



# PHILIPPINE TOBACCO NEWS

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**Dr. ROBERT L. SEARES**

*NTA Administrator 2017-2020*

## *A Legacy of a Caring Hand*

**Robert Victor G. Seares Jr.**

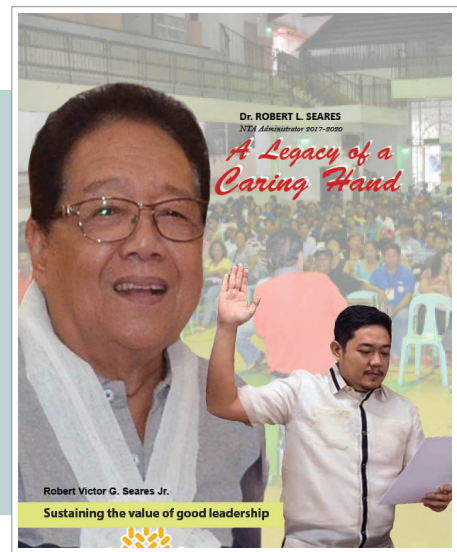
**Sustaining the value of good leadership**

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## ABOUT THE COVER

AFTER his remarkable term as top local executive of Dolores, Abra, **Robert Victor G. Seares Jr.** joined the National Tobacco Administration as the new Administrator and CEO in June this year, replacing his late father **Dr. Robert L. Seares** who died halfway of his term. The father left his mark in NTA with his efforts to make tobacco a sustainable and beneficial endeavor, especially for the tobacco farmers, favoring their welfare over other issues. But he left when the whole industry is facing its biggest challenge: the COVID-19 pandemic. The son is up to the challenge, applying the lessons and values gleaned from his father on his milestone in government service and his own administration over the tobacco regulatory agency.



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## EDITORIAL

### Amazing response to crisis and transition

JUST as many farmers and other stakeholders were looking forward to a new trading season with increased floor prices and the advent of new industry roadmap for sustainable tobacco production this year, the government declared a national health emergency for the entire Luzon to contain the spread of COVID-19. This resulted in work suspension and restrictions on mass gathering and travel, hampering agency services and derailing the implementation and completion of various projects and programs of the agency.

Amidst uncertainties, however, NTA maintained its key functions for vital services and programs under the leadership of Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, and with immediate support and cooperation of the NTA family. Dr. Bonoan took the helm of the agency as OIC, in concurrent capacity as Deputy Administrator for Operations, after the untimely demise of Administrator Robert L. Seares in March.

Equally important, too, is for the agency to take as many precautions as it can in order to reduce transmission of the virus and protect the employees. It suspended work in the Central Office and have the staff work from home until further notice, while maintaining skeleton workforce in the Branch Offices to continue our services and to protect the interest of our stakeholders.

Dr. Bonoan coordinated with local traders and local government units to keep tobacco trading in continuous operations, thanks to the approval by Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar of our request for unhampered deliveries of tobacco to the buying stations.

The agency shifted its intervention priorities to help our farmers affected by the national emergency. Using its refocused/realigned budget, NTA distributed Emergency Cash Assistance (ECA) to our farmers under the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) Program, and set up livelihood programs, such as the “Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay” Project and Vegetable Seeds Distribution, for food sufficiency during the lockdown.

These activities and the call for cooperation from various stakeholders bring forth a powerful message that the NTA continues its commitment to serve our farmers in the best way we can despite the crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has also tested once more the resiliency and *bayanihan* spirit of men and women of the agency and the industry, in general.

The appointment of new Administrator Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., son and namesake of the late Administrator, before the end of the first semester, gave the NTA family, who are already inspired by the positivity and resiliency of the the members, better hope for the industry to win over the pandemic.

The new Administrator is a young and promising leader who has proven himself in good governance and dedicated and effective leadership as a former local executive. Among his earliest actions was to ensure that all employees who are working bravely through the uncertain time be well taken care of, with timely and full release of salary, rehiring of Job Orders, and provision of face masks, face shields and vitamins. He vowed to continue the programs and projects of his father to honor his memory, and enjoined the employees to work together to ensure delivery of quality service to our farmers.

There is no denying that the pandemic will linger on. No one can say for certain how or when this national emergency ends. However, with the leadership of Administrator Seares, ably supported by Dr. Bonoan and newly designated Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano, we are assured that NTA will keep moving forward as one family.

Together we will show what NTA service truly means. ■



## ISO 9001:2015 1st surveillance audit for recertification

NTA got recommendation for the continuation of its ISO 9001:2015 QMS certification as a result of the 1st surveillance audit on July 27.

The audit was conducted by the international certification body Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS) on virtual platform using Microsoft Teams in two sites: the Central Office in Ben-Lor Building in Quezon Avenue in Quezon City, and the Farm Technology and Services Department in Batac City.

With the continuation of certification, the agency is again recognized by the standard-setting body for its commitment to provide 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 no major or minor nonconformities and corrective actions. Certified are the agency's core processes, namely, Research and Development; Regulatory Services; and Technology Assistance, Extension and Production Services.

The surveillance audit involved the evaluation of people, technology and processes within the agency in reviewing the performance and effectiveness of the QMS based on customer feedback and satisfaction results; project performance and conformity of products and services; effectiveness of actions taken to address risks and opportunities; opportunities for improvement; results of audit conducted by the IQA; and performance of external providers.

Jimenea, with co-auditors Arnold Dizon and Magdalena P. Balingit, concluded that the agency, following an extensive audit process, has demonstrated the ability of the management system to systematically achieve requirements of the audit standard.

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. commended the QMS Implementing Team, who was behind the recertification efforts, for managing to keep the agency processes worthy of ISO's standards despite the increasing challenges brought about by COVID-19 pandemic.

The agency now vows to maintain and sustain the quality standards in its core process as it enters another year of service with renewed hope to the tobacco growers and other industry stakeholders.

NTA first earned the ISO 9001:2008 for QMS in 2016 and transitioned to ISO 9001:2015 QMS in 2018 for its core process, which incorporates risk management to enable organizations to identify and provide a systematic approach to risk for more efficient quality management system.

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 Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan (Research and Development Services), Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros (Regulatory Services), Imelda N. Riñen (Technology Assistance, Extension and Production Support), Neyo E. Valdez (Customer Satisfaction), and Priscilla S. Esguerra (Information and Communication Technology Services); with Teresita D. Dela Rosa as Secretariat.

Administrator Seares, along with the two Deputy Administrators Benedicto M. Savellano (Support Services) and Dr. Bonoan (Operations), leads the Policy and Steering Team that guides the NTA QMS members. ■



Photo credits: Dinah E. Pichay / Roberto R. Bonoan

# NTA Board elects new Administrator



**Members of the Governing Board** (from left): Wilson R. Victorio, Nestor C. Casela, Rodolfo F. Salanga, NTA Chairman and DA Secretary William D. Dar, newly installed Vice Chairman and NTA Administrator Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., Teofilo R. Quintal, Danilo C. Trongo, and Wilfredo C. Martinez (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)

THE NTA Governing Board elected former Dolores, Abra Mayor Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. as the new administrator of the government tobacco regulatory agency, following its 133rd Regular Meeting on June 29.

Seares, who will also serve as the Vice Chairman of the Board, took his oath before Agriculture Secretary and Chairman of the Board William D. Dar, held at the Conference Room of the Office of the Secretary, Department of Agriculture, in Quezon City.

The Board received the nomination of Seares as Administrator by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte in a letter from the Office of the President dated June 10, 2020.

The new administrator got unanimous votes from the current directors Rodolfo F. Salanga (manufacturing sector), Teofilo R. Quintal (farmer sector), Wilfredo C. Martinez (farmer sector), Nestor C. Casela (academic community sector), Danilo C. Trongco (farmer sector), and Wilson R. Victorio (traders/exporters sector).

Seares Jr. replaced his father Robert L. Seares who died of illness on March 19 this year.

Officer-in-Charge Roberto R. Bonoan formally transferred leadership on June 22 to the young Seares with a ceremonial turnover of agency banner, witnessed by Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano, and heads of the departments and divisions and staff at the NTA Central Office.

“This is not a new administration, but a continuation of the leadership of my father in implementing programs that protect the welfare of our tobacco farmers,” said the 40-year-old new executive in his message.

According to Bonoan, Seares brings years of expertise in leadership and management to NTA, an attached corporation of the Department of Agriculture. As a mayor, Seares turned Dolores, a 5th class municipality, into one of the most progressive towns in the Cordillera Administrative Region, and a consistent DILG Seal of Good Governance Awardee. ■ (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)



Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. receives the agency banner from Officer-in-Charge Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan during the turnover ceremony.

## Personnel Update

### NTA scholar, 3 others get permanent positions

THREE new extension workers, one of them an agency scholar, and a senior researcher were given regular appointments in January after confirmation of their permanent status by the Civil Service Commission this year.

The newly appointed extension workers are Jharrel John B. Aruelo, Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer (TPRO) I of La Union Branch Office; Marife P. Peralta, Agriculturist I of NTA Abra; and Emily M. Abubo, TPRO I of La Union Branch.

Aruelo, a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering graduate of DMMMSU, Bacnotan Campus from Sto. Tomas, La Union is a scholar of the NTA Tobacco Free Education Program under the NTA La Union Branch Office. He started at the branch office as Job Order technician in 2017. He now joined six other NTA scholars who were hired and given permanent positions by the agency after their graduation.

Justito A. Ambros also got regular appointment as Science Research Specialist of the Industrial Research Department.

In addition to the new regular employees, whose appointments were all dated January 30, 2020, the agency also gave appointments to co-terminous positions, namely, Arman L. Anga-angan, Private Secretary I of the Office of the Administrator; and Ma. Cassandra M. Leofando, Private Secretary I of the Office of the Deputy Administrator for Support Services. Alona A. Manganauan was reappointed as Executive Assistant IV of the Office of the Administrator. ■

# Survey: NTA gets excellent mark in customer satisfaction

THE satisfaction levels of tobacco growers for the implementation of the programs, projects and activities of the agency for Crop Year 2017-2018 are at its highest.

Using the 5-point Likert scale, with performance rating of 5 as Excellent and 1 as Poor, the Performance Scorecard of NTA is consistently exceptional in all areas of efficiency and effectiveness as demonstrated by a high overall mean rating of 4.76 (“Strongly Agree”) which is higher than last year’s 4.36 rating.

This was reported by Neyo E. Valdez, focal person of the Customer Satisfaction Determination, during the management review of the implementation of the agency’s Quality Management System (QMS) on June 7 at the NTA Board Room.

The survey was conducted last year by the Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU) in Batac City, an independent third party, commissioned by the NTA.

This implies that NTA is not complacent of its achievements of efficiency and effectiveness in previous years as it is continuously improving its systems and procedures to fulfilling its mandate to deliver better quality services.

Given the outstanding ratings, NTA is one government-owned and -controlled corporation that has truly adhered to the mandate of high standards of efficiency, effectiveness, and good governance.

As such, NTA has become an effective catalyst of development ensuring its

primary stakeholders the satisfaction of their needs and standards and their expectation of a better quality of life.

This is the fourth year that the agency got excellent (extremely satisfactory) mark in the customer satisfaction survey. In the 2016 and 2017 Surveys conducted by the Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College (ISPSC), and by MMSU in 2018, farmers and private sector clients gave an excellent (extremely satisfactory) mark to the programs, projects, activities, and services which they availed of in the covered crop year.

The purpose of the survey is to solicit feedbacks from the various NTA clients as regards the efficiency and effectiveness

of the policies, systems and procedures underlying its different programs, projects, activities, and services.

