. TMI donated cash for the fund drive and provided the trucks for the loading of the relief packs to the distribution area.

Mizal shared: "We are very thankful to our donors, showing the true *bayanihan* spirit, and we are very happy to help and deliver the *ayuda* to the residents who were affected by the typhoon." ■



NTA Candon, in cooperation with Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. (ULPI), distributed relief goods to 200 tobacco farmers in Sta. Maria and Sta. Cruz towns, in Ilocos Sur, who were severely affected by flooding due to the onslaught of typhoon Maring.

Acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana led the distribution of relief goods in barangays Padaoil, Lantag, Saoat, and Bugbuga in Sta. Cruz town on October 29. With him during the distribution were acting Supervising TPRO Amelia Veronica Lacaden and Area III staff, and ULPI Manager Wilfredo Mendoza.

Branch Chief Agriculturist Adonis D. Lazo, Area I Supervisor Helen Teodora D. Peña and staff, along with ULPI Manager Denise Maurine Barcelon, proceeded on the same day to barangays Nagsayaoan, Laslasong West, Baliw Laud, Poblacion Sur, and Cabaroan in Sta. Maria. (Edgar C. Torres & Harvin Herald Lumbania)

NTA Cagayan: Block farming, NTA projects

by Josefa P. Correo & Bryanne Marke William R. Simeon

NTA Cagayan conducted seminar on Block Farming and other projects for farmer leaders representing farmers' cooperatives and associations in the province, held on December 14 at the old training hall of the Branch Office in Tuguegarao City.

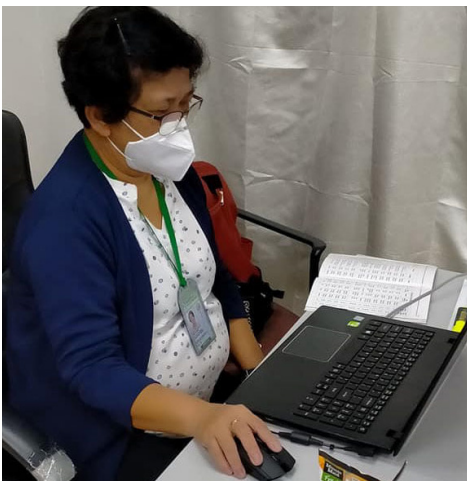
Twenty-eight farmer leaders, including Reymund Piñon, National Vice-Chairman (Native Cigar Filler) of the National Federation of Tobacco Farmers Association and Cooperatives, attended the seminar spearheaded by Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda.

Riazonda discussed the rationale of the seminar, including OneDA Agenda of the Department of Agriculture and Values Reorientation. Chief Agriculturist Gilbert A. Taguiam discussed the Block Farming Program while Supervising TPRO Alicia A. Malab presented the NTA 2020-2021 Project Accomplishment Report.

For the current cropping season, NTA Cagayan has organized seven block farms with an aggregate area of 175 hectares involving 393 farmers.

Piñon commended the agency for conducting the seminar on block farming as he exhorted other farmer leaders to sustain their efforts in promoting the interest of the farmers and the tobacco industry in general.

According to Riazonda, the farmer leaders are very thankful for the 40% subsidy in the production assistance provided by the agency for the Block Farming. ■



IRD OIC Manager Myrna O. Lozano is the main resource person in the seminar



NTA Cagayan Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda discusses guidelines on block farming and other component projects of the STEP before farmer leaders during the one-day seminar. (Joven Erico E. Reyes)

IRD: Harmonized grading for new EWs, researchers

THE NTA Industrial Research Department (IRD) conducted a two-day virtual orientation seminar on the Harmonized Grading System for Locally Grown Burley Tobacco on November 23-24.

Participants were new Tobacco Production and Regulation Officers (TPROs), Agriculturists, and Researchers from the branch offices in Cagayan, Ilocos Norte, Isabela, La Union, Pangasinan, and Vigan, including the three departments – Farm Technology and Services, Industrial Research, and Regulation.

IRD Officer-in-Charge Myrna O. Lozano said that the seminar also aims to equip the participants with practical application of knowledge in actual trading operations and to assess the implementation of the Harmonized Leaf Grading System for Burley and Virginia Tobacco.

The IRD Quality Assurance Division (QAD) facilitated the seminar, with QAD OIC Dina B. Dela Reyna, as moderator and Cyrus Raymond C. Olivenza, Science Research Specialist II, and Engr. Kathlyn Mae A. Tejano, Science Research Specialist I, as lecturers.

Topics discussed were keys to standard grade marks; degree of elements of leaf quality in terms of leaf color and position, maturity, uniformity, injury, and waste; grade marks and description by leaf position; and NTA grade equivalents of the harmonized grade description.

NTA Cagayan Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda and Chief Agriculturists Gilbert A. Taguiam (NTA Cagayan) and Joefrey T. Bautista (NTA Isabela) contributed insights in the discussion of the harmonized grading system.

Deputy Administrators Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana (Operations) and Benedicto M. Savellano (Support Services) graced the opening day of the virtual seminar. ■ (Cyrus Raymond C. Olivenza & Melanie Rapiz-Parel)

Online capacity building training for Communication Support Group

by **Melanie Rapiz-Parel**

THE Public Relations unit of the Office of the Administrator conducted an online training seminar for the members of its Communication Support Group on December 9 via Microsoft Teams.

The one-day training was aimed at enhancing competencies of designated information officers and social media administrators of the Branch Offices and Departments in information dissemination through relevant information for publications or social media posting.

Rita T. Dela Cruz, head of Social Media Team of the Strategic Communications Office of the Department of Agriculture, was the resource person on the first session: “Making an Effective Infographics for Social Media.”

The second session focused on “Building a Better Social Media Presence” presented by Dela Cruz and Dinah E. Pichay, Manager of Internal Audit Service. Pichay provided reminders on social media etiquette, particularly on the official social media pages of the agency and the branch offices.

Neyo E. Valdez, Public Relations Officer V and Head of PR Unit, and Kathleen Mae B. Bulquerin, Information Officer II (JO), presented the Communication Guidelines

and Editorial Standards for Information, Education, and Communications (IECs), reminders on effective news writing, editing and making relevant posts on social media.

In his message, delivered by Atty. Jun Fred V. Parado, Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., stressed the important role of the information officers in communicating truthful and relevant information to the industry stakeholders, especially under the new normal where people turn to social media for immediate access to information.

Administrator Seares also encouraged the participants to continue promoting good rapport with the local media outlets and the general public in the performance of their tasks.

Deputy Administrators Benedicto M. Savallena (Support Services) and Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana (Operations) also graced the online event with their video messages.

Workshop on making infographics followed after Dela Cruz’s lecture. Three outputs were adjudged best among those presented by the participants: Gay Anne B. Ronduen of the Farm and Technology Service Department, first place; Leonora P. Nudo of the Industrial Research Department, second; and Kristin Mae S. Castañeda of NTA La Union, third. ■