The survey probed customer’s satisfaction among the various projects and services provided by NTA in Crop Year 2017-2018, and assessed the performance of NTA vis-à-vis its declared objectives of quality performance along the following indicators: efficiency and effectivity of staff and organization, quality of products and services, effectiveness of training programs and workshops, handling of complaints and record keeping, ease of information and communication, facilities, and ource of information. ■

**Summary table of ratings of the indicators of efficiency and effectiveness of NTA by industry stakeholders**

INDICATORS	MEAN	DESCRIPTION
Staff and Organization	4.79	Strongly Agree
Regulatory (Policies, rules, and regulations)	4.69	Strongly Agree
Regulatory (Applications with NTA)	4.77	Strongly Agree
Complaints Handling and Records Keeping	4.68	Strongly Agree
Information and Communication	4.81	Strongly Agree
Facilities	4.82	Strongly Agree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>4.76</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

Range	Description
4.20 - 5.00	Strongly Agree (SA)
3.40 - 4.19	Agree (A)
2.60 - 3.39	Neither (N)
1.80 - 2.59	Disagree (D)

## Administrator Seares calls for stricter health protocols

ADMINISTRATOR/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. urged employees at the NTA Central Office (CO) to follow strictly safety and health measures, as required by the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) on Emerging Infectious Diseases.

The Administrator addressed the CO employees for the first time in a general assembly on September 7, following the four-week lockdown of the Central Office in Quezon City after some of its security officers tested positive of COVID-19, with one employee unable to survive the infection.

To ramp up efforts against COVID-19, the agency distributed free face masks, face shields, and vitamin C tablets sourced from donations and required the employees to undergo COVID-19 Rapid Antibody testing to see if one has already developed antibodies against the severe respiratory disease.

Seares said while the Top Management does its best to keep everyone safe, he

will not cease in reminding the employees to follow health protocols for everyone’s protection, including their families, and advising them against downplaying the effect of infection.

He urged everyone’s cooperation and reminding them to sanitize their respective workplaces whenever necessary, to wear face mask and face shield while at work, and cleanse their hands with alcohol.

“If you are not feeling well, please stay at home and take a rest. Let us know if you are not feeling well, so we can act immediately,” he added.

He also discussed the plan to establish a COVID Response Management Plan for the agency, which will be composed of CO staff with medical background, who are willing to assist in enforcing health protocols, propose actions to maintain mental health well-being of staff, and serve as quick response team against infection.

The CO employees are currently reporting to the office in a skeleton workforce with the rest, in rotation, performing their tasks under a work-from-home setup, within the guidelines set by the Civil Service Commission.

At the start of the meeting, a music video produced by the Public Relations Office, was presented to lighten the mood and encourage everyone to conquer fear and be strong amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The administrator said the NTA family should be working together and heading forward for a new beginning. “One must not lose hope and maintain the ability to care for ourselves and one another,” he said.

The antigen testing was conducted by Dr. Salter Joseph B. Elizalde, resident Medical Officer, assisted by Gerald C. Guzman, Administrative Assistant I and a registered nurse. ■ (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)



# NTA Kadiwa passes NMIS audit

THE Poultry Dressing Plant and Slaughtering Plant of the NTA Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita passed the standards set by the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS), during the audit of the government meat inspection team on November 26.

Also, the “AA” accreditation of the food processing facility in Brgy. Nanguneg, Narvacan, Ilocos Sur was renewed by the same inspection team.

Members of the NMIS audit team were Dr. Domingo D. Gonzaga, Dr. Rudio G. Abulencia, and Mario V. Agbanlog from NMIS Region 1 office.

According to Felicisimo T. Lazo, OIC Project Manager, the inspection team was impressed by the facility, including its trading center and dormitory, confirming the earlier observation of NMIS as one of the cleanest processing plants in the Ilocos Region.

Meanwhile, 50 trainees from the 11th and 12th batches of the Slaughtering Operations NC II students of the TESDA-accredited NTA Kadiwa Training School had their assessment by the TESDA first week of December.

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. ■

Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur Mayor Brigido Camarillo and Sangguniang Bayan Member Arlon Serdenia joined the NTA Candon Branch staff, other barangay officials and youth group during the tree-planting activity in Barangay Lubong. Lower photo: Employees of the DPWH Second Engineering District also joined NTA Candon in the tree-planting activity at the Candon City Watershed. (Resty C. Cambe/Marcelia P. Peralta)



Members of the NMIS audit team inspect the poultry section of the food processing facility. (Mary Rose D. Canaoay)

## NTA Candon: Synchronized Tree Planting

NTA Candon celebrates the agency’s 33rd anniversary with synchronized tree planting activity on July 24.



TO fine-tune the implementation of its solar-powered irrigation program, NTA conducted technical capability training for all its 31 registered Agricultural and Biosystems Engineers.

The five-day training, a collaboration of NTA and the Bureau of Agricultural and Fisheries Engineering (BAFE), was held via video conference platform Microsoft Teams from October 12 to 16. Six technical staff from BAFE also joined the virtual training.

Administrator Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. in a message on the first day said that an efficient irrigation system has a vital role in the modernization of tobacco production.

“It is necessary that we train our engineers in the planning and designing of solar-powered irrigation and the preparation of plans and program of works of their proposed SPIS project,” he said.

The installation of the solar-powered irrigation system (SPIS) is included in the farm mechanization component of the Block Farm Model, which is expected to be implemented in the upcoming cropping season.

NTA has installed in the past two cropping seasons nine SPIS in tobacco-growing areas in Northern Luzon.

According to Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, Deputy Administrator for Operations, NTA had no established standards for installation during the initial implementation of the project.

“So this time we have to determine, with the help of our engineers, the baseline information needed in the site and other relevant information such as rainfall, and wind velocity, for a resilient and effective system during operation,” added Bonoan.

Among the topics included in the training modules are the importance and viability of applying solar energy

## Virtual training on solar irrigation for agricultural engineers



*Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Robert R. Bonoan meets the agricultural engineers during the virtual training. (Jano P. Belleza)*

to farm activities; data needed about the location, assumptions made, and computation of irrigation and crop water requirement; location consideration and its effect on the SPIS design; sizing of SPIS components based on irrigation requirement and water source capacity; design computation exercise; and construction and installation requirements.

Irrigation experts from the Engineering Plans, Designs, and Specifications Division (EPDSD) of BAFE and the Department of Energy (DOE) served as resource speakers, namely, Noemi L. Carpio (Chief, EPDSD), Analyn G. Sagana, Maria Evic C. Panganiban, Arjay P. Sabasaje, Desiree Joy R. Salvatera, Emmanuel R. Lanuza, and Peter A. Sablay (DOE).

A highlight of the training was the group presentation of location-specific design of SPIS applicable in their respective localities. Best presentations were awarded to Farm Technology and Services Department, La Union Branch, and Cagayan Branch.

“After the training, I can say that our engineers are now ready and capable to come up with the required standards for an efficient irrigation system,” Bonoan said.

He added that the agricultural engineers can certify project proposals submitted to them for installation in their respective areas.

NTA is set to establish eight more SPIS in major tobacco-growing provinces, or one for each Block Farm. ■ (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)

## Orientation on selection, promotion process held

NTA conducted an orientation on the selection and promotion process and policies on appointments, with Roderick J. Romualdo, Director II of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) – National Capital Region, as resource speaker, at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City on November 25.

Participants were members of the NTA Human Resource Merit Promotion and Selection Board (HRMPSB) and the Department Managers at the Central Office.

This is in line with the preparations of the selection board in the deliberation of applications for various vacant positions in the agency.

According to Perla C. Manzon, Officer in Charge of the Administrative Department and HRMPSB Chair, the first batch of applicants to the 74 vacant positions for promotion or appointment are expected to be screened by the selection board on December.

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., in his message, enjoined the newly constituted HRMPSB to accelerate the filling-up of vacant plantilla positions to enhance manpower capability of the agency for its upcoming projects this cropping season, and to boost employment in government.

Also present in the orientation were the two Deputy Administrators,

Benedicto M. Savellano (Support Services) and Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan (Operations). Savellano exercises oversight over the HRMPSB.

With Manzon in the HRMPSB are Dinah E. Pichay, Manager of Internal Audit Service, vice-chairperson, as representative of the appointing authority; Ophelia T. Gonzales, Human Resource Management Officer IV, who is directly responsible for recruitment, selection and placement; Neyo E. Valdez, Public Relations Officer V, who represents the NTA Employees Association, for second level positions; and Carmelita V. Albano, Senior Bookkeeper, who represents first level positions. ■



# First online meeting for admin officers

ALL Administrative Officers of the agency held their first virtual meeting on October 1, addressing issues on the safety of the employees from COVID-19, as well as updating on policies and processes in filling up of vacant positions, and other administrative matters.

Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano instructed the officers to focus on the main tasks of enhancing the administrative services in the implementation of health and safety protocols at the workplace.

“Health services is topmost priority of Administrator Robert Victor Seares Jr. and we are performing frontline services in this regard for everyone’s safety,” said Savellano.

The Central Office has been maintaining a 50-percent skeleton workforce and work-from-home setup since April. For the branch offices, he reminded the officers to comply with the procedures set by their respective local government units (LGUs) as far as health issues are concerned.

Filing of terminal leaves, collection of retirements, requests for vehicles, staff trainings and scholarships were also discussed in the virtual meeting organized by the Administrative Department headed by Officer in Charge Perla C. Manzon and Zenaida T. Arrojo, chief of General Services and Procurement Division.

Savellano emphasized the importance of upgrading the computerized system for database of employees’ records to ensure faster transaction on the computation



Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano presides over the virtual meeting with the agency’s Administrative Officers. (Michell P. Naccpil)

of the terminal leaves and claiming the retirement benefits of the retirees.

On manpower development, Savellano discussed his plans to provide opportunities for staff training, as he proposed a meeting with the officers of the NTA Employees Association (NTAEA) to discuss programs or projects they plan to do for their member employees.

“I want to emphasize continuous enhancement of our administrative services and know the areas where we can focus on to improve our major processes,” said Savellano.

The administrative officers were also given updates on new protocols or guidelines on hiring procedures under the new normal condition. Savellano said that an addendum in the internal guidelines of the NTA particularly on the conduct of online interview of applicants will be forwarded to the Civil Service Commission.

“Under the new normal, we encourage online transaction to help employees

reduce contact with virus and to monitor social distancing,” he added.

On NTA scholarship grant for dependents of tobacco growers, he reported on the continuation of registration in the branch offices. “The allowance we give our grantees may be used in obtaining gadgets and internet connection for their online classes,” he said.

The Administrative Officers in attendance were Elaine A. Tinio (Ilocos Norte), Magdalena Mamuyac (Pangasinan), Noralyn I. Idica (Vigan), Alberto C. Casison (La Union), Teodulo B. Benitez Jr. (Isabela), and Josefa P. Correo (Isabela). Imelda N. Riñen, manager of the Farm Technology and Services Department, also joined the meeting. The Administrative Officers of Abra and Candon were represented by Abra Branch Manager Esmeralda G. Valera and Candon Branch Manager Estrella G. De Peralta, along with Resty C. Cambe, respectively. ■ (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)

**Distribution of farm tractors.** NTA Abra distributed six farm tractors to cooperatives and associations of tobacco farmers under its Tobacco Farm Mechanization Program (TFMP), at the Branch Office in Bangued, Abra on February 3.

The distribution, graced by NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares, was facilitated by Abra Branch Manager Esmeralda G. Valera.

The six Kubota KRX 164 tractors worth P5.58 million were given to the tobacco growing municipalities of Luba (2 units), Villaviciosa (2 units), Tayum (1 unit), and Pidigan (1 unit).

TMFP is a five-year program of the agency to modernize the tobacco production with the distribution of tractors, power tillers, and tobacco transplinters to cooperatives and associations in tobacco-growing provinces, including the construction of communal solar-powered irrigation system. (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)



# ECQ Updates

NTA activities under the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic



NTA La Union releases Emergency Cash Assistance (ECA) to TCGS farmers of various barangays in Aringay, Agoo, and Sto Tomas, La Union on April 7. (Kristin Mae S. Castañeda)

## TCGS farmers get cash assistance

NTA released P13 million for farmers under the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) who are affected by the national health emergency resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The agency, through the Branch Offices, distributed the Emergency Cash Assistance (ECA) to 6,668 farmers under the TCGS program in Region 1 and Abra, with each farmer receiving P2,000.

The allocation for immediate intervention was initiated by the NTA Governing Board, with the adoption of Referendum Resolution No. 002-2020 dated March 24, appropriating the budget from the agency's Corporate Fund.

"The directives from the national government is to support our farmers during the national emergency and give them the cash assistance they need," said Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan.

According to Bonoan, the amount may be increased, subject to the approval of the NTA Board and availability of funds.

He added that the Branch Offices have also coordinated with their local traders to release cash advances to their contracted farmers, based on the assessment of the tobacco leaf of the farmer and recommendation of the assisting NTA technician.

The NTA Branch Offices in Regions 1 and 2 and Abra maintained a skeleton workforce to facilitate the distribution of cash assistance to the farmers.

The agency made the necessary arrangements and coordination with the local government units and tobacco buying firms for the deliveries of tobacco produce of the farmers at designated buying stations, as well as from the buying stations to the redrying plants.

The Department of Agriculture has earlier granted the request of NTA to exempt tobacco deliveries from the no-movement policy and continue the trading operations, which have already started before the declaration of a national health emergency.

According to Bonoan, the agency facilitated the release from DA Regional Office I and II of 130 food lane accreditations to the local traders for the unhampered delivery of the farmers' produce to the buying stations.

"If we discontinue the operations, the quality of tobacco in the hands of the farmers will be greatly affected due to limited post-harvest facilities at the farmer level considering that only the tobacco buyer firms have the redrying plants that can preserve the quality of tobacco. If the leaves are not delivered in due time, quality will deteriorate and price will go down, to the detriment of our farmers," Bonoan said.

"We always aim to have all our farmers attain the full benefits from their tobacco crop," he added, with his report that more than 1 million kilos of cured tobacco have been delivered and bought in the buying stations even during the lockdown until the end of March. ■



A farmer receives the cash assistance from Patricia Cortez of NTA Vigan.



Photos: NTA Vigan / NTA Candon

## NTA joins food sufficiency drive with ‘Gulayan at Manukan’

NTA launched its “Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay” Project to help farming households produce their own food and raise additional income for their family during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project is expected to further strengthen the efforts of Secretary William Dar of the Department of Agriculture, through “Plant, Plant, Plant Program” or “Ahon Lahat, Pagkaing Sapat (ALPAS) Laban sa Covid-19” program, in achieving food productivity and supply availability among households.

NTA held the synchronized ceremonial launching of the pilot project on April 27 in three separate barangays, Lubong and Silag in Sta. Maria and Nagsupotan in San Juan in Ilocos Sur, with local chief executives, community leaders, and farmers beneficiaries in attendance.

According to Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, the launching sites in the three barangays are part of the 21 pilot sites of the backyard gardening and free range chicken farming module in Ilocos Sur.

The project was also launched in tobacco-growing communities, with 467 other pilot sites in Ilocos Norte, Abra, La Union, Pangasinan, Cagayan, and Isabela.

Each module for an area of 1,000 to 2,500 square meters is comprised of free

inputs of vegetable seeds, chicks, and feeds.

As of June 30, the agency has distributed 14,600 chicks and 2,920 packs of assorted vegetable seeds to 976 farmer-cooperators.

NTA extension workers also provide technical assistance on vegetable farming and chicken raising to the farmers participating in the project.

The P10-million budget for the Gulayan at Manukan were from the refocused/realigned FY 2020 budget in support of the food sufficiency program of the national government.

Project beneficiaries are households of registered tobacco growers, selected and validated by the NTA Branch Offices, and having enough viable space for the vegetables to grow and chickens to roam around.

“We implement the project at the tail end of the tobacco trading in Ilocos, and this will sustain our efforts to ensure food sufficiency for the farmers after tobacco cropping season,” Bonoan said.

“We will help our farmers establish small business enterprises and supply fresh food in their farming communities and to our NTA Kadiwa one-stop shop for vegetables, poultry and processed meat, and hopefully, facilitate these farmers

in developing linkages with local and national markets,” he added.

NTA Candon Branch Manager Estrella G. De Peralta said that NTA, through its provincial branches, has been actively extending support to “our farmers in major tobacco growing provinces in the country while taking all necessary precautions to help in preventing the spread of COVID-19.”

She added that the support of the barangay leaders and local chief executives plays a big role in the success of the project, and other intervention priorities during the national health emergency.

De Peralta and NTA Vigan Branch Manager Minerva P. Mizal, spearheaded the said ceremonial launching of the project in Sta. Maria and San Juan, Ilocos Sur, respectively.

With the successful launching of the Gulayan at Manukan, and positive feedbacks from the farmers and cooperating local government units, the agency has expected similar success with the launching of the Vegetable Seeds Distribution program, as it targets a bigger number of beneficiaries with wider coverage. ■ (with reports from NTA Vigan and NTA Candon)



NTA Ilocos Norte Branch OIC Luzviminda U. Padayao (right) and Divina D. Pagdilao received from Wilma Ibea, chief of Ilocos Norte Research and Experiment Center (INREC), packs of vegetable seeds for the farmer beneficiaries of the NTA Vegetable Seeds Distribution. (NTA Ilocos Norte)

## NTA launches P3.3-M vegetable seeds distribution project

IN support of the Department of Agriculture's effort for food sufficiency, the NTA launched its P3.3-million "Vegetable Seeds Distribution" Project simultaneously in eight different areas in tobacco growing provinces on May 26.

The synchronized seed distribution was held in selected launching sites, in coordination with cooperating local government units in Abra, Ilocos Sur (with two sites), Ilocos Norte, La Union, Pangasinan, Cagayan, and Isabela.

According to Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, the project will benefit 6,660 tobacco growers.

Each farmer will receive a pack of mixed vegetable seeds of *okra*, bush

*sitao*, upland *kangkong*, *pechay*, eggplant, *ampalaya*, and other fast-growing vegetables perfect for backyard gardening.

Bonoan added that the formal launch of the seeds distribution is part of the agency's celebration with DA of the Farmers and Fisherfolks' Month.

"This is a fitting follow-up to our Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay Project which got positive response from our farmer beneficiaries and cooperating local government units since its pilot launch on April 27," said Bonoan.

He said that two projects help ensure our farmers enough food supply and additional income for their family during and after the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) health crisis.

"We expect that the simultaneous launching activities give us a wider coverage to drumbeat the project, and all the agency's interventions to benefit the farmers during the community quarantine," he added.

NTA was one of the first government agencies that came to the aid of the farmers during the early part of the Enhanced Community Quarantine with its P13.5 million Emergency Cash Assistance to 6,668 farmers under its Tobacco Contract Growing System.

Bonoan has enjoined the Branch Offices to ensure that the participants wear face masks, maintain social distancing and other health and safety protocols during the program launch. ■

**FRONTLINERS, TOO.** The NTA "Oras ni Mannalon ti Tabako (OMT)" Radio program anchors joined other NTA personnel who were at work on the front line, bringing relevant information to the farmers and the rest of our stakeholders, especially in this time of emergency resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. They showed up for the weekly broadcast to make sure that industry stakeholders are given relevant information, especially on trading matters and those concerning government interventions for the affected farmers.



The OMT was aired in six radio stations:

DZTP-Candon (Anchors: Adonis Lazo, Marcelia Pulgar) – Monday, 12:00 noon – 12:30 p.m.

DZVV-Vigan (Anchors: Jose Taclas Jr., Immanouel Rafanan) – Saturday, 12:30 – 1:00 p.m.

DZPA-Abra (Anchor: Marife Peralta) – Saturday, 11:00 – 11:30 a.m.

DZSO-La Union (Anchors: Aurie Nellie Tumbaga, Ruby Dacanay) – Saturday, 12:30 – 1:00 p.m.

DZVR-Laoag (Anchors: Ferdimark Rosario, Mae Angela Lacamora, with Rhonelle Sullicipan) – Saturday, 12:30 – 1:00 p.m.

DZRD-Dagupan (Anchor: Eulalia Elle) – Friday, 11:00 – 11:30 a.m. ■

## Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay Project in Cagayan



Franklin Berbano, flanked by Robert F. Pedro and Alice A. Malab (upper photo), shows his full-grown chicken, and his vegetable farm (lower photo) during the project monitoring conducted by the NTA Cagayan Branch Office. (Orlando Arugay)

TOBACCO grower Franklin Berbano, of Taguing, Baggao, Cagayan, a beneficiary of the NTA “Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay” project, started harvesting his vegetables and poultry first week of November.

Berbano and 13 other tobacco growers in the province were the first batch of beneficiaries who were given free vegetable seed packs and Sasso chicks in August. The second batch had 39 beneficiaries.

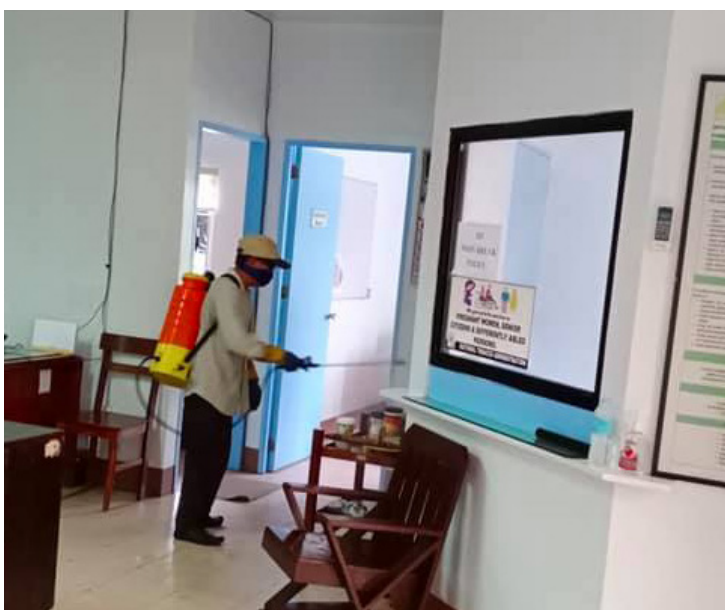
According to Berbano, he sold part of the vegetables and the 25 free-range chicken that he harvested in his 100 square-meter farm lot, and will keep the rest for family consumption.

Alice A. Malab, Senior TPRO, Roberto F. Pedro, Agriculturist I, and staff from the Branch Operations Unit visited Berbano’s farm and other project sites in Baggao in November 5.

The project was in support of the food sufficiency program of the Department of Agriculture. NTA has allocated P10-million for the Gulayan at Manukan project from its realigned budget for 2020 as part of the intervention to support the farmers during the pandemic.

For Cagayan, the agency has allocated P500,000 for the two batches of beneficiaries. ■

## Regular disinfection



Disinfection and general cleaning of office premises and peripheral areas at the NTA Isabela Branch in Ilagan City. (Photo: J.A. Pascual)

NTA has ordered the regular disinfection of offices in all departments and branch offices, every third Friday of the month, until the risk of viral transmission is contained as determined by proper authorities.