NTA La Union: Tobacco contract growing

by **Aryann Pamela G. Sangil**



Photos: Mark Joseph Forges, Kristin Mae S. Castañeda

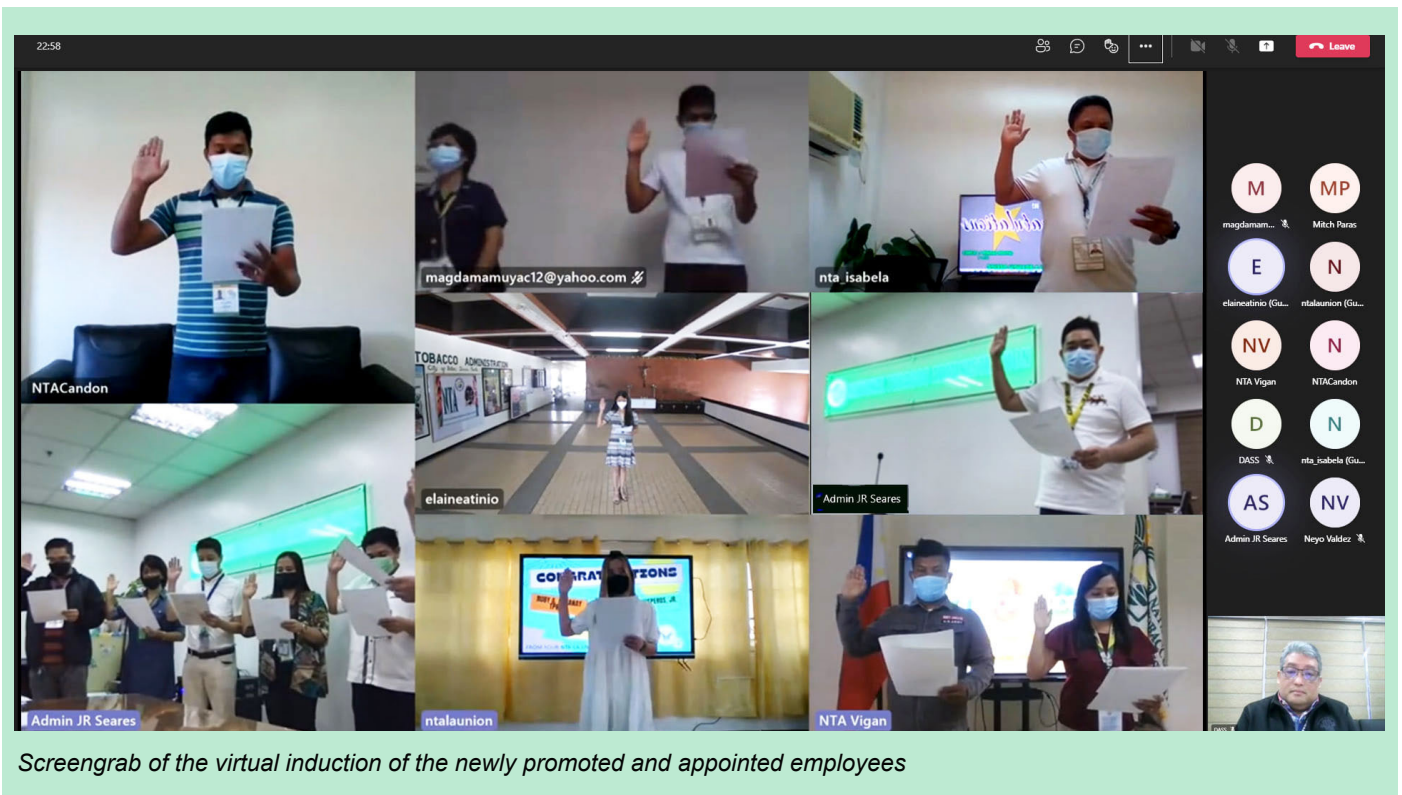
NTA La Union conducted an orientation-seminar for the Tobacco Contract Growing System project for crop year 2021-2022 in various municipalities of La Union from December 1-15.

A total of 1,591 tobacco farmers from the municipalities of Aringay, Bacnotan, Balaoan, Bangar, Bauang, Rosario, San Juan, Santol, Sto. Tomas, and Sudipen, and San Fernando City attended the orientation-seminar in separate schedules.

NTA La Union Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay spearheaded the discussions of the Implementing Guidelines of the TCGS projects. Chief Agriculturist Emma Beth B. Fantastico joined Manager Palabay in the discussion of various projects of the agency, including good agricultural practices.

Also discussed in the series of seminars was crop insurance under the fully subsidized Insurance Program for High Value Crops, of which tobacco is one of the HVCs, by the Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation (PCIC).

Representatives of buying stations, participating as market tie-up for the tobacco production, also attended the seminars to discuss their company’s policy relative to tobacco contract growing. ■



NTA holds virtual induction for new promotions, appointments

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. administered the oath of office of newly promoted and appointed employees in a virtual group induction held on October 28.

The promotions include positions for two division chief levels. They were given to Adonis D. Lazo as the new Chief Agriculturist and head of Operations of the Candon Branch, and Felisa D. Aurellano, as Chief Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer (TPRO) and head of the Production Support Services Division of the Farm Technology and Services Department in Batac City.

Also inducted into higher positions were Marivic G. Espolng, from Financial Analyst III to Budget Officer IV of the Finance Department; Divina D. Pagdilao, from Agriculturist II to Supervising TPRO of Ilocos Norte Branch; Winiefreda V. Fangon, from TPRO I to Cashier III of Candon Branch; Saturnino A. Agatep, from TPRO III to Senior TPRO of Ilocos Norte Branch; Marilene V. Sansano, from Secretary I to Budget Officer II of the Finance Department; Elmerante A. Ginez, from Agriculturist I to Cashier II of Cagayan Branch.

Three other extension workers were promoted to TPRO III: Romel E. Calautit (Ilocos Norte), Ambrocio R. Nisperos Jr. (La Union), and Ruby A. Dacanay (La Union).

The newly appointed Legal Officer of the agency, Atty. Jun Fred V. Parado, Attorney V, is the highest ranked officer in the set of newly appointed staff in the virtual induction. The office of the Legal Officer is under the Office of the Administrator at the Central Office in Quezon City.

Two of the newly inducted regular employees are also from the Central Office, namely, Cyrus Raymond C. Olivenza, Science Research Specialist II of the Industrial Research Department; and Raymund M. Marzan, Reproduction Machine Operator II of the Administrative Department.

The others are from the Branch Offices: Nasser John F. Ragasa, TPRO I, and Liezl Margarette R. Guzman, Computer Operator II, of the Vigan Branch; Aryann Pamela G. Sangil, Secretary I of La Union Branch; Leo C. Rante, Agriculturist I of Candon Branch; Manuel M. Delfin Jr., TPRO I of Pangasinan Branch; Leazyl V.

Casauran, Agriculturist I of Ilocos Norte Branch; and Jayson Darwin T. Leones, Driver II of the Isabela Branch.

All the promotions and appointments were approved by the Civil Service Commission in separate issuances.

In his message, Administrator Seares said that concomitant to the positions given to the employees is the chance to serve the country, especially in these challenging times. "You deserve that position you are holding now and take pride being part of the NTA family."

The Administrator ordered in January the Administrative Department to accelerate the filling-up of vacant positions to enhance the manpower capability of the agency for its upcoming projects under the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program, and to boost employment in the government.

The first ever virtual induction in the agency was witnessed by Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano, who has oversight function over the Human Resource Merit Promotion, Placement and Selection Board (HRMPSB). ■

Administrator urges employees to show worth as gov't workers

by **Melanie Rapiz-Parel**

IN A MESSAGE to the virtual orientation seminar for newly hired employees on October 26, Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. exhorted the employees to show their worth as government workers, stating that they are among the fortunate few to get employment in the government sector.

“Take pride in wearing your agency ID, as this shows that you are professional government workers in service of our farmers,” he said, as he urged them to help protect the integrity of the agency with their professionalism and hard work.

Administrator Seares also encouraged the 25 new employees to make good use of the information provided in the seminar and help improve the service provided by the agency to all industry stakeholders.

The new employees were given orientation on organizational knowledge, how to be a good public servant, employees association, employees statutory benefits, safe and healthy workplace, property accountability, leave administration, salary adjustment, strategic performance management, and filling up of IPCRs (Individual Performance Commitment Review).

In his inspirational message, Regulation Department Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, shared his success story as a government worker at the agency, highlighting his 4Ps principle—projection, perseverance, performance and patience—from which the new employees can learn to succeed in government.

Perla C. Manzon, chief of the

Administrative Services Division, discussed administrative core functions and policies, grievance mechanism and work values.

Also present to give their messages were the two deputy administrators Benedicto M. Savellano (Support Services) and Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana (Operations), and Milagros C. Tiu, officer-in-charge of the Administrative Department.

The Administrative Department, which spearheaded the one-day orientation seminar as part of their manpower development program for the last quarter, also conducted one for the Job Order hires on October 20. This is part of the internal trainings scheduled by the Administrative Department for the last quarter to address training and competency gaps of the employees.

The one-day event was attended by 34 Job Order hires from different departments and units of the Central Office.

They were given lectures on the mandates of the agency and proper decorum by Michell P. Nacpil, HRMO III; Duties and Responsibilities of Current Job and Accomplishment Reports by Zenaida T. Arrojo, chief of the General Services and Procurement Division, and Ophelia T. Gonzales, HRMO IV; Salary Deductions, Absences and Tardiness by Carmelita V. Albano, Senior Bookkeeper; Safe and Healthy Workplace by Dr. Joseph Salter B. Elizalde, Occupational Medicine and Safety Officer; and Values Orientation by Perla C. Manzon, head of the Administrative Services Division; and Issues and Concerns on the Job including Feedbacks and Actions by Atty. Jun Fred Parado, Legal Officer V. ■



PADAYAO

NTA Ilocos Norte has new manager

LUZVIMINDA U. Padayao got her permanent appointment as Department Manager III of NTA Ilocos Norte after serving as Officer-in-Charge of the Branch Office after the retirement of erstwhile Branch Manager Mario E. Corpuz in August 2018.

Padayao's appointment was signed by Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. on October 12, and approved by the Civil Service Commission on December 10.

Before her promotion, she was the Chief Agriculturist of the Branch Office.

Padayao started her career in the tobacco industry in 1979 as Research Assistant of the Research Department under Philippine Virginia Tobacco. She was promoted to Senior Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer in 2007 then transferred to Farm Technology Services Department when she got another promotion, as Project Development Officer IV in 2015.

Padayao holds a BS Agriculture major in Crop Protection degree from Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU) and master's degree in Public Administration from MMSU Laoag.