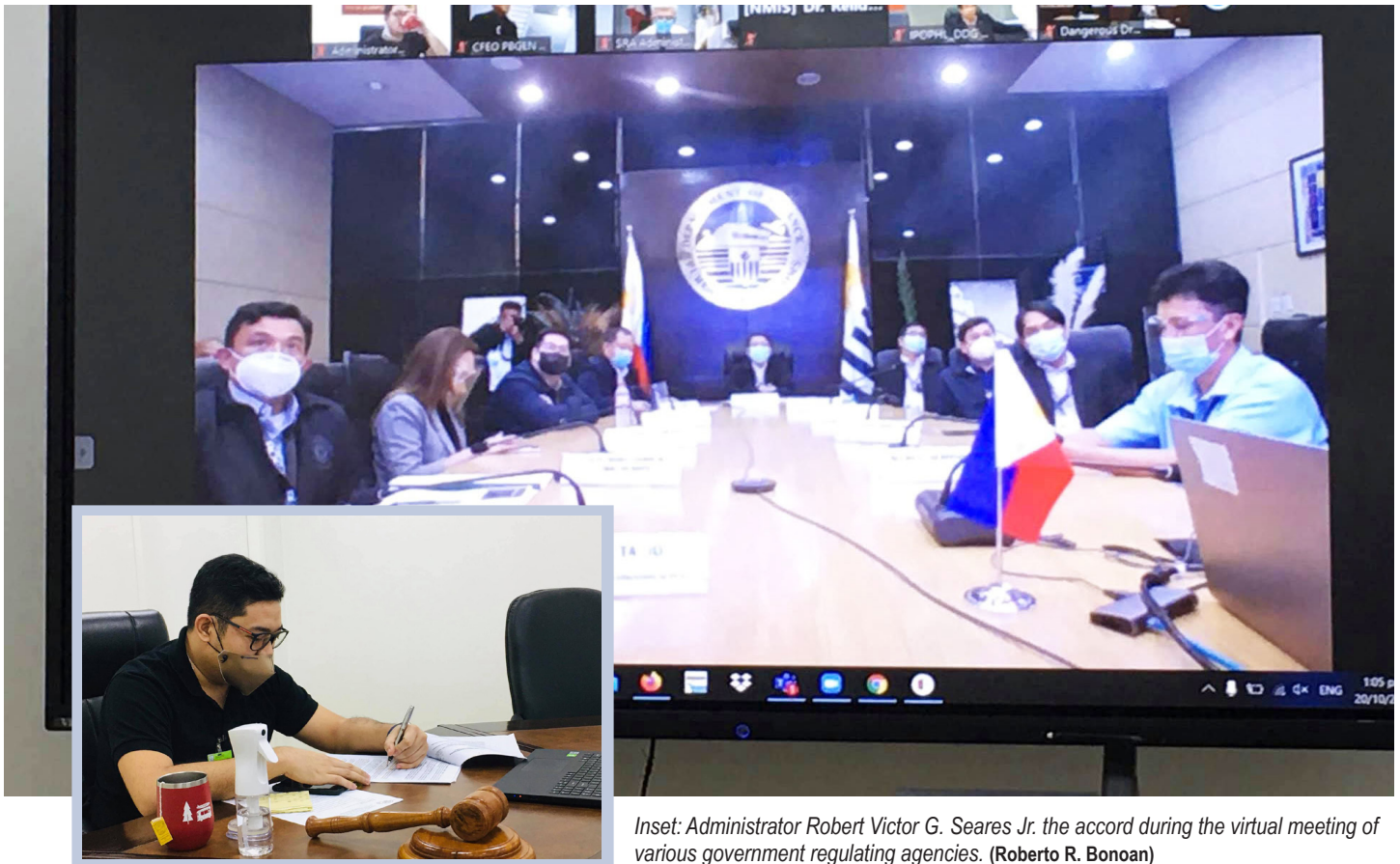
This was first implemented on May 22 with the cancellation of work at the NTA Central Office and the Branch Offices to give way to the disinfection of office premises, as part of the infection prevention and control adopted by the agency to reduce transmission of COVID 19.

Disinfection at the Kadiwa Processing Plant in Narvacan, Ilocos Sur, however, was scheduled anytime within a month to ensure nondisruption of slaughtering, toll-dressing and other activities.

The Branch Offices in Region 1, 2 and Abra, areas under General Community Quarantine (GCQ) have allowed their staff to work, except senior citizens and those with high health risk.

The agency retained a skeleton staff in the Branch Offices during the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), for the continuous operation of tobacco trading and in the distribution of the emergency cash assistance to the tobacco growers.

Work at the Central Office in Quezon City during the Modified ECQ was at 50% workforce. ■



*Inset: Administrator Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. the accord during the virtual meeting of various government regulating agencies. (Roberto R. Bonoan)*

## NTA signs inter-agency accord for border security, management

NTA joined 29 other government bodies for inter-agency cooperation initiated by the Bureau of Customs (BOC) to strengthen border control capabilities of the government.

The signing of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the BOC and various government regulating agencies was held through virtual meeting on October 20.

By signing the MOU, Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. has affirmed the commitment of NTA to render consultation, coordination and cooperation with the BOC in trade facilitation, prevention of smuggling and provision of support mechanism on border control.

NTA and the regulatory agencies must provide the BOC an updated list of both restricted and regulated goods as defined under Republic Act No. 10863, or the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act of 2016, which requires regulatory permits and licenses.

NTA regulates unmanufactured tobacco leaves, cigarettes, cigars, heated tobacco products, pipe tobacco, chewing tobacco, snuff, homogenized tobacco, reconstituted tobacco, cut fillers, cut rags, snus, flavorings and machine spare parts.

Government regulatory bodies must also strengthen coordination and cooperation in the utilization of data and information resources and provide a process flow in the application and releasing of the required regulatory permits to prevent and suppress smuggling and all other forms of customs fraud.

Also part of the joint cooperation are six other agencies under the Department of Agriculture, namely: Bureau of Animal Industry, represented by Director Ronnie D. Domingo; Bureau of

Plant Industry, represented Director George Y. Culaste; Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, represented by Director Eduardo B. Gongona; National Food Authority, represented by Administrator Judy Carol L. Dansal; National Meat Inspection Service, represented by Executive Director Reildrin G. Morales; and Sugar Regulatory Administration, represented by Administrator Hermenegildo R. Serafica.

Administrator Seares signed the MOU at the NTA Board Room in Quezon City, in the presence of Deputy Administrators Benedicto M. Savellano and Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, Regulation Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, Corporate Planning Manager Fortuna C. Benosa, Finance Manager Ma. Teresa B. Laudencia, Internal Audit Service Manager Dinah E. Pichay, and Budget Officer V Reynaldo R. Aquino.

Other participating regulatory agencies are the Bureau of Import Services, Bureau of Philippine Standards, Fair Trade Enforcement Bureau, Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines, Strategic Trade Management Office, Environmental and Management Bureau, Mines and Geo Sciences Bureau, Bureau of Quarantine, Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, Dangerous Drugs Board, Food and Drug Administration, Bureau of Internal Revenue, Securities and Exchange Commission, Bureau of Immigration, Firearms and Explosives Office of the Philippine National Police, National Telecommunications Commission, Philippine Nuclear Research Institute, Professional Regulation Commission, Philippine Economic Zone Authority, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, Anti-Money Laundering Council, National Bureau of Investigation, and Philippine Coast Guard. ■  
(Melanie Rapiz-Parel)

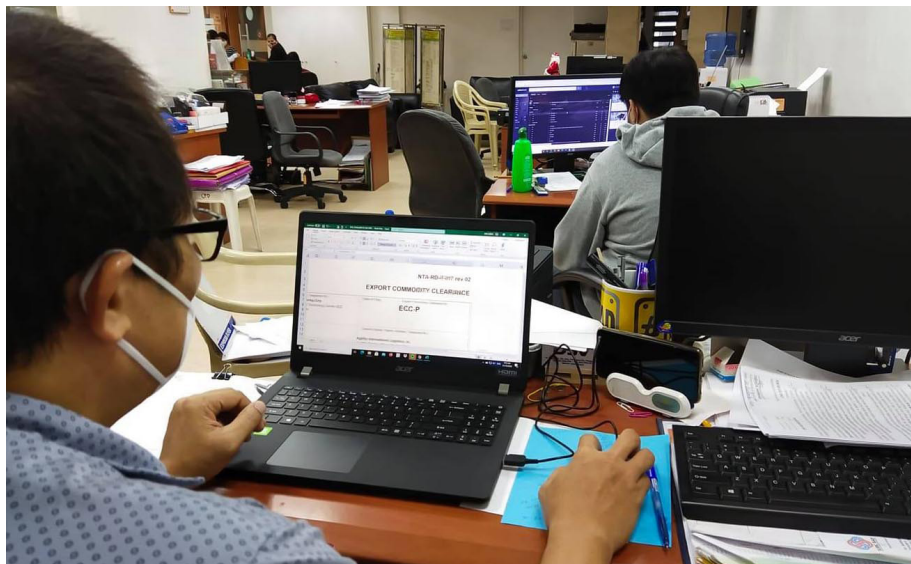
# Board OKs rules for mandatory online transaction for regulatory processes

THE NTA Governing Board has approved the guidelines and procedure for the mandatory online transactions in its regulatory functions, in a board meeting held October 13 at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City.

Mandatory online transactions include application, processing and issuance of license to import, export and transship tobacco leaf, tobacco products, heated tobacco products, other tobacco-related supplies, materials and spare parts, and application, processing and issuance of import/export/transshipment commodity clearances.

According to Regulation Department Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, the said guidelines and procedure is a requirement for the integration of the regulatory processes into a fully online and interoperable platform with other trade regulatory government agencies (TRGAs) with TradeNet, the Philippine government's online trading facilitation portal.

"Aside from streamlining our processes in compliance with the requirements of Ease in Doing Business and Efficient Government Services Delivery Act of 2018, NTA will adopt a no-contact policy to protect the health of our clients and employees in compliance with the government directive for stringent social



*A staff of the Regulation Department processes online application of clearances*

distancing and community quarantine measures to contain the spread of COVID 19," said Ambros.

To proceed with online transactions, applicants for licenses and clearances must have their own TradeNet account and profile. Upon activation, they must fill out license/clearance forms provided by the TradeNet and upload digital copies of required documents.

Payments of processing and other

necessary fees shall be deposited to the NTA Transhipper Account at Land Bank of the Philippines. After payment, the applicant must upload the copy of bank validated deposit slip to TradeNet. Once approved, the applicant will receive an electronic notification.

The guidelines will take effect after 15 days of publication and upon the availability of the TradeNet.gov.ph portal to the public. ■ (Eleanor A. Rapanut)



**Ilocos Trading.** ONE month of lockdown in Luzon has not slowed down tobacco trading operations in a buying station in Cabugao, Ilocos Sur and in other trading centers in the country's tobacco-producing provinces. As of April 1, tobacco leaf acceptances for all types of tobacco (Virginia, Burley and Native) have reached 2.9 million kilos. NTA projects that total production this year will reach 45 million kilos. Vehicles for the transport of tobacco and movement of farmers, trading personnel and NTA staff during the enhanced community quarantine are allowed by the LGUs to pass through checkpoints upon presentation of proper identification and other required documents and compliance with safety protocols. (Minerva P. Mizal)

# Tobacco private sector on board for stronger cooperation



NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. and some members of the Governing Board with representatives from the private sector during the discussion on the current industry situations. Also present are Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan and Regulation Department Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros. (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)

GEARING up for the upcoming tobacco season, NTA got commitment for stronger cooperation from cigarette manufacturers, leaf buyers and traders to boost the industry for the benefit of the local tobacco growers.

In a consultative conference at the Central Office in Quezon City on September 10, NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. said the cigarette manufacturers, through their representatives, have pledged to increase their purchase commitment for locally produced tobacco.

At present, the local manufacturers are buying 25% of the local production and the agency pushes for a higher rate or at least 45% to sustain growth for the tobacco industry.

"This support is crucial as we enter a tobacco season under the current pandemic which have impacted a lot of sectors, especially agricultural production," said Seares.

"Our partners from the private sector also agreed to our proposals to come up with their own five-year purchasing plan in line with our medium-term roadmap for sustainable tobacco production, and to submit quarterly report with respect to their local purchases and import data to enhance our data gathering," he added.

The industry development roadmap is expected to accelerate the modernization

and industrialization of the tobacco industry towards increased production and higher income to the farmers for the next five years.

"We always aim to give better opportunities to our growers to earn more for their tobacco venture as this is our major thrust under our administration, and with the support of our key industry players," said Seares.

Present in the meeting were representatives from Japan Tobacco International (JTI), Atty. Jose Paolo Patajo and Robert Eugenio; and Philip Morris and Fortune Tobacco Corporation (PMFTC), Atty. Anicka Zaragoza and Atty. Archie Gonzales. The representative from La Suerte Cigar and Cigarette Factory, Walter Barrios, joined the virtual discussion.

According to Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, the meeting provided a more focused discussion on the issues and challenges affecting the industry.

"We need this cooperation as we prepare for the next cropping season under a difficult situation brought about by the pandemic," said Bonoan.

Directors Rodolfo F. Salanga and Nestor C. Casela, both members of the NTA Governing Board, and NTA Regulation Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros also joined the meeting

facilitated by Bonoan.

In a separate meeting on September 14, leaf buyers and traders also gave their commitment to buy more locally produced tobacco for the export market.

Local production last year reached 46.6 M kg, a 7.7% increase from the 43.2 M kg production in 2018. According to Winston Uy, president of Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc., 75% of the local production goes to the export market.