New Accountant IV, Secretary

Also promoted in the last quarter was Resty C. Cambe who moved up from Accountant III of NTA Candon to Accountant IV of the Finance Department.

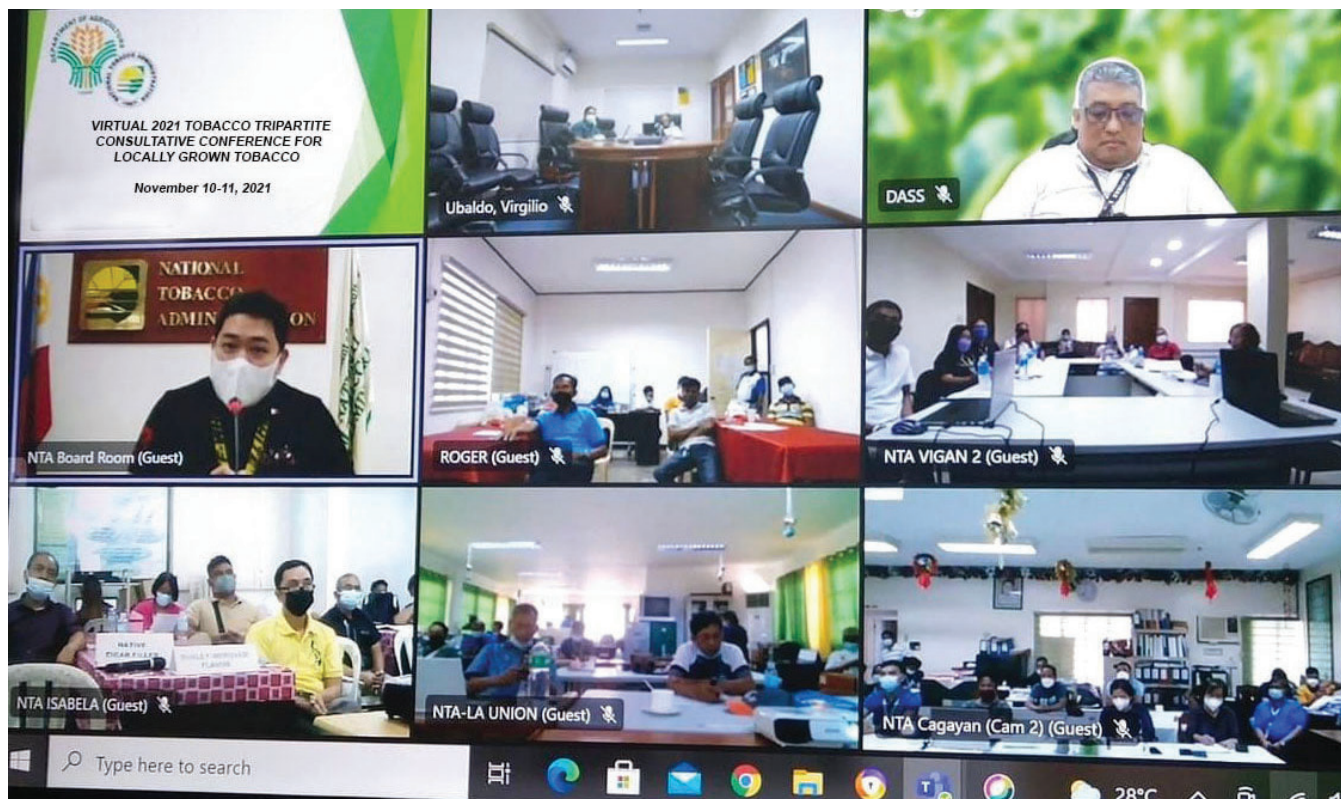
Deivid John Rayze B. Briosos, on the other hand, got his regular appointment as Secretary I of the Administrative Department, after serving as Administrative Aide IV (job order) in the same Department from October 2020.

Cambe and Briosos took their oath of office before Administrator Seares on November 15 after the approval of their promotion and appointment by the CSC. ■ (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)



Kriscia Mae M. Vidal, Administrative Clerk IV of the General Services and Procurement Division (hired in November 2019), participates in the orientation for Job Order hires.

Tripartite agreement on tobacco floor price hike



Screengrab of the opening program

A NEW tripartite agreement for the tobacco floor prices between the farmers, private sector, and the National Tobacco Administration was reached during the two-day virtual Tripartite Consultative Conference that ended on November 11.

The agreement calls for a P3 increase in floor prices per kilogram across all grades for Virginia and Burley, and a P4 increase across all grades for Native tobacco.

The floor prices per kg for Virginia top grades will be increased to P87.10 for Grade AA and P86.10 for Grade A. For Burley, the top grades A and B will be increased to P75.10 and P72.10, respectively. The adjusted floor price for high grade of the Native type is P77.10 per kilogram.

The memorandum of agreement will be sent immediately to the representatives of each sector for their signature, Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, Manager of the Regulation Department, said at the end of the conference.

According to Atty. Ambros, the agreement will be effective immediately upon approval of the NTA Governing Board and the required publication of the NTA Memorandum Circular adopting the new floor prices, and applicable for trading years 2022 and 2023.

Director Wilfredo C. Martinez, member of the NTA Governing Board, moved for the approval of the agreement

by the Board.

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. said the cooperation among the parties, in light of the current difficulties besetting the industry due to the pandemic, made the difference in the negotiation.

“We dedicate this success and all our efforts to our tobacco growers who, despite these trying times, still contribute to the nation’s economy, especially in the health sector, through the tobacco excise tax,” Seares said.

Bernard R. Vicente, president of the National Federation of Tobacco Farmers Association and Cooperatives (NAFTAC), said the farmers were satisfied with the conclusion of the negotiation for a higher floor prices.

“This is better and more organized than our negotiations in the past tripartite conferences,” he said, citing the cooperation of all sectors and leadership of NTA under Administrator Seares.

Vicente, who presented the cost of production for Virginia tobacco as basis for the floor price increases, joined other NAFTAC officers, Saturnino Distor of Pangasinan and Reymund Piñon of Cagayan, in the negotiating table. Distor and Piñon presented the cost of production for Burley and Native, respectively, before the price negotiation.

Joel L. Binwag of Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc.



Secretary William Dar (left) and Ilocos Sur Governor Ryan Luis V. Singson

NTA-RD-F-032 MOA VT-2021 (REVISED) [Compatibility Mode] - Word National Tobacco Administration

We, the undersigned participants to the **2021 Tobacco Tripartite Consultative Conference for Virginia Tobacco**, have agreed, as it is agreed, that the following floor prices shall be adopted for **Trading Years 2022 and 2023**, to wit:

GRADE	FLOOR PRICES 2020 & 2021	INCREASE	NEW FLOOR PRICE 2022 & 2023
AA	PhP 84.10	PhP 3.00	PhP 87.10
A	83.10	3.00	86.10
B	82.10	3.00	85.10
C	80.10	3.00	83.10
D	72.10	3.00	75.10
E	71.10	3.00	74.10
F1	62.10	3.00	65.10
F2	59.10	3.00	62.10
R	48.10	3.00	51.10

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the PARTIES hereto have affixed their hands and signatures this day of _____ 2021.

“We dedicate this success and all our efforts to our tobacco growers who, despite these trying times, still contribute to the nation’s economy, especially in the health sector, through the tobacco excise tax.”

*NTA Administrator/CEO
Robert Victor G. Seares Jr.*

The agreed floor prices for Virginia tobacco are flashed on the screen immediately after the deliberation.

represented the manufacturers and leaf buyers in the negotiation. Tobacco manufacturers also joined the biennial conference as observers.

Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar delivered his keynote address during the opening program, highlighting the need to assist the smallholders, the tobacco growers, so that “they can be more prosperous than their present level of existence.”

The agri chief also said that the “well represented consultation” will help address various issues and concerns of the industry, including, not only the pricing scheme but also production and marketing.

He assured that the Department of Agriculture “seeks nothing but the best possible future for all industry stakeholders, especially the smallholder farmers.”

Ilocos Sur Governor Ryan Luis V. Singson, Deputy Speaker and Ilocos Sur 1st District Rep. Deogracias Victor Savellano, and members of the NTA Governing Board also delivered their live video messages on Wednesday.

In his message, Gov. Singson highlighted the goal of the government to protect the welfare of the tobacco farmers, citing the huge contributions of the industry in the development of Ilocos Sur and other tobacco-producing provinces.

Ilocos Sur is the top producer of tobacco in the country.

Rep. Savellano urged all parties in the tripartite to come up with favorable results to encourage the farmers to produce quality tobacco, which eventually result in the change in their economic status. He called on the cooperation of all sectors to address the needs for fuelwood, water, curing barns, and the right fertilizer for better yield and income of the tobacco growers.

The Deputy Speaker also commended NTA under the leadership of Administrator Seares and all the provincial branches for providing production and technical assistance and other services to farmers for better production.