Seares said that the leaf buyers, true to their commitment before the trading season in March, bought all leaf produced by the tobacco growers despite the difficulty of trading activities due to lockdown.

Uy, joined by Matthew Diong of TransManila Inc. (TMI) in the said meeting, assured NTA that they continue making their contract growers to be more efficient with better technology and sufficient production and financial assistance in producing quality tobacco that can compete with the world market. Kingsley Pua of Pentaleaf Corp joined the meeting via JioMeet.

The leaf buyers and the NTA agreed to adopt the policy of market-driven tobacco production. In particular, the leaf buyers encouraged the production of Virginia Topped and Burley Topped this year in response to the current market trends. ■



# NTA welcomes private sector's support for tobacco growers

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. commended Japan Tobacco International (Philippines) Inc. (JTI) and PMFTC Inc., for their commitment to help the tobacco growers improve their economic conditions.

JTI said in a press release on October 19 that it is studying further increase on its procurement of locally produced tobacco from the current 4.6 million kilograms (kg) it has programmed to buy in 2021 to support local growers reeling from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

PMFTC, on the other hand, said that approximately about \$130 million, or P6.2 billion, will be spent by the company to buy more than 45,000 tons of locally-grown green tobacco leaf over the next three years.

The actions of JTI and PMFTC were in response to the joint request of Secretaries Carlos Dominguez of Finance and William Dar of Agriculture for the cigarette manufacturers to help support local growers and raise revenues for tobacco-producing provinces affected by the pandemic-induced economic shock by hiking their purchases of locally produced tobacco leaf.

In their letter, Dominguez and Dar

pointed out that the strict quarantines imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19 had constrained the marketing flow of food and other agricultural goods, including tobacco, which is among the most affected crops as it is a non-food commodity.

"We are very thankful that Secretary Dar and Secretary Dominguez brought this up with our private partners, especially for including tobacco, a non-food commodity, among the agricultural crops that need government support during this difficult situation," Seares said.

He added that this is a recognition of the relevance of the tobacco industry, particularly in its contribution to raise revenues, not only for tobacco-producing provinces through their excise tax shares, but also to the health sector.

JTI and PMFTC are two of the major cigarette manufacturers that NTA invited for its pre-season consultation on September 10 as the agency calls for stronger cooperation among all stakeholders to boost the industry for the benefit of the small farmers.

JTI said its planned purchase of 4.6 million kg of local tobacco leaf for 2021 represents an increase of 1 million kg

from what it brought from farmers this year.

Its 2021 programmed purchases of local tobacco leaf make up a quarter of its estimated total leaf requirement for next year, JTI general manager John Freda said in his letter.

This volume is also well beyond the requirement provided under Republic Act (RA) No. 10351, which requires manufacturers or sellers of tobacco products to procure at least 15 percent of their tobacco leaf raw material requirements from locally grown sources.

PMFTC, through its leaf suppliers, has been implementing a comprehensive Agricultural Labor Practices program that benefits approximately 15,000 tobacco farmers from Regions 1, 2 and CAR including Nueva Ecija and Tarlac.

Knowing the shocking effect of the pandemic in our local economy, Administrator Seares said that intervention programs of the agency are not enough to help farmers sustain their source of livelihood.

"So we appreciate every support we can gather for our farmers, especially coming from our major industry players like JTI and PMFTC," he added. ■

## Tobacco traders commit to buy all tobacco leaves

NTA welcomed the commitment of major tobacco buying firms to buy all the tobacco leaves of farmers in Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley Region, and Abra.

Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan said the commitment, personally relayed to him by ULPI, TransManila, Conleaf, and Associated Anglo-American, would mean all contracted tobacco growers are assured of reasonable income of their produce in the current crop year.

"We implemented beginning this year a new floor price, higher than the price of all tobacco types for the last two cropping seasons, and based on feedbacks from the buying stations, trading operation is alive and well, despite the lockdown," Bonoan said.

According to Bonoan, it helped that the Department of Agriculture approved the request of the agency, and in coordination with the local government units, for the unhampered delivery of tobacco in their respective areas, and movement of NTA staff and trading



NTA Cagayan Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda inspects the classification of Cigar Filler Tobacco of farmers from Amulung, Cagayan at the ULPI buying station in Tuguegarao City on May 16. (NTA Cagayan)

personnel to the buying stations to receive tobacco from the farmers.

The trading season of cured tobacco in the Ilocos Region officially started on March 5 while the trading in Region 2 started last week of April.

Trading operations continued until the first week of June for Virginia, and will

continue in July for Burley and August for Native tobacco.

"The figure would have been higher if not for the extended stoppage of operations during the Holy Week and choke points in some areas due to strict implementation of safety protocols," Bonoan said. ■

## Farmers, buyers agree to new tobacco floor price



AN agreement to increase tobacco floor prices by two pesos across all types and grades was finalized after the signing ceremony on January 29, during the Stakeholders' Meeting held at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City.

The agreement, which adjusted floor prices of Virginia, Burley and Native tobacco, will be effective immediately upon the approval of NTA Governing Board and the required publication, and applicable for trading years 2020 and 2021.

The floor prices per kilogram for Virginia top grades increased to P84 for Grade AA and P83 for Grade A. For Burley, the top-grades A and B increased to P72 and P69, respectively. The high grade of the Native type is now P73 per kilogram.

The signing of the agreement by NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares, Philippine Tobacco Institute President Rodolfo F. Salanga, and farmer-leader Bernard Vicente of the National Federation of Tobacco Growers Association and Cooperatives (NAFTAC) was realized after fruitful negotiations between the tobacco farmers and leaf buyers following the tripartite conference on September 25, 2019.

Other agency officials, farmer leaders, and representatives of the private sector were also present on the occasion. ■

*SIGNING OF THE TRIPARTITE AGREEMENT on tobacco floor prices: (seated, from Left) Bernard Vicente for the farmers; Rodolfo F. Salanga for the traders; and NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares, assisted by Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan.*

## Leaf buyers warned against nonissuance of purchase docs

THE NTA Regulation Department (RD) has strongly reminded the field canvassers against non-issuance of certificates of purchase (COPs) to the farmer-sellers upon purchase of their cured leaves.

RD Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros issued the reminder during the orientation seminar on the 2018 Revised Trading Rules and Regulations (Revised TRR) Governing the Trading of Locally Grown Leaf Tobacco held on February 7 at the NTA Candon Branch Office in Candon City.

The 2018 Revised TRR prescribes a strict compliance by the field canvassers to issue COP, as well as the buying stations to issue purchase invoice vouchers (PIVs) to every sale transaction of tobacco, a provision installed to monitor the production data of tobacco from the source.

The field canvasser, authorized by a tobacco buying station to buy tobacco leaves from the farmers, is required to issue COP in five copies, one each for the buying station, NTA, the chairman of the barangay where the leaves are sourced, the field canvasser, and the farmer-seller.

Failure or refusal to issue COP or PIV covering tobacco purchase is considered a less serious offense punishable by a penalty of fine up to P100,000.

"We need to remind anew our leaf buyers to strictly follow the NTA trading rules and there are no more excuses for their noncompliance. The local government units of our tobacco-producing provinces are seriously conducting proper monitoring of their production data," Atty. Ambros said.

These purchase documents, COPs and PIVs, are used as proof of production of a municipality/province and necessary in the computation of its tobacco excise tax share.

The department also urged all tobacco buyers to submit their license applications with complete documentary requirements. Atty. Ambros enjoined the branch offices to strengthen their enforcement and close monitoring of trading operations and to immediately report buyers without license or authority, particularly the unregistered field canvassers (FCs), and other violators of trading rules.

Participants in the annual orientation seminar were licensed FCs and representatives from buying stations in areas covered by Clustered NTA Branch Offices in Region 1 and Abra. Also present were Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, and the provincial branch managers of NTA. ■



NTA Candon at Burgos, Ilocos Sur on September 21. (Marcelino C. Ancheta)

AS an initial move for a successful implementation of the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS), the NTA started conducting orientation on quality tobacco production, in cooperation with leaf buying companies and the local government units.

The agency, through its eight Branch Offices, started meeting with local farmers in tobacco-growing communities in Regions 1 and 2, and Abra for the upcoming cropping season.

The educational and information drive on quality tobacco production is aimed at giving the tobacco growers a briefing on their responsibilities in the TCGS project, including its implementing guidelines and marketing agreement.

Part of the discussion is the Tobacco Block Farming, a new model of tobacco production to increase farmers' income and productivity, under the five-year development roadmap of the industry, or the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP). Also included are the essential components of the Block Farm, with focus on farm mechanization and livelihood projects, in addition to the various institutional projects of the agency under the Integrated Farming and Other Income Generating Activities Project (IFOIGAP).

In Isabela, the operations team of NTA Isabela conducted information drive on tobacco production and orientation meeting in Quirino town on October 27.

In attendance were 45 Burely tobacco growers under the TCGS financing program, and two representatives from leaf buyer Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc.

Cagayan Branch Manager Corazon R. Riazonda, in charge of Isabela Branch in concurrent capacity, discussed the various programs of the NTA, giving more emphasis on Tobacco Block Farming, including updates of its implementation and other components, financial assistance, and local government support.

Before the orientation, Riazonda and her team had a brief meeting with Quirino, Isabela Mayor Eduard Juan at his office. The municipality of Quirino is the country's top producer of Burley and Native type tobacco.

In Ilocos Sur, NTA Vigan Branch Manager Minerva P. Mizal led the branch operations team for TCGS orientation on October 27 of local Virginia tobacco growers in separate schedules in five tobacco-growing barangays in Sinit town: Cadanglaan, Quibit-quibit, Masadag, Nagcullooban and Nagongburan.

Sinit has 1,147 farmers registered under the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA) of the Department of Agriculture, representing a total of 860.35 hectares of tobacco farms.

The branch offices in Candon, Abra, Ilocos Norte, Cagayan, Pangasinan and La Union also conducted

see PAGE 20



## Tobacco growers get P49.5-M assistance for rice production

Rice ready for transplanting, in Rosario East, Aringay, La Union, under the Rice Production Wet Season Project of NTA La Union. (Kristin Mae S. Castañeda)

TOBACCO contract growers received rice production assistance worth P49.5-million under the agency's Integrated Farming and Other Income-Generating Activities Program (IFOIGAP), and in line with the Rice Resiliency Project of the Department of Agriculture.

NTA through its Branch Offices released early in June the amount for the Rice Wet Season Project for CY 2020 to 3,537 tobacco-rice farmers of major tobacco-producing areas in the Ilocos Provinces, La Union, Pangasinan, Abra, Cagayan, and Isabela.

According to Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, the agency implemented the inbred rice production in rainfed areas, with tobacco as preceding crop, to augment the income of tobacco-rice farmers, by increasing their yield to at least 5,000 kilos per hectare.

The rice production assistance, at P25,000 per hectare with

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

According to Bonoan, the agency has increased the program coverage from 2,371 last year to 2,829 hectares this crop year and an additional 533 farmers to last year's 3,004 beneficiaries, as part of its intervention and activities on food production.

"We have a high yield and productivity in our rice production program, since we started implementing the tobacco off-season project in 1999, and we expect to sustain our efficiency and boost production in support of Secretary William Dar's food sufficiency drive," he said.

The agency's extension workers, who are also equipped with technical know-how on rice production, provide the farmers technical and marketing assistance. ■

orientation meetings with the local farmers in their respective areas.

In Camanga, Badoc, NTA Ilocos Norte OIC Luzviminda U. Padayao and her team met on October 6 cluster leaders in the area to discuss Tobacco Block Farming, a new tobacco production model, as required by the industry roadmap for increasing productivity and farmers' income.

NTA Abra Branch Manager Esmeralda G. Valera and staff from the Operations Unit joined Tubo Mayor Guilbert P. Ballangan and other local officials for the tobacco farmers' meeting and orientation of TCGS, held at the Dap-ay Hall in Barangay Poblacion.

Meanwhile, the extension office of NTA in Misamis Oriental teamed up with the local government of El Salvador City in the conduct of Tobacco Farmers General Assembly held at the new City Hall on November 5, 12, 19, and 26.

Mercedes M. Ayco of the NTA extension office discussed the updates of the tobacco industry and the importance of proper documentation of volume of tobacco production in relation to the LGU's share of Excise Tax. ■



Orientation in Quirino, Isabela on October 27. (Edgar Lagasca)



## LIVELIHOOD

# Tobacco growers tapped for beef cattle production

NTA is taking another step towards increasing income of farmers through its Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project (BCPAP).

For the new initiative, the agency has allocated P10 million from the Tobacco Farmers Production Assistance or Investment Outlay for 2020, under its Integrated Farming and Other Income Generating Activities Project (IFOIGAP).

According to NTA Administrator Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., the dispersal of the Brahman heifers is part of the livestock component of the agency's five-year industry development plan, or the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program.

NTA is set to distribute 250 beef cattle to selected farmer-cooperators under its Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) project in the initial implementation of the project.

The dispersal started with the distribution of 35 heads in Abra on November 16, and 25 each in Ilocos Sur (1st District) on November 19, and Pangasinan (including Tarlac) on November 20.

The Branch Managers and senior staff spearheaded the dispersal in their respective areas, assisted by Project Consultant Dr. Mikael Benedict Carmelo G. Crisologo in the first three locations. Crisologo said that NTA is also expected to deliver beef cattle in Ilocos Norte, 2nd District of Ilocos Sur, La Union, Cagayan and Isabela.

The distribution will also be conducted in Candon Branch, 50 heads; La Union Branch, 25 heads; Ilocos Norte Branch, 35 heads; Isabela Branch, 25 heads; and Cagayan Branch, 25 heads.



*Orientation-Seminar and Beef Cattle Distribution at NTA Pangasinan*

### Online training

The Branch Offices conducted beef cattle production training on October 26 to project implementers and farmer beneficiaries.

Speaking online from the Central Office in Quezon City to the project implementers in the provincial branch offices, Administrator Seares said that the project will help jumpstart the beef cattle industry in the tobacco growing provinces and will also forward the vision of the Department of Agriculture for advancing food sufficiency in the country.

The new initiative took off during the term of the late Administrator Robert L. Seares as a production and marketing intervention for the tobacco farmers.

NTA already has an established production and marketing intervention for the tobacco farmers through its NTA Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita (formerly AgriPinoy Projects), with its value-adding component, the Tobacco Farmers Food Processing and Trading Center.

Per project guidelines, prospective farmer-cooperators must be registered tobacco farmers with the NTA and under

the Registry System for the Basic Sector in Agriculture and Fisheries (RSBSA). They must be willing to undergo cattle production training, and have the capability to provide cattle shed housing and equipment, labor, adequate grazing area, supplementary feed, and clean water source.

As an initial step, the project implementers will conduct training/ seminar to the farmer cooperators on cattle production, including grazing land development and organic feed production.

Other essential project components include production technology package, artificial insemination services, and technical support services/animal health services.

Production assistance shall be repaid with two 12-month-old cows, the first and third offsprings, within a maximum period of six years. The first offspring is the repayment which is to be loaned out immediately to next-in-line or downline farmer-cooperator, and the third offspring for the second repayment, to be sold out as income of the agency to recover investment. ■

# Project Monitoring



Balaoan, La Union

## Improved seedling production in Ilocos Norte, Candon, La Union

FARMER-cooperators of the Improved Tobacco Seedling Production (ITSP) Project in Ilocos Norte and Candon Branch have started preparation of motherbed and sowing in various locations in tobacco-growing municipalities of their coverage area.

NTA Ilocos Norte Officer in Charge Luzviminda U. Padayao and Branch Operations Unit monitored first week of October the preparation of the farmers in Nambaran, Bacarra; Camanga and Madupayas, Badoc; Sucusquen and Tangaoan, Piddig; Espiritu, Dingras; Sta. Catalina, Pasuquin; and Bangsar and Imelda, Banna.

The Branch Office also delivered sacks of carbonized rice hull (CRH) and cheesecloth necessary for the motherbed preparation in selected municipalities.

Candon Branch, headed by Manager Estrella G. De Peralta, also monitored motherbed preparations and sowing in the second district of Ilocos Sur, the Branch Office coverage area, particularly: Sapang, Sta. Lucia; Dan-ar and Plaza, Santiago; Bantugo, Nagbukel; Bagani Ubbog, Candon City; Dirdirig, Burgos; and Capariaan, Sta. Cruz.

In La Union, Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay and his team visited on the same period the seedbeds of the Improved Tobacco Seedling Production (ITSP) Project in various sites in Balaoan, Sto. Tomas, and Agoo in La Union.

The Branch Office is expected to produce 5.4 million good quality seedlings for Virginia and Burley production in the province. Beneficiaries are 359 farmer-



Piddig, Ilocos Norte

cooperators of the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) in Balaoan, Sudipen, Bangar, Santol, Naguilian, Agoo, Sto. Tomas, and Rosario.

According to Manager Palabay, the farmer beneficiaries with an aggregate area of 270 hectares are expected to start transplanting the seedlings on December 2, and the activity will continue until the first week of January 2021.

For the ITSP project, Ilocos Norte, Candon and La Union Branch Office were given 28, 25 and 45 modules, respectively, with 120,000 seedlings per module.

ITSP is aimed at producing healthy seedlings for quality tobacco crop. The agency is set to produce from these seedbeds sufficient, good, uniform, strong and healthy seedlings of desired variety needed by the tobacco buyers for quality tobacco production.

Each Branch Office is expected to produce good quality seedlings (stocky with good root system) to supply the needs of the tobacco farmers. This is based on a 10-hectare module which assigns two seedling production sites of at least 5 hectares per location for each Branch Office.

The ISTP Project for Virginia and Burley production is also being implemented in the other branches: Vigan, Abra, Pangasinan, Isabela and Cagayan.

As part of the preparation for the upcoming tobacco season, NTA Candon manager De Peralta also had a meeting on October 5 with Reynaldo Bagaoisan, Agronomy chief of TMI, to discuss fuelwood sustainability under the agency's Kahuyang Pangkabuhayan at Pangkalikasan. ■



## A Legacy of a Caring Hand

**A**DMINISTRATOR Dr. Robert “Banting” Lizardo Seares passed away during first week of the Enhanced Community Quarantine or metro-wide lockdown brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was a short-lived, three years or halfway of his term, but significant service to the tobacco growers.

It was in February 2017 when the government regulatory agency for tobacco welcomed Doc Banting, a former Bangued Mayor and a medical doctor, as the new administrator. He wholeheartedly accepted the challenge to head the agency in service of all tobacco growers and other major industry’s stakeholders.

Being in the medical profession, he had said, will not stop him from helping the farmers earn a good profit of their produce or as long as the industry needs them. As he was also aware of the challenge given by President Rodrigo Duterte to the agency to pursue government’s policy of balancing between regulating the industry for the sake of the people’s health and ensuring the welfare and upliftment of the farmers and workers.

Doc Banting had expected that with his medical background--he was a Doctor to the Barrios and consultant and chief surgeon of the family-owned hospital in Abra--he would be facing questions about his ability to run the agency.

He assumed the office with a strong commitment to look after the welfare of the tobacco farmers.



He said that he assumed the office with a strong commitment to look after the welfare of the tobacco farmers. That was exactly what he wanted to focus on despite the campaign against smoking and the looming negative impact of another round of excise tax rates increase for tobacco products.

Doc Banting presented four important agenda under his leadership: enhance the organization; continue corporate priority programs; take care of the farmers and their families; and use agency resources wisely and judiciously.

In his first 100 years in office, he conducted series of consultative dialogues with stakeholders to understand and forge a way of working together for the progress of the industry. He exhorted local government units to spend their share from excise taxes on livelihood, agro-industrial and infrastructure projects, ensuring that the benefits derived from tobacco shall be channeled back towards increasing productivity and uplifting the lives and welfare of tobacco farmers and tobacco growing communities.



“The agency has lost a very dynamic and inspiring leader, the amiable and very considerate administrator.”

He introduced the **Farmers First Policy**, favoring farmers’ welfare over other issues. Thus, his first year in office was marked by efforts to make tobacco a sustainable and beneficial endeavor especially for the tobacco farmers.

He continued the implementation of the market-driven quality tobacco production. Through the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) and other income-generating activities such as the AgriPinoy projects, the rice program, the renewable fuelwood project, the continuing enhancement of the industry’s capability for quality assurance, and industrial research, among others.

He approved programs such as the construction of farmers’ training centers, the solar-powered irrigation system, curing barn assistance, the demo or model farm, and worked closely with the private sector for the crafting of the tobacco industry roadmap.

He worked closely with the local government units so that their shares from the excise taxes as provided for under RA 7171 and RA 8240 will be spent for livelihood and other projects aimed at enhancing the productivity and advancing the welfare of the farmers and their communities. He exhorted the leaf buyers to be considerate of the farmer’s interest, by not charging usurious rates.







The tobacco growers benefited from the reduction of the interest rates and administrative charges of production assistance and from the increased production subsidy from 20% to 40%, including the increase of the tobacco floor prices which happened in two tobacco tripartite consultative conferences during his term.

He initiated the Beef Cattle Production Program as additional livelihood activities for the farmers and the Farm Mechanization Projects to facilitate the modernization of the tobacco production.

NTA received the ISO 9001:2015 certification from the SGS, proving that NTA under his watch abides with its commitment towards ensuring continuing enhancement of his services to farmers and other key stakeholders.

The agency also earned the highest mark in satisfaction survey on the overall performance of the agency in terms of the implementation of all the programs, projects, and activities.

To strengthen the organizational capacity of the NTA, he ordered with the approval of the NTA Board the filling up of 60 vacant plantilla positions confident that the Selection Board will find highly competent personnel to occupy these vacant posts. Among those hired are

beneficiaries of the agency's scholarship program.

There were expectations of further growth for the industry, with the crafting of the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP) a five-year development program for growth anchored on the twin targets of increased productivity and increased farmers' income.

The completion of the draft along with the implementation of agency's projects and programs however was briefly stalled by the government lockdown due to COVID 19 pandemic. And on March 19 three days after his birthday, the agency and the rest industry stakeholders expressed grief and shocked over his sudden demise.

Thus ended the journey of Doc Banting as a public servant from over four decades of exemplary service of medical practice and in the local government to more than three years as head of the agency.

"The agency has lost a very dynamic and inspiring leader, the amiable and very considerate administrator," Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan said. "We mourn but with confidence, that amidst uncertainties, he will be remembered as the resolute champion of farmers' interest."

More is definitely in store in the NTA, with the changing of Administration, but one thing remains for sure, with the men and women of the agency whom Administrator Seares had inspired for the last three years and that is the passion to serve the tobacco growers and stakeholders with utmost integrity and excellence expected of public servants.

The late Administrator's son Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., who assumed office in June to succeed his father, said he will continue and push forward the Farmers First policy of the previous administration. "I will recognize that as a mission given to me."

With the young son at the helm, the agency is expected to work to keep on moving the policy forward and honor the legacy of the late administrator.  
-oOo-





## *The Son Also Rises* **Sustaining the value of good leadership**

**R**OBERT Victor G. Seares Jr., 40, the youngest NTA Administrator ever appointed to the position, is no stranger to the tobacco industry. His interaction with the tobacco growers and exposure to the economics of tobacco production started when he was the mayor of Dolores, Abra.