Acting NTA Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana served as moderator during the negotiation.

The setting of the minimum floor price provides tobacco farmers a guaranteed minimum return on investment of at least 25 percent for expenses. The actual buying price, which is based on prevailing market prices, is usually higher than the minimum floor price.

NTA is authorized to set or fix tobacco floor prices, as mandated by Presidential Decree (PD) No. 627 s. 1974 (for all tobacco types except Virginia), PD No. 1481 s. 1974 (for Virginia), and PD No. 1143 s. 1977 as amended (for Burley), by adopting a tripartite consultative conference. ■

NTA allots P300-M production aid for tobacco growers

NTA has allotted P300-million as production assistance for the tobacco growers in the implementation of its Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) project this cropping season 2021-2022.

The production assistance, given to the farmers in the form of cash and material inputs, is essential in producing the required volume and quality of tobacco needed by both the local and foreign market.

This will benefit about 4,000 farmer cooperators with target coverage area of 2,000 hectares in major tobacco-growing provinces in Regions 1 and 2, and Abra.

The amount, P100-million for tobacco production and another P100-million for the Curing Barn Assistance Project, is included in the proposed budget of the agency for fiscal year 2022. The agency provides another P100-million from its corporate funds to finance its market-driven tobacco production program.

With the subsidy, NTA will be giving away a total of P120-million as financial assistance to all TCGS contract growers.

According to Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., the agency has doubled the rate of subsidy, from 20% in the previous administration to 40% beginning crop year 2020-2021.

In his message during the opening of the virtual pre-tripartite conference on tobacco floor price on October 21, Seares said that NTA initiated the increase of subsidy “to help our farmers reduce their production cost in producing quality tobacco and earn more income in their effort, especially in this very challenging time for agriculture due to the pandemic.”

The Administrator added that the entire amount goes directly to the farmer cooperators through the Branch Offices. The production assistance will cover the cost for fertilizers, crop protection agents, seedlings, suckercides, land preparation, gas and oil, fuelwood, and labor.

The cost of production is also the main consideration in the computation for tobacco floor prices.

“For all our efforts, the agency is guided by our Farmers First policy, so we offer subsidy for assistance and other interventions for productivity in recognition of the huge contributions of our tobacco growers to the national economy,” he said.

Pursuant to Republic Act (RA) 7171 (for Virginia) and RA 8240 (for Burley and Native), tobacco-growing provinces and municipalities collect their share from tobacco excise tax collections, based on the volume of leaves produced by their local tobacco growers.

The national government gets the biggest share from the excise tax collection to fund its universal health care program.

“We have to help our farmers, and this is the primary goal of our TCGS production assistance program, so that they produce the quality of tobacco required by the local and foreign market,” Administrator Seares said.

To augment the income of tobacco farmers from tobacco farming, the agency also provides production assistance in Rice Production, Renewable Fuelwood Energy Farm, Improved Tobacco Seedlings Production, and Beef Cattle Production Assistance projects.

Last year, NTA distributed P13-million Emergency Cash Assistance to all its 6,668 TCGS farmers who are affected by the national health emergency due to COVID-19, and implemented P10-million livelihood programs, including the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay and Vegetable Seed Distribution Project, to help in achieving food sufficiency.

In addition to the proposed budget of the agency now under deliberation in the Senate and the House of Representatives, NTA has also requested an additional P100-million in its annual budget for another emergency cash assistance to all the tobacco farmers. ■

AGRICULTURE Secretary William D. Dar awarded P4.565 million to the tobacco growers of Piddig, Ilocos Norte as production assistance under the NTA Curing Barn Assistance Project, during the ceremonial release held on December 14. Ilocos Norte Governor Matthew Marcos Manotoc, acting NTA Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, NTA Ilocos Norte Manager Luzviminda U. Padayao, Piddig Mayor Eduardo Guillen, and Ilocos Regional Director Nestor Domenden joined the agri chief in the ceremonial release.

The assistance for the tobacco growers was part of the P66.93-million worth of interventions by DA to benefit the farmers and livestock raisers of the municipality. ■ (John James B. Canosa)



P14-M production assistance for La Union tobacco growers. Tobacco growers in La Union received P14.479 million production assistance from NTA under its Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) project for quality tobacco production for crop year 2021-2022. NTA La Union, headed by Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay, conducted a ceremonial release of the production assistance to 23 cluster leaders of the total 1,591 TCGS farmer-cooperators in the province on December 1, held at the NTA Branch Office in Bauang, La Union. (Aryann Pamela G. Sangil / Leandro Vince Domondon)



Pangasinan Among the recipients of the GMB chicks are Burley growers Generoso Pequet (left photo, with Lorna S. Espanto, TPRO I) of Sto. Niño, Sto. Tomas, Pangasinan and John John Broncano (right photo, with Venbel V. Echalar, TPRO I JO) of Vacante, Alcala, Pangasinan. **(Anne Margaret P. De Fiesta)**

Tobacco growers get broiler chicks for GMB project

NTA Branch Offices in Abra, Candon, Pangasinan and La Union distributed boiler chicks to farmer beneficiaries of its Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay (GMB) project. The distribution was held in separate schedules in their respective areas in the last quarter.

The distribution of the “Manukan” component of the project is intended for tobacco farmers whose farms were heavily affected by freak rains in late January and early February this year.

According to acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, the project compensates for the losses in tobacco production of farmers who were intensely affected by the heavy rains and contributes to food security and supply amid this pandemic.

In **Abra**, the Branch Office distributed 2,280 broiler chicks to GMB farmer beneficiaries, held simultaneously on October 5 at the Bangued Branch Office and in Pilar, Abra.

In all, 57 tobacco farmers each received 40 broiler chicks, feeds, and veterinary supplements. Farmers from Pilar, Abra received the feeds and the supplements on an earlier date, September 28.

The distribution in Bangued was facilitated by Romeo Y. Paculdo, Senior Tobacco Production Regulating Officer (TPRO); Melben B. Bejarin, TPRO III; Marife P. Peralta,

Agriculturist I; Natividad B. Quibilan, TPRO I; and Roger B. Talape, TPRO – Job Order (JO). Farmer beneficiaries are from Barangay Agtangao in Bangued, Libtec and Salucag in Dolores, Gayaman and Luzong in Luba, Nagtipulan in Lagangilang, and Basbasa in Tayum.

Julio A. Barbosa, TPRO I; Mardelito B. Bacaricas, TPRO (JO); Mary Ella Mae D. Agbusac, TPRO (JO); and Jemaima C. Santiago, TPRO (JO), supervised the dissemination of chicks and poultry supplies to the beneficiaries of barangays of Ocup, Dintan, Bolbolo, and Poblacion in Pilar.

NTA Candon distributed 3,500 broiler chicks to GMB farmer beneficiaries in the second district of Ilocos Sur. This was held at the Branch Office in Candon City on October 29.

Some 185 farmers from tobacco-growing municipalities of Narvacan, Sta. Maria, Burgos, Santiago, San Emilio, and G. Del Pilar, and Candon City each received 25 broiler chicks, 5 kilos of booster feeds, 10 kilos of starter feeds, 25 kilos of growers feeds and veterinary supplements.

In **La Union**, some 558 tobacco farmers in La Union received free broiler chicks and assorted vegetable seed packs from NTA La Union under the agency’s GMB Project in a series of releases in five drop-off points across the province this November.

Each farmer received P7,041 worth of assorted seed packs of okra, string beans, and mungbean, free fertilizers and crop protection agents, and 25 broiler chicks including feeds, feeding materials and vitamins.

Farmer-ipients came from the 12 tobacco-growing municipalities, namely Agoo, Aringay, Bacnotan, Balaoan, Bangar, Bauang, Naguillan, Rosario, San Fernando, Santol, Sto Tomas, and Sudipen.



Abra

Photo: Marife P. Peralta

The series of releases was supervised by Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay, Chief Agriculturist Emma Beth B. Fantastico, acting Administrative Officer V Albert C. Casison, Supervising TPRO Warlie V. Oribello, Senior TPRO and Project Coordinator Christopher R. Supang, District I Supervisor Potentiano H. Apilado, COA resident auditor Robehgene N. Atud, and assisted by the Area Supervisors Ruby A. Dacanay (Area 1), Rosita R. Gambito (Area 2), Ambrocio R. Nisperos Jr. (Area 3), Leni M. Arciaga (Area 4), and Joannaliza D. Ordinate (Area 5).

Said distribution was completed on the release of the 13,950 broiler chicks, 25 heads for each farmer-recipient on November 25.

A total of 214 tobacco farmers from Pangasinan and Tarlac also received free chicks, including feeds, vitamins and nets, from **NTA Pangasinan** during the distribution held at the Branch Office in Villasis, Pangasinan on November 19.

NTA launched its GMB Project in April 2020 to help farming households produce their food and raise additional income for their family during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is in support of the thrust of the Department of Agriculture to strengthen flagship programs for food productivity and supply availability during the health crisis. ■ (with reports from the Branch Offices)



Candon

Photo: Charito A. Masiglat



La Union

Photo: NTA La Union

Improved Tobacco Seedlings Production



TOBACCO seedling growers received P4.44-million worth of production assistance and farm inputs from Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar on November 4.

Acting NTA Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana joined the Secretary in the ceremonial distribution held during the RCEF-RFFA Launching Ceremony in Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College (ISPSC) in Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur.

The seedling growers are part of the 62 farmers of the second district of Ilocos Sur who are cooperators of the Improved Tobacco Seedling Production (ITSP) Project.

Under the ITSP, now on its third year of implementation, the agency provides P20 million worth of production assistance to 250 seedlings growers in the country to produce sufficient tobacco seedlings of good, uniform, strong and healthy quality.

The tobacco growers also received from NTA Candon inputs for the NTA Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay and Vegetables Seed Distribution. ■ (John James B. Canosa)

NTA Ilocos Norte headed by Branch Manager Luzviminda U. Padayao inspected on November 17 the transplantable tobacco seedlings of Bernardo Acidera, farmer cooperador of the agency's Improved Tobacco Seedling Production (ISTP) project, in barangay Macupit in Bacarra, Ilocos Norte.

Padayao, along with Branch Inventory Committee headed by Elaine A. Tinio, Administrative Officer V, also visited seedbeds of two seedling growers in Dadaeman, Pasuquin; one in Tangaoan and one in Sucusquen, both in Piddig; one in Lydia, Marcos; and one in Sacritan, Pinili to start the inventory of 38 project modules in the province this cropping season.

Farmer cooperators in Bacarra and Pasuquin produce Burley seedlings, while the rest in other municipalities produce Virginia Improved Flavor. The seedlings ready for transplanting will be distributed free of charge to tobacco growers in Ilocos Norte.

Joining the monitoring team were other members of the inventory committee: Senior TPRO and Project Coordinator Saturnino A. Agatep, Supervising TPRO Divina D. Pagdilao, and Accountant III Valentino L. Valdez. ■ *(Divina D. Pagdilao)*

NTA Candon ITSP Project Update

NTA Candon completed the inventory of tobacco seedlings of farmer cooperators, comprising six modules, of the Improved Tobacco Seedlings Production project in Candon City, Burgos and Sta. Maria, in Ilocos Sur on November 26.

According to Chief Agriculturist Adonis D. Lazo, the six modules are expected to produce more than 340,000 tobacco seedlings ready for transplanting to the farmer-cooperators of its Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) project in the second district. The seedlings will be given free to the tobacco growers.

Lazo, along with members of the Branch Inventory Team which included acting Administrative Officer V Orlando Galdones, and Project Coordinator Oliva C. Galdones, visited the seedling production sites of ITSP seedling growers Susana Cudiamat of Allangigan 2nd, Candon City; Jerry Annaguey of Sto. Tomas, Candon City; Jasmin Antolin of Dirdirig, Burgos; and Isabelo Calzo Jr. of Ag-agrao, Sta. Maria.

The Branch Office has 71 modules for seedling growers in its area for crop year 2021-2022. ■ *(John James B. Canosa)*

Solar Powered Irrigation System



JOHN James Canosa, Agriculturist I of NTA Candon, fixes the solar panel of the Solar Powered Irrigation System (SPIS) that was damaged by typhoon Maring in Barangay Pidpid, Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur on November 5. The irrigation facility, awarded to the Salasa Irrigators Farmers Association, is one of the nine SPIS installed by the agency under its Irrigation Support Program to increase yield and quality of tobacco production in major tobacco-growing areas. The Sta. Cruz SPIS has been serving five hectares of farmland in the area since its installation in 2019. *(Harvin Herald Lumbania)*

IFOIGAP Rice Production



THE farmers in Macarcarmay, Bangued, Abra under the IFOIGAP-Rice Project have started harvesting, threshing and drying rice. **Marife P. Peralta**, Agriculturist I of NTA ABRA, took this picture on November 5 at the farm of farmer cooperador Reynaldo Quidangen during her monitoring visit of rice farmers in the area under the Block Farm. For the Rice Production project in Abra, NTA has released P6.577 million production assistance to 444 farmer cooperators covering an aggregate area of 380 hectares.



Support Services take front line action

EVERY good company has a great team of administrators; without them, no business can function. Being an exemplary office administrator requires a capable team.

As one of the National Tobacco Administration's two second-in-command, the Deputy Administrator for Support Services usually acts as an Assistant Chief Officer and stands in line whenever the Administrator is unavailable.

His office implements policies, plans, programs and systems and procedure concerning financial management and administrative services and helps in strategic planning, policy development, and project coordination. It also provides overall direction, control, coordination, and supervision for the two departments under its supervision: the Administrative and Finance Departments.

Administrative Department

Every organization, regardless of industry, requires excellent management to run its operations. The Administrative Department provides valuable services that allow work processes to run smoothly and decision-makers to focus on value-added tasks and responsibilities.

With the leadership of its Officer-in-Charge Perla C. Manzon, the Department ensures the availability of the Agency's techno-physical facilities and infrastructure requirements, supplies and materials, the appropriate number and quality of manpower expertise, and the general services required to facilitate the Agency's goal and objectives.

Despite the continuous lockdowns and surges of the COVID-19 last year, the Administrative Department managed to fill up 94 plantilla positions in the Central and Branch Offices. This initiative is upon the directive of Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares, Jr. to accelerate the filling up of the plantilla positions to enhance the manpower capability of the agency for the various projects under the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP).

The Administrative Department also provided health kits containing face masks and alcohol, and conducted the "online

kamustahans" to monitor the employee's mental health during the difficult time.

Finance Department

The finance department handles all financial decisions and is primarily focused on strategic planning through initial and long economic planning and strategy implementation.

The department, under the leadership of Manager Ma. Teresa B. Laudencia, has ensured that employees received their salaries and benefits on time. In some cases where employees were exposed, they were given additional assistance in their recovery as well as additional funds to help sustain the needs of their families.

The department, in coordination with the Administrative Department, also purchased test kits for routine testing of employees as first line of defence against infection.

The largest efforts of the Finance Department during the pandemic were reserved appropriately for the farmers. Lockdowns imposed per town and region heavily disrupted supply chains, productions, and distribution channels.

The Finance Department was able to safeguard the welfare of the farmers and their families and ensure the continuity of producing crops through immediate transfer of funds to the Branch Offices for the implementation of various interventions and programs.

They released on time funding requirements for the Gulayan at Manukan project and provision of logistical support in the distribution of Emergency Cash Assistance to 6,000 tobacco farmers affected by the pandemic.

THE Office of the Deputy Administrator for Support Services keeps a good support team that is both proactive and productive when it comes to providing the needs of the employees—proactive in knowing what they need and act on them before they can complain, and productive, so that everyone can really feel how the agency cares for them, consistent with pronouncements of the Top Management on giving priorities to the staff who are all front liners in service to the farmers and other industry stakeholders. ■

Our manpower is our strength

I CAME on board in the middle of a public health emergency in June last year. I took charge as the agency and our workers go through the challenges amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have more than five years as head of operations in a private service provider, then as a three-term councillor in Cabugao, Ilocos Sur, jobs which required me to deal with a lot of challenges in management; this time however, the current situation in our country puts government officials on a different milieu in leadership.

In my mind, as soon as I started to work, are our employees who are navigating uncertainty and stresses with series of lockdowns that paralyze all sectors of society. One of my primary tasks is the supervision of the Finance and Administrative Departments, so I must ensure the effectiveness, adequacy and responsiveness of both departments in responding to the needs of the employees, while providing support services and adopting measures for the unhampered delivery of services to our stakeholders. This boils down to effecting the continuous operations of the agency despite the challenges.

The pandemic has made us adapt and be flexible in our workplaces. Working from home, which was not so common before, has become our default mode of work. With support from the Top Management, inspired by the proactive leadership of Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., we strengthened our operations and resilience. The importance of supporting the well-being of our employees has come into even sharper focus. We remind our workers that everyone has fair opportunities to contribute and thrive at work despite their current condition.

The Administrative Department conducted the “Online Kamustahan,” a virtual get-together where everyone in the meeting shared his or her experience while working at home during the lockdowns, best practice and learning, and personal tips and strategies of coping with isolation due to the pandemic. The Finance Department, despite the suspension of work, saw to it that our employees received on time their salaries and all benefits, like



BENEDICTO M. SAVELLANO
Deputy Administrator for Support Services

the procurement of test kits for their employees. Our personnel, in support of Operations, worked tirelessly for the immediate transfer of funds for various programs and interventions to the Branch Offices.