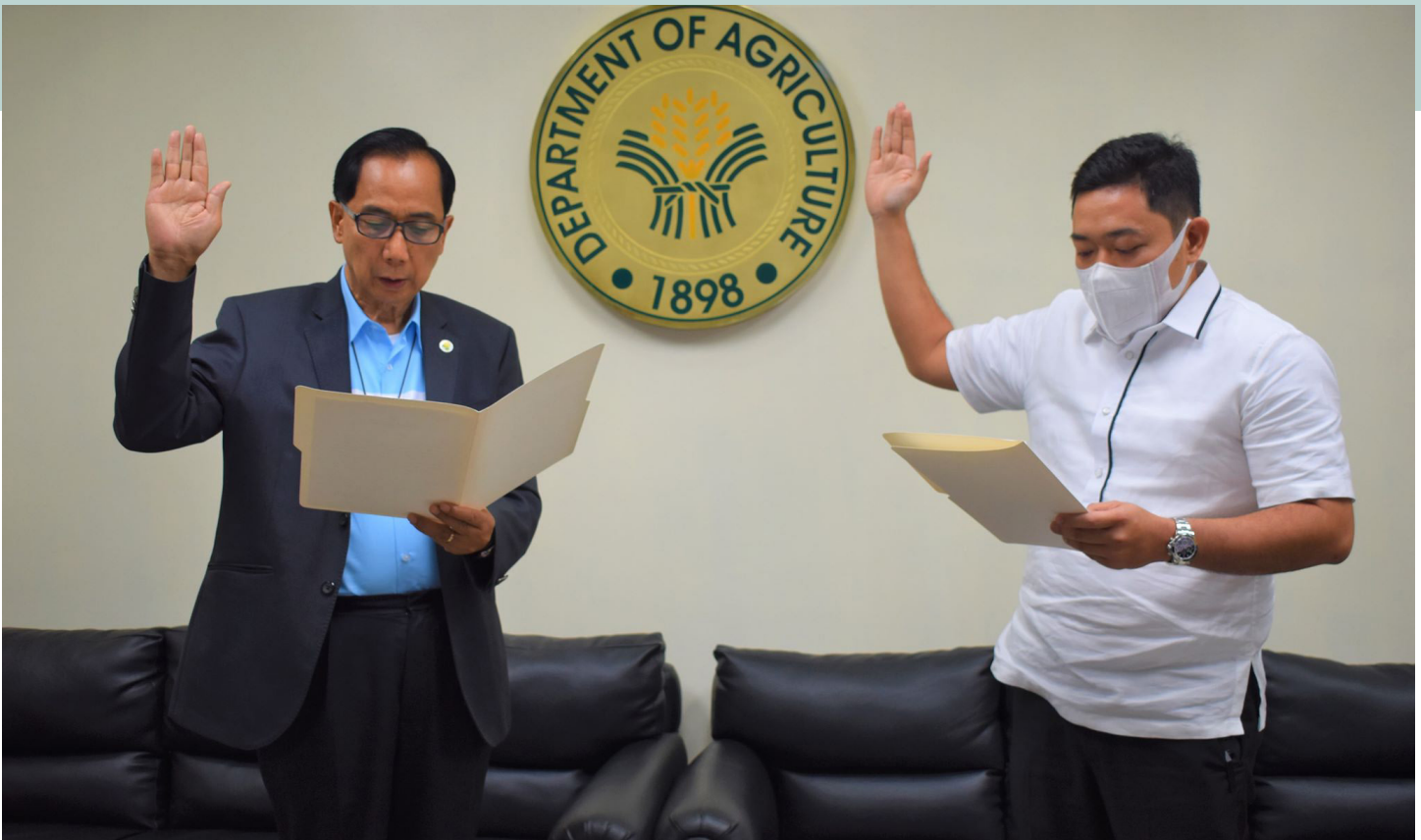
In his three terms as local executive (2010-2019), JR, as he is fondly called by his peers and family, was at the forefront helping the local tobacco-rice farmers, through their associations and cooperatives, by enhancing their productivity and advancing their welfare with various infrastructure projects and assistance programs that he initiated, using funds from the town's share from the tobacco excise tax collection of the national government.

In fact, his father, the late NTA Administrator Robert Lizardo Seares, M.D., early on his term even cited the achievements of his son as a model of the proper use of the tobacco excise tax for the farmers' benefits, in close partnership and coordination with the agency.

The share from the tobacco excise tax of Dolores is small compared to other tobacco-producing LGUs but because it was prudently spent, it had impacted a great deal on the communities leading to various infrastructure and development projects, financial assistance to local growers, and improved capacity of the local government to deliver basic services to their constituents.

As a former mayor, like his son, the elder Seares believed in the importance of LGU cooperation and partnership in managing the growth of the industry.

**“This is not a new administration, but a continuation of the leadership of my father in implementing programs that protect the welfare of our tobacco farmers.”**



## A Natural Successor

The elder Seares, whom the son succeeded after his death on March 19, 2020, made the Farmers First Policy of utmost importance under his leadership.

JR Seares made it clear as soon as he assumed office that he will continue the same kind of leadership and farmer-centered policy established by his father.

He was elected to the NTA Governing Board as Administrator and Vice Chair and took his oath of office before Agriculture Secretary William Dar on June 29. His appointment as Administrator and Chief Executive Officer was signed by President Rodrigo Duterte on June 10, 2020.

“This is not a new administration, but a continuation of the leadership of my father in implementing programs that protect the welfare of our tobacco farmers,” he declared.

In particular is the formulation of the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP), a five-year industry development plan to enhance the growth of the Philippine tobacco sector, which was initiated during his father’s term. The industry roadmap is aligned with Secretary Dar’s “new thinking” in his approach to managing Philippine agriculture, focused on accelerating the modernization and industrialization towards increasing income and productivity.

To some, JR Seares is seen as a natural successor to his father, the right person to build on his father’s record and take NTA to the next level. His background at Dolores has primed him to take the lead of the agency.

Having the same experience and background as his father, the same expertise and leadership and management as former local executives, and personal commitment to help the smallholders improve their lives through their farming ventures are a unique combination that will serve the industry well.

He admits that although much has been done during the brief stint of his father at NTA, there’s still more to do to achieve sustainability and global competitiveness of tobacco production and provide more opportunities for farmers and their communities to earn more.

## NTA Family an Utmost Priority

“The challenge for me is to refocus our efforts in helping the tobacco industry increase its quality production in light of the COVID-19 pandemic,” he said.

“That’s why early on we have started appealing to the manufacturers and leaf buyers to raise their purchase commitment for the next cropping season to sustain the income-generating activities of smallholders,” he added.

And while he speaks about increasing farmers’ productivity and income, JR Seares has also made the needs of the employees his top priority.

“We always talk about the tobacco farmers, but this is the time that we talk about the employees, especially now that we are in a pandemic; they are our committed frontliners who are brave and hard at work in service to our farmers and other stakeholders,” he said

“My office is open for everyone, I am always ready to listen to everyone’s concerns,” he declared in one of the flag-raising rites that he regularly attends.



He added that the agency draws its strength “from our unity as a family—the NTA family, and from there, let this resiliency and unity transcend to our Branch Offices, and eventually to our farmers.”

The pandemic has not discouraged Seares to work hard, as he attends to one virtual meeting to another in constant dialog with the Operations Group and various stakeholders to evaluate current programs and prepare for the forthcoming cropping season. In fact, he looks at the difficult situation as a chance to discover and improve manpower potentials and enhance the communication capability of the agency under the “new normal” condition where most of government transactions and interactions are done online.

He is up to the challenge, he said, and he does not fail to acknowledge President Duterte and Senator Bong Go for giving him the trust to serve the industry stakeholders, especially the tobacco growers.

### Young Achiever

JR Seares is the youngest among the four children of the late NTA Administrator Dr. Robert L. Seares and Sesy G. Seares. He spent his elementary and high school years at Claret School of Quezon City. He graduated from University of Sto. Tomas with a Bachelor of Science degree, major in Botany and further pursued Doctor of Medicine at Our Lady of Fatima until his junior year.

Growing up and living with doctors and healthcare providers in the family was a learning process for himself because people are looking at them with so much respect and admiration. Both his grandfather and father were doctors, his mom is a nurse, some of his uncles, aunts, and cousins are doctors or working in the medical sector. Though he was not able to finish the medical school, he knew that he could continue taking care of people in some other way. He then challenged himself to venture on another career path and reestablish the Seares family in the political arena after so many years of absence in local elections. He first ran and won as mayor of Dolores at the young age of 30.

... To serve the industry and fulfill the dreams of his father of a progressive and sustainable industry where every tobacco grower is happy with the fruits of his or her labor.



This is not anymore a surprise for the Seares clan because politics runs in the blood. His late grandfather, Dr. Petronilo V. Seares, Sr., was a Mayor, Vice-Governor and Governor of Abra from 1965 to 1971, and the late NTA Administrator was the Mayor of Bangued, Abra for six years (1980-1986) and served as Doctor to the Barrios before his appointment to the tobacco regulatory agency.

JR Seares transformed the 5th class municipality into one of the most progressive towns in the Cordillera Administrative Region and a consistent DILG Seal of Good Governance Awardee (2016-2020).

JR Seares was feted as Most Outstanding Mayor Award for 2013 by the Superbrand Marketing International, Inc. (SMI), the only international award-giving body in Marketing/ Branding in the Philippines that identifies excellence in governance and honoring outstanding individuals in the field of politics.

Dolores during Mayor JR's term also received other recognitions such as the inclusion to the Top 5 Nationwide in terms of Excellence in Public Service based on the ARTA (Anti-Red Tape Act) Report Card 2017 of the Civil Service Commission for providing excellent public service to its constituents.

He was consistently cited for his achievements in supporting and improving the system on health services of local communities, educational development through the construction of new classrooms, promotion of tourism and entertainment sector through the Sakuting Festival as part of the town's fiesta, and various infrastructures to improve agricultural activities such as farm-to-market roads.

JR Seares is married to Jennifer Tiu Seares from Davao City, a Member of the Board of Directors of Movie and Television Regulatory Commission Board (MTRCB). They are blessed with four handsome boys all named "Victor," after the triumphs and blessings in the life of Robert Victor.

For someone who has made good as a public servant for more than a decade now, JR Seares looks forward to at least two more years to serve the industry and fulfill the dreams of his father of a progressive and sustainable industry where every tobacco grower is happy with the fruits of his or her labor. -oOo-



# THE FIRST

# 100 DAYS

## **ROBERT VICTOR G. SEARES JR.**

*Administrator/CEO*

*(Delivered on September 29, 2020 at the NTA Central Office Training Room, Ben Lor-Building in Quezon City)*

I WAS APPOINTED Administrator and CEO by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte in June 2020 under a very unusual or unprecedented condition. I succeeded my father, the late Administrator Dr. Robert L. Seares, who suddenly died of illness in the early part of the metro-wide lockdown in March 2020. I was faced with a daunting task to lead the agency that he left amidst uncertainties brought about by the pandemic.

But then, I knew very well of the challenges that confronted the tobacco industry, particularly the farmers and workers, and the impact COVID-19 is having on every aspect of our industry. However, I was convinced that with cooperation and teamwork, we can work our way through the new reality we are facing.

Our administration was off to a good start accomplishing some of our initial goals of meeting with the Top Management, our two deputies, our branch and department managers, and the members of the NTA Governing Board to get our team in place.

I communicated regularly with our staff in the Central Office to get our work processes and financial records in order. Mostly important, I endeavored to keep health protocols in place to safeguard our employees.

### **Health is ultimate priority**

The first thing the agency accomplished is the implementation of timely policies and procedures to keep our employees safe and healthy. We have been consistent in overemphasizing strict compliance to safety and health measures, as required by the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) on Emerging

Infectious Diseases.

We required our Central Office employees to adopt alternative work arrangements, like requiring them to work in a skeleton force with the rest, in rotation, performing their tasks under a work-from-home setup, within the guidelines set by the Civil Service Commission.

We saw to it that shuttle services to our employees and a place of accommodation for them to stay, should they opt to, are adequately provided until the duration of the pandemic.

As a necessary precaution, owing to the death of one employee due to the virus infection, we imposed a four-week lockdown of our Central Office. We ramped up our efforts against COVID-19 with the distribution of free face masks, face shields and vitamin C tablets sourced from donations from our willing partners and friends, and required all our Central Office employees to undergo COVID-19 Rapid Antibody testing.

To sustain our efforts, we would be adopting a COVID Response Management Plan for the agency, which will be composed of Central Office staff with medical background, who are willing to assist in enforcing health protocols, propose actions to maintain mental health well-being of our staff, and serve as quick response team against infection.

### **All for sustainability**

We have already made significant strides to make NTA responsive to the needs of our stakeholders in line with our commitment for a sustainable industry. We continue the formulation of the five-year industry development

roadmap that was started during my father's term. The Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP) is aimed at the development of the Philippine tobacco sector through the use of all available resources to accelerate the modernization and industrialization of the tobacco industry, and to increase production and farmers' income.