We have made significant progress in our recruitment, promotion and selection, thus improving staff morale, loyalty, and productivity. As of December, we have filled up all 94 vacant plantilla positions, with 34 of the appointments and promotions already approved by the Civil Service Commission.

A key concern raised among our staff is also the need for capability enhancement trainings. Our Administrative Services gave them opportunities for webinars and online digital learnings to enable them to continue their careers.

As we continue to address training and competency gaps of the employees, we gave our newly hired employees onboarding/orientation programs to capacitate them on their functions in the agency, and our Job Order workers manpower development trainings.

We have made much progress in administrative and financial functions in the last two years and we must not lose momentum. We still have to take more challenges amidst the continuous threat of COVID-19.

The Support Services will do its best to support our employees as they chart the path towards productivity. ■



(L-R): Administrative Department OIC Perla C. Manzon, Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano, Finance Department Manager Ma. Teresa B. Laudencia, and Ma. Cassandra M. Leofando (Secretary I)



Roberto Recilles (center), farmer in Gatang, Malasiqui, Pangasinan with the Technical Working Group members: NTA Cagayan Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda (rightmost), NTA Pangasinan Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana (second from right), and ULPI Agronomist Adelaida Tenesa (3rd from right), with Farm Technology and Services Department Manager Imelda N. Riñen (second from left), attending technician Marcos G. Atela (leftmost), and NTA Pangasinan Supervising TPRO Elizabeth R. Biala (third from left).

Evaluation of Chewing Batek Tobacco “Varieties” Commercially Grown in La Union and Pangasinan

by Benjamin P. Fiesta, Raymart P. Guzman, Chareeze S. Israel, Nelly U. Castro and Imelda N. Riñen

Rationale/Background of the Study

Tobacco buyers and traders are constantly looking into the varieties that satisfy their end-users: the manufacturers, smokers, and other consumers of the tobacco leaf. These varieties have been developed by established tobacco companies that underwent intensive evaluation in consonance with the needs of the end-users of the tobacco leaf. Some tobacco varieties were also introduced by the private sectors for their tobacco contract growers.

Over the years, chewing “Batek” tobacco has been grown all over the country for domestic use. Some chewing tobacco varieties were introduced by private companies to satisfy market demand. These varieties are already considered as landrace. These are grown by tobacco farmers in some parts of La Union and Pangasinan. The yield and income from these Chewing Batek varieties are high, thus keeping other farmers from shifting to produce other tobacco types/varieties. However, these varieties should be registered in the National Seed Industry Council (NSIC) as chewing Batek tobacco seed board variety, considering their performance in the field and the number of farmers planting these varieties.

The farmer-cooperators (FC) were involved in the

evaluation of these varieties for possible registration in the NSIC as seed board chewing Batek tobacco variety. According to Witcombe (1996), farmers’ participation in plant breeding research was initiated in the 1980s to encourage the adoption of higher-yielding varieties by low-resource farmers in several countries. All of these researches were devoted to the latter stage of the plant breeding process: the selection among finished varieties. Two types of participatory varietal selection had emerged namely: (a) consultative and (b) collaborative. In the consultative program, farmers are consulted at every stage to set the goals and choose parents that are entirely appropriate. In collaborative type, farmers grow early, variable generations and select the best plants in their own fields.

Stronger participation of farmers in agricultural research and extension is fueled by the realization that the socio-economic and agro-ecological conditions of farmers are complex, diverse, and risk-prone. Conventional approaches, based on research station trials followed by unidirectional technology transfer are unlikely to be fruitful. Close engagement with farmers is needed throughout the cycle of diagnosis, experimentation, and technology transfer. This increases the understanding of the opportunities and constraints the farmers face and of

their own technical knowledge. This in turn enhances the prospective that externally promoted technologies will be adaptable (Farrington, 1997).

The farmers' involvement in the evaluation of the six varieties of chewing Batek tobacco grown in La Union and Pangasinan is based on the premise that they are already very familiar with the production technology, growth, and characteristics of these varieties. The farmers can best evaluate the attributes of a specific variety. Therefore, by involving them in the evaluation, varietal acceptance will lead to a more rapid transfer of information making the registration of the varieties faster.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted to document and evaluate the agronomical and morphological characteristics of the commercially grown chewing Batek tobacco varieties in La Union and Pangasinan, to document the applied package of technology (POT) to these varieties, and to register the introduced chewing Batek tobacco varieties grown for a specific purpose with the NSIC through the National Tobacco Technical Working Group (TWG).

Locale of the Study

There were two setups in the study: the farmer's field in La Union and Pangasinan and one replicated trial at the NTA Experimental Station in Tabug, Batac City.

Under farmers' field, five tobacco varieties (Pimminya, Lawit, Karag, Sinai, and Lampangog), commercially grown as chewing Batek tobacco in La Union and Pangasinan, were documented and evaluated for its second year. The same FCs during CY 2018-19 were involved except for those who planted Lawit, Pimminya, and Karag. The selection and monitoring of FCs were done in coordination with La Union and Pangasinan Branch Offices. There were four FCs per variety, except for Pimminya with two FCs because of the lesser number of farmers planting this variety. The proximity of the farmer's field to the road is one of the main considerations for easier monitoring and evaluation. The FCs are all members of the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS). These varieties were characterized and documented agronomically and morphologically to be used as data in the registration of a

Chewing Batek variety/varieties to the NSIC.

For crop year 2019-20, the members of the TWG on tobacco, composed of NTA Pangasinan Manager Engr. Cesario Sambrana, NTA Cagayan Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda, and Adelaida P. Tinesa, Agronomist of the Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. (ULPI), together with Imelda N. Riñen, Manager of the Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD), evaluated the field setups of the FCs.

The individual technology employed by each FC was documented as additional data in the registration of the variety to the NSIC as Seed Board Chewing Batek variety.

In the field, agronomic characterization started at vegetative stage where uniformity of crop stand, presence of mixture and presence of diseases were noted.

Under the FTSD Batac Experimental Station setup, the six varieties (Pimminya, Lawit, Karag, Sinai, Sagedsed, and Lampangog) were again evaluated in a replicated trial in CY 2019-20.

Experimental Design

The setup was laid out in a randomized complete block design with four replications. The plants were spaced at one meter between rows and 90 cm between hills at six rows per plot with a total of 60 plants per plot. The fertilizer requirements for Chewing Batek were applied and the cultural management practices were followed from transplanting to harvesting.

The following data were gathered for both farmers' field and experimental setups:

(1) *leaf length and width* – measured from the 10th or 11th leaf position. Leaf length was measured from the base to the tip along the midrib while the width was at the broadest portion of the leaf. This was taken from 10 sample plants per variety per FC. Likewise, 10 sample plants were also taken in the replicated trials;

(2) *stalk length* – measured from the ground level to the tip of the topped tobacco stalk from the 10 sample plants taken both from the farmers' field and replicated trials;

(3) *number of leaves* – the number of leaves per plants was counted at 75 to 80 days after transplanting (DAT) from 10 sample plants per FC and variety in the replicated trials;

Turn to Page 23



"Sinai" (left photo) and "Karag" variety both grown in Bauang, La Union.



NTA La Union Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay with ARCTFGA President Ronilo Masangcay during the distribution of tractors for tobacco growers in the Branch Office.



For Aringay's top farmers coop: Persistence precedes success

by Kristin Mae S. Castañeda

NOTHING can bring down an organization that persists for the good of their members amidst challenges.

The Aringay Rice Corn Tobacco Farmers Growers Association, (ARCTFGA, Inc.) sailed through some rejections in their requests for subsidy and other government benefits and support, only because they carry “tobacco” in their original name “Aringay Tobacco Farmers Association (ATFA)” in 2013, then renamed as Asosasyon Daguiti Agmulmula Tabako Dito Aringay (ADATDA) in 2015.

The members felt discriminated but they, however, understood the national government's heightened campaign towards tobacco control. Also government agencies that they approached for assistance were wary of that “interaction” with the tobacco industry. The members knew that is a necessary interaction, having an agricultural crop to sustain their income from farming, but they just comply with the advice to change name.

Partly. They did not remove “tobacco” because that's what they really are,

tobacco farmers.

According to ARCTFGA President Ronilo R. Masangcay and Secretary Delfin V. Cavinta, they were organized and established initially and exclusively for tobacco farmers.

They just removed the exclusivity of membership. They welcome new members, rice and corn growers, who are not actually in tobacco production. And that's what they got their current name, which was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) on August 9, 2015.

Their luck has turned around. Their requests for subsidy and support were approved and now they have become Aringay's richest farmers association with more than P10-million in assets.

It was not just the name change, however. The officers worked tirelessly to submit resolutions and requests to various agencies, and gathered support from its members.

They now have in their possession two rice combine harvesters, two four-wheel tractors, one rice reaper, one precision seeder, and one chemical

sprayer vehicle. These farm machineries obtained from various sources (OPAG, DA Region 1, PhilMech, Aringay LGU, among others). One of the tractors were from the NTA through the agency's Tobacco Farm Mechanization Program in 2020.

The association is benefitting its members through the operation of said machineries on discounted fees. It maintains two regular operators who would get 30% of the daily net income and leave 70% to the association. Because the machineries are income-generating, the proceeds go back to the association as savings and operational funds for maintenance and repair, and for loaning purposes.

It lends money to members who are short in farming capital at a very low interest rate of 3% per annum. In addition, it no longer collects annual dues from its members because the income is sufficient for the association's daily expenses and can pay their obligations.

A very supporting Aringay LGU, headed by Mayor Eric O. Sibuma and



the Sangguniang Bayan, particularly SBM Ramsey Pascual D. Mangaoang, chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, forms a big part of their success.

Among the latest subsidies received by the association from the local government of Aringay were 71 units of water pump prorated; 33 units went to Samara, 21 to Sta Lucia, 2 to Sto Rosario, 11 to San Benito Norte and 4 for San Juan West.

To date, the association has 226 members from tobacco-producing barangays of Aringay, and is awaiting grant of rice dryer, rice mill, rice transplanter and hand tractors from PhilMech.

If you ask them now, what makes their association successful?

They persist in the face of failures and rejections (name issue, for one) and, more importantly, they continue to invest on the three Ts: talent (of their members), treasure (or their resources), and time (to serve their members for the good of the whole association). ■

(4) *cured yield (kg/ha or t/ha)* – computed yield from the actual area of the FC. In the replicated trial, this was based on the 32-sample plant/plot taken after fermentation; and

(5) *quality* – represented by the percentage of each grade classification where the cured leaves were graded as Liso, Morada, and Batek.

Significant Finding and Implication

Chewing Batek tobacco has been planted by many farmers in Pangasinan and La Union due to high yield and high price and demand. However, these varieties should be registered in the NSIC as Batek tobacco seed variety.

Based on the data gathered in the farmer's field, Lampangog variety had an average leaf length of 78.5 cm with 48.3 cm leaf width, 18 leaves, and stalk length of 94.8 cm. Sinai had an average leaf length of 82.6 cm, leaf width 45.5 cm, 18 leaves, and 121 cm stalk length. The average leaf length and width of Karag were 85.8 cm and 49.9 cm, respectively. On average, it produced 19 leaves with a stalk length of 120.5 cm. The average leaf length and width of Lawit were 69.2 cm and 35.7 cm, respectively, with 20 leaves and a stalk length of 121.1 cm. Pimminya produced an average leaf length of 73.1 cm and width of 30.1 cm. They were able to produce an average of 15 leaves and 89.0 cm stalk length.

Lampangog produced an average yield of 2.93 t/ha valued at P303,578/ha; Sinai 3.07 t/ha valued at P268,857/ha. Karag also had an average yield of 2.37 t/ha valued at P204,531/ha; Lawit, 2.34 t/ha valued at P190,150/ha, and Pimminya had the lowest with 1.57 t/ha valued at P130,377/ha.

On the replicated trials, significant differences were noted in the leaf width, the number of leaves and stalk length, and internode length among the six varieties evaluated. Karag and Lampangog had the broadest leaves of 49.7 cm and 49.3 cm, respectively. This was followed by Sinai (41.3 cm),

Sagedsed (42.6 cm), and Lawit (41.3 cm), and the narrowest leaves were produced by Pimminya with 34.4 cm.

The number of leaves after topping ranges from 17 to 19. Sinai (113 cm) and Pimminya (111.7 cm) had the longest stalk and Sagedsed had the shortest (87.1 cm). Sinai, Pimminya, Lawit, Karag, and Lampangog had internode lengths ranging from 3.4 cm to 4.7 cm and the shortest was from Sagedsed with 2.9 cm.

Karag had the highest yield of 3 t/ha, however, it was similar with Lampangog 2.91 t/ha, Sagedsed 2.90 t/ha, and Sinai 2.44 t/ha. The lowest yield was from Lawit with 2.38 t/ha and Pimminya with 2.2 t/ha but was similar to Sinai.

On the percentage grade distribution, the varieties evaluated had percentage Lizo ranging from 15.83% to 22.02%, Morada zero to 17.13%, and Batek 63.94% to 77.99%. Lampangog had the highest crop value of P269,526.53/ha but were similar to Karag (P241,785.48/ha) and Sagedsed (P230,121.69/ha). Pimminya had the lowest crop value of P181,410.08 but were similar to Sinai (P212,092.23/ha) and Lawit (P208,926.05/ha).

In crop year 2018-2019, Lampangog, Karag, Lawit, and Pimminya had an average nicotine content (%) ranging from 2.32% to 2.95% and chloride content of 1.28% to 2.25%. The lowest nicotine content was from Sinai (1.77%) with chloride content of 1.28% and Sagedsed 1.98% nicotine and 1.47% chloride. In the farmers' field, Lawit had the highest nicotine content of 4.55%. Lampangog had 3.74%, Karag (3.23%), Sinai (3.16%), and Pimminya had the lowest (1.81%). The chloride content ranges from 0.47 to 2.35%.

Based on the result of the evaluation, Pimminya was selected by the members of the Tobacco Technical Working Group to be submitted to the NSIC for registration. The NSIC released the approval of the application on September 20, 2022. Pimminya is now recommended for commercial production in the Ilocos Region. ■

The Native Batek Chewing tobacco varieties, Lampangog and Sinai, were approved for registration by the National Seed Industry Council (NSIC) during the 38th NSIC Technical Secretariat Meeting on November 18.

Tobacco growers get facility, production assistance from LGUs



Ilocos Norte GOVERNOR Matthew Marcos Manotoc led the distribution of farm implements and fertilizers to 100 tobacco farmers in the province on November 29, held at the NTA Building in Batac City.

The farmers, all cooperators of the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) project for crop year 2021-2022, received 50 water hoses, 50 knapsack sprayers, and 200 bags of fertilizers.

In addition to the farm implements, the provincial government is set to distribute 2,200 bags of 10-18-24 and 2,200 bags of 0-0-50 (25kgs/bag) to the farmers from the share of the province of the tobacco excise tax collections under RA 7171.

In his brief message, Governor Manotoc assured the farmers that the provincial share of RA 7171 will be utilized for the benefit of the farmers.

The distribution was in coordination with NTA Ilocos Norte.

NTA Ilocos Norte Officer-in-Charge (OIC) Luzviminda U. Padayao, NTA Governing Board Member Nestor C. Casela, and Sustainable Development Center OIC Luzviminda Ortal assisted the governor in the distribution of the material inputs and implements. ■ *(Divina D. Pagdilao)*



Tumauini, Isabela THE MUNICIPALITY of Tumauini, Isabela, one of top tobacco producers in the province, has started giving cash assistance of P15,000 (per hectare of farm area) to farmers in tobacco-producing barangays. Mayor Arnold S. Bautista, in coordination with senior officials of NTA Isabela headed by Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda and Chief Agriculturist Joefrey T. Bautista, conducted meetings on tobacco production with the tobacco growers to coincide with the ceremonial distribution.

After the farmers' meeting in Barangay Paragu on December 1, Mayor Bautista showed to the NTA officials various ongoing LGU projects such as goat production, dairy processing center, dairy cow production, LGU livelihood center, and mango processing center. The funds for the financial assistance and the livelihood projects are from the municipality's shares of the tobacco excise tax collections (per RA 8240).

Mayor Bautista cited collaborative efforts with NTA and leaf buyer ULPI for the sustainability of the tobacco industry in the municipality, while helping the farmers produce more quality tobacco and earn higher income from tobacco production. ■ *(Joey A. Pascual)*

Pilar, Abra gets the biggest share in 2018, 2019 excise tax collections

by Kathleen Bulquerin

THE MUNICIPALITY of Pilar, Abra gets the biggest share among local government units (LGUs) in the excise tax collection, getting P770.05 million from the FY 2018 collection and P969.39 million from the FY 2019 collection for Virginia tobacco type. The municipality also topped LGU shares in excise tax in FY 2017.

In a memorandum released by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) on November 22, two municipalities from Ilocos Sur, namely Candon and Cabugao, secured second and third spots, respectively, receiving P584.36 million and 564.07 million for FY 2018, and P807.92 million P741.16 million for FY 2019.

Meanwhile, three municipalities from Isabela got the biggest share from excise tax collections on locally grown Burley and Native-type tobacco, namely Quirino with P327.11 million, Roxas with P263.93 million, and Aurora with P220.7 million for FY 2018. For FY 2019, Aurora received P358.57 million; Quirino, P352.02 millio; and Roxas, P318.82 million.

The release of the shares of LGUs from the tobacco excise taxes is pursuant to Section 2 of Republic Act (RA) No. 7171 and Section 8 of RA No. 8240, as amended by Section 8 of RA 10351.

In all, the LGUs in areas that grow tobacco received a total of P46.1 billion from the DBM as their share in the excise taxes collected from the sale of cigarettes and tobacco in 2018 and 2019.

Local Budget Memorandum Nos. 83 and 84 issued by DBM officer in charge Tina Rose Marie Canda, on November 22, said the LGU shares included P21.3 billion from the 2018 collections and P24.9 billion from the 2019 collections.

With the released funds, the LGUs are expected to utilize them to advance the self-reliance of tobacco farmers and growers through cooperative programs, livelihood projects, and agro-industrial and infrastructure projects. ■



Guitagum, Misamis Oriental officials, farmers visit Ilocos

LOCAL officials and farmer leaders of Guitagum, Misamis Oriental visited NTA Ilocos Norte to learn tobacco production as part of their educational tour in Region 1 on November 29. They were accompanied by the Mindanao-based staff of the NTA Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD), namely Ma. Mercedes Ayco, Nelly G. Alba, Lilibeth Rafisura, and Ralph Edward Abrazaldo.

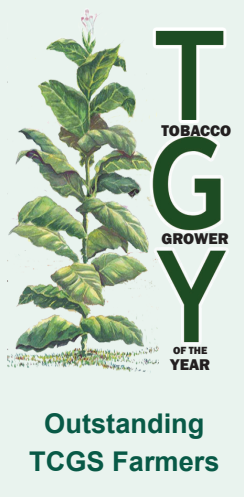
The group, led by Sangguniang Bayan Members Jemiolo C. Fabricante and Dean Laurence M. Ajonan, visited the Experimental Station at Barangay Tabug, and the Pest Clinic Laboratory, Seed Laboratory, and various tobacco products on display at the Industrial Research Department (IRD) at the PhilRice Building in Batac City.

Before the tour, FTSD and the Ilocos Norte Branch Office, headed by NTA Ilocos Norte OIC Luzviminda U. Padayao and FTSD OIC Felisa R. Aurellano, welcomed the group with a brief program for the orientation of various programs and projects of the agency.

NTA La Union, headed by Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay, held a welcome program for the LGU officials and farmers when they visited the Branch Office for benchmarking on December 1. ■ (Rhonelle Sulicipan)



Burgos, Ilocos Sur SOME 318 tobacco-rice farmers of Burgos, Ilocos Sur received free fertilizers as farm input subsidy from the municipality's share of the tobacco excise tax under Republic Act 7171. Mayor Nathaniel Escobar (in white shirt) led the ceremonial distribution held at the town center on November 5. Leonardo C. Escobar, Agriculturist I of NTA Candon and team leader of extension workers assigned in Burgos, assisted in the distribution. Each farmer received three bags of 10-18-24, two bags of 21-0-0, and one bag of foliar fertilizer per one hectare of farm area. ■ (Roan G. Daproza)



**Outstanding
TCGS Farmers**

Taking up the challenge

ROBERTO A. Reciles, a 53-year-old widower from Barangay Gatang, Malasiqui, Pangasinan, has been a dedicated and consistent Native Batek grower for almost 35 years. After the death of his wife, he assumed all the duties and responsibilities of a father and mother to his five children. He provided all their needs from his income derived from planting tobacco and rice, corn, onion, and other vegetables during off-season. If he was not busy in the farm, he was a tricycle driver plying the community for additional income, which helped a lot in sending his children to school.

For his diligence in farming and high yield, Anong, as he is fondly called by his peers, was nominated and won the Tobacco Grower of the Year (TGY) provincial contest for crop year 2017-2018. At first, he was hesitant to accept the nomination, but he was inspired by the success of his fellow Gatang resident, Joseph Lubos, who was a provincial TGY winner for crop year 2015-2016. He wanted to prove that he, too, like Lubos, can win the contest.

As a provincial winner, he was nominated for the National TGY contest in the next crop year, 2018-2019. With the assistance of his assisting extension worker, Marcos G. Atela, TPRO I of NTA Pangasinan, and support from his family, he won the contest for Native Chewing tobacco category. He received his trophy and cash prize from Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar in a ceremony held in Tagudin, Ilocos Sur in December 2019.

During the contest year, he produced a total of 11,662 kilos on his two hectares farm lot or 5,831 kg/ha with 83.32% high grades. His gross sales was about P1.2 million. ■ (Marlon G. Facun)



Proud to be a tobacco grower

HILARIO O. Olidan, 53, of Barangay Butubut Sur in Balaoan, La Union won the Tobacco Grower of the Year (TGY) provincial contest, Virginia Improved Flavor category, for La Union Branch for crop year 2020-2021. His farm output for the contest year was 3,497 kg/ha of good quality tobacco. He was recognized for his hard work and continuous adoption of the tobacco package of technology, including compliance to Good Agricultural Practice, and active participation in the various programs and projects of NTA.

Olidan is an active farmer leader in his community, and a responsible tobacco farmer-cooperator of NTA projects. He is the president of Eastern Balaoan Tobacco Farmers Association. He was one of the representatives for Virginia tobacco growers in La Union during the Virtual Tripartite Consultative Conference for Locally Grown Leaf Tobacco on November 10 to 11.

He is a Barangay Kagawad and chairman of the Committee on Agriculture in the council, and the president of the Tricycle Drivers Association in Balaoan.

In his 32 years in tobacco farming, he and wife Shirley Hilaria were able to send his children to school, who are now college graduates and gainfully employed. Cheene Pearl Clarisse is a Registered Nurse; Krestle Hearth, a Barangay Nutrition Scholar, is graduate of Bachelor of Science in Business Administration; and Lord Harry is a BS Marine Engineering graduate.

He said: "*Napalalo ti panagyamanko iti NTA, nangnangruna ti mangidadaulo iti ahensia, ni Apo Administrator Robert Victor Seares Jr. ken ti nagaget a manager ti NTA La Union, ni Sir Giovanni Palabay ken dagiti kakaduada, gapu iti ayat ken tulongda kadakami nga agmulmula ti tabako. Gapu ti nabuslon a bendision iti pangmulak, pakaidayawak ngarud a maysaak a mannalon ti tabako.*" ■ (Corazon V. Dacumos)





YEAR-END ASSESSMENT & TEAM BUILDING

Text & Photos: **Kathleen Bulquerin**

NTA celebrated the accomplishments and achievements of the agency for the year through a Year-end Assessment and Team Building activity held at the Crystal Beach Resort in San Narciso, Zambales on December 16-17.

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. felt elated seeing the Central Office employees and senior officials (managers, chief agriculturists, and administrative officers) from the Branch Offices together in one activity as the agency assessed its accomplishments and discussed plans and ways forward for the succeeding years with positivism despite the ongoing pandemic.

After the assessment, Administrator Seares and the top officials actively participated in the team building activity which aimed at strengthening connections, build professional relationships among the employees, and learn the importance of teamwork in achieving common goals.

The employees were divided into four teams. Each team had to perform their first task: to craft a battle cheer. Administrator Seares was head of the Blazing Blue team; Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano, the Green Minded team; Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, the Red Ready team; and Regulation Department Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, the White Ranger team.

Following the battle cry performances, the teams faced a series of team building activities, each of it was designed to test the camaraderie between the formed teams. Rising victorious in the two-hour team building activity was the Blazing Blue, followed by the White Rangers. Coming in third and fourth place were the Green Minded and Red Ready teams, respectively.

Later in the evening, the NTA employees and officials gathered at the beach front for the fellowship, highlighted by parlor games, live band, and raffle. ■





Tobacco season is on. After the rice harvest, seedbeds of Native broadleaf tobacco start to appear in farm areas in Isabela, an indication that the tobacco cropping season has begun in the region. **Joey A. Pascual**, Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer of NTA Isabela, captured these cheesecloth-covered seedbeds of tobacco growers Romeo Maraggun and Beatriz Baquiran in San Luis, Cauayan City during the monitoring of the Branch Office on November 17. The incoming season holds promise to the tobacco growers as it starts the implementation of an increase in the tobacco floor price in the coming tobacco trading and the provision of higher subsidies to the farmers to augment their income in their farming venture.



NATIONAL TOBACCO ADMINISTRATION
nta.da.gov.ph

Tobacco Contract Growing System

“Tunay na malaking biyaya sa amin ang quality tobacco production project ng NTA na may 40% subsidy sa production assistance. Dahil nakapag-organize kami bilang cooperative, nabigyan kami ng 4WD tractor. At dahil naging integrated farmer na kami, nakatanggap kami ng livelihood assistance tulad ng pag-aalaga ng baka. Nabigyan pa ng scholarship grant ang aking anak. Salamat, NTA. Dahil sa inyo, guminhawa ang buhay namin.”

Reymund M. Piñon
Baculod, Alcala, Cagayan
President, APC / NAFTAC leader