I have set out a vision that underpins my mandate, and that is to continue the priority programs of my late father, but with renewed resolve to gain more success as we navigate COVID both in the short-term and long-term.

We have approved plans and budget and related communications of various programs and projects such as the Tobacco Contract Growing System, Rice Production, the Synchronized Tree Planting Activities, the NTA Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita, and Livelihood Programs.

We have started the farmers survey for the Farmers' Registry as required for the Tobacco Block Farming and as a requirement by the Department of Agriculture.

We have joined the Operations Group in various tasks preparatory for the upcoming tobacco season.

With a new model of tobacco production, we have been meeting with the Operations Group to plan for the implementation of various projects for the block farming and continue other interventions to assist the farmers during the pandemic.

### **Dialogue and consultation**

In the context of building a strong, inclusive partnerships across various stakeholders, we conducted meetings and dialogues to reach out to our

stakeholders as we prepare for the upcoming tobacco season. As a former mayor, I know it is important to listen to the ideas, points of view and concerns of everyone to achieve one unified goal or direction.

We were able to forge strong partnerships and sustained cooperation with our private partners in addressing major industry issues. To achieve sustainability of production despite challenges, we secured commitment for a stronger cooperation from cigarette manufacturers, leaf buyers and traders to boost the industry for the benefit of the local tobacco growers.

We received pledges from the manufacturers to increase their purchase commitment for locally produced tobacco. Our partners from the private sector also agreed to our proposals to come up with their own five-year purchasing plan in line with our medium-term roadmap and to submit quarterly report with respect to their local purchases and import data to enhance our data gathering.

We especially touch-based with our tobacco growers, through their farmer leaders. With the help of our managers from the branch offices, we were able to communicate to our farmers our different programs and projects, especially our intervention in the current health crisis to mitigate their situations.

In the coming days, we will continue our efforts to bolster NTA's collaboration and interactions with the local government units. In particular, we will discuss with our local executives on how they can use a bulk of their resources sourced from their shares of the tobacco excise tax to set up programs and projects to increase productivity and income of their local farmers.

### **Teamwork is the key**

Barely a month to my job, I eagerly joined the NTA Management Team as we prepared and successfully passed the ISO 9001:2015 1st surveillance audit for recertification. This is significant for me, not

only for the fact that the certification of NTA for ISO 9001:2015 was earned during my father's term, but also for the realization that I have the same team that is committed to provide customers with the highest level of products and services within the organization's policy and objectives. This will always be my motivation in the coming days.

We recognize that people are key to every success, and that the agency's employees are its greatest asset. I made efforts to meet employees and to talk to them regularly on various concerns. Even during the transition of administration, I vowed to retain all Job Orders in recognition of their vast experience working for the agency and to give them equal opportunities, along with the regular staff, to boost their morale in spite of the pandemic.

### **New Normal**

The current pandemic has prevented me to visit our farmers and our industry partners in the branch offices. But this has not discouraged me to really work hard. I have been attending one virtual meeting to another in constant dialogue with our Operations Group and various stakeholders, especially our farmers to evaluate current programs and prepare for the forthcoming cropping season.

It is for this reason that I ordered for the enhancement of our communication and information capability. We purchased large

screen TV for teleconferencing for the Central and Branch Offices, two-way radio sets for our frontliners, desktops for office and laptops for work-from-home setup. In the coming days, we will be enhancing our website and our social media platform for better interaction and information dissemination.

LOOKING back to my first 100 days in office, I can say that I am incredibly proud of how the NTA community has come together to work with me starting day one, even as we faced the challenges.

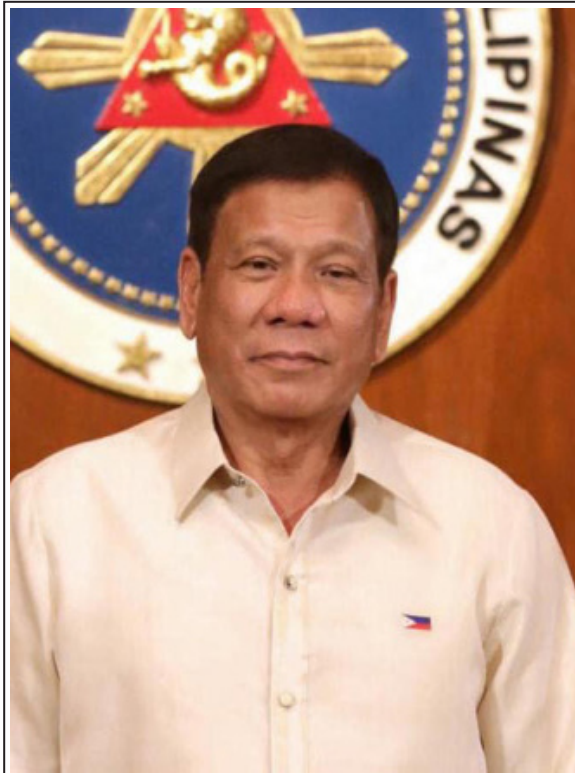
I assure you that our cooperation will serve as guideposts of my administration to continue our commitment to improve the economic lives of our farmers, and the rest of the stakeholders and for the sustainability of the industry.

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

*Para sa Tunay na Pagbabago! -oOo-*



# Message of PRESIDENT RODRIGO DUTERTE on the 33rd Anniversary of the National Tobacco Administration



MALACAÑAN PALACE  
MANILA

## MESSAGE

My warmest greetings to the National Tobacco Administration (NTA) as it celebrates its 33rd Anniversary.

The Tobacco industry is an important contributor to our nation's socio-economic growth. I therefore commend NTA for its invaluable role in empowering our tobacco farmers through programs that provide financial assistance and promote self-reliance.

May this occasion inspire the men and women of the agency to remain committed in fostering sustainable development by harnessing the vast potentials of your stakeholders and adopting new technologies that will make your services more accessible.

Let us all work together to strengthen economic productivity and accelerate progress, especially in our rural areas.

I wish everyone an engaging and meaningful event.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rodrigo'.

RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE



**"I am taking this opportunity also to bring my father back here. Because I think it is fitting for him being the Administrator of this beloved agency ... I know we are supposed to celebrate our 33rd anniversary and at the same time celebrate life because he is now with the Lord."**



# NTA celebrates 33rd Anniversary

AGRICULTURE Secretary William D. Dar and NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. led the 33rd Anniversary celebration of the National Tobacco Administration held at the Central Office in Quezon City on July 24.

Secretary Dar, who is also the Chairman of the NTA Governing Board, challenged the management of the agency to elevate productivity to make Filipino farmers competitive with their counterparts in other tobacco-producing countries.

He underscored the formulation of the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program, a five-year industry development plan, which is needed to enhance the development of the Philippine tobacco sector.

“We have to use all available resources to accelerate the modernization and industrialization of the tobacco industry, and see to it that the tobacco farmers will have more income,” Secretary Dar said, stressing that the goal for “Masaganang Ani, at Mataas na Kita” applies to all agricultural commodities.

“I believe we will win over this pandemic if all of us will be one... *Kung tayo po ay nagkakaisa, nagtutulung-tulong, at samasama, may pag-asa ang ating bayan, babangon ang ating ekonomiya, babangon ang sektor ng agrikultural at babangon ang mga magsasaka at mangingisda at bababangon din ang mga tobacco farmers,*” he said.

The commemoration, which takes on the theme “**Nagkakaisa tungo sa panibagong pag-asa,**” embraced the new normal with a simple and short program, attended by members of the NTA Governing Board, other agency officials and staff wearing face masks and observing social distancing.

The event was highlighted by Administrator Seares paying tribute to his father, the late NTA Administrator Robert Lizardo Seares, in a video presentation, which also featured his father’s major accomplishments in the three years of his term cut short by his death on March 19.

In his message, Administrator Seares also expressed his gratitude to the men and women of the agency who have supported his father in his service to the tobacco growers and other stakeholders. He urged the employees to be resilient to survive the challenges ahead in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“You are the true assets of this agency, and while we think highly of our tobacco farmers, this time let’s also talk about our tobacco employees of NTA,” Seares said.



**“We need now to properly utilize the resources that have been accruing to the national coffers and open for use by the NTA in pursuit of developing further the industry.”**

He added that NTA draws its strength from the unity of the employees as one family—the NTA family. “And from there, let this resiliency and unity transcend to our Branch Offices, and eventually to our farmers,” he said.

Nestor C. Casela and Danilo C. Trongco, both members of the NTA Governing Board, also stressed resiliency amidst challenges in their respective anniversary messages.

The Branch Offices also celebrated the 33rd anniversary of the agency through a synchronized tree planting activities in tobacco-growing areas in Regions 1 and 2, and Abra. ■



## ROADMAP

*Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan meets various stakeholders in consultative meeting on the tobacco industry roadmap in Rosales, Pangasinan.*

# Consultative meeting on tobacco 5-year roadmap

NTA convened in series of consultative meetings sectoral representatives of the industry stakeholders to discuss enhancing productivity and income of farmers with new industry roadmap.

Main highlight of the meetings was the presentation of the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP), a five-year development program for industry growth, anchored on the twin targets of increased productivity and increased farmers' income.

According to Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, the consultative meetings helped the agency gather additional inputs and comments from the representatives of major tobacco leaf buying firms, farmer leaders, and other stakeholders.

The development plan includes various interventions and strategies from the Tobacco Industry Roadmap (2018) and the agency's mandate, aligned with the Duterte administration's 10-Point Socioeconomic Agenda to eradicate hunger and poverty through the 25-year long-term development plan entitled *Ambisyon Natin 2040*.

"The ultimate goal is to chart the course for the tobacco industry in the next five years (2020-2024) in line with the "new thinking" in agriculture by Agriculture Secretary William Dar and in accord with the development plan of the buying firms and all industry partners in the private sector.

The new thinking includes the eight paradigms: modernization, industrialization, farm consolidation, export promotion, infrastructure development, roadmap development, legislative support, and budget and

investment.

Fortuna C. Benosa, NTA Corporate Planning Department Manager, discussed in each meeting the overview of the STEP and the agency's expanded programs and projects for the modernization and sustainability of the industry, and for potential collaborations with stakeholders and various government agencies.

In Pangasinan, NTA consulted buying firms Universal Leaf Philippines Inc. (ULPI) and Trans-Manila, Inc, and the farming sector represented by Saturnino C. Distor, president of the Pangasinan chapter of the National Federation of Farmers Association and Cooperatives. The meeting was held at the NTA Training Center in Carmay East, Rosales, Pangasinan on June 10-11.

"For this meeting, we focused on tobacco block farming, as the centerpiece strategy for the STEP, with discussions on farm mechanization, irrigation systems and fuelwood/bamboo production, three of the major components of the block farm," said Bonoan.

The host Branch Office limited the number of participants to a maximum of 10 participants per day, recognizing health protocol required under the general community quarantine. "But we will continue our consultation with other stakeholders and partners before we finalize the roadmap for implementation in this coming crop year," added Bonoan.

NTA Pangasinan Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana presented the NTA Tobacco Farm Mechanization Program, which is expected to modernize field activities on tobacco production using new technologies and packages of farm machineries for block farming.

Bonoan also spearheaded the meeting with the president of Universal Leaf Philippines Inc. (ULPI), the country's largest tobacco growing and processing firm, to discuss the five-year development plan for the Philippine tobacco industry. This was held at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City on May 11.

ULPI President Winston P. Uy provided inputs on the roadmap, as he commended the agency for crafting the development plan, its fresh initiatives for industry growth centered on farmers.

According to Uy, this new thinking of industry leaders will create lots of opportunities that can spur progress of the tobacco-farming sector. "Whatever system in place in the past, the industry must make sense of it and make it better, and have the stakeholders continue improving themselves," added Uy.

Ilocos Sur Representative and Deputy Speaker Deogracias Victor Savellano organized a meeting with NTA and other government agencies to discuss convergence of initiatives and interventions in support of the tobacco growers, under the proposed tobacco industry roadmap.

The meeting was held at the Villar Hall, South Wing Annex, House of Representatives in Quezon City on January 29.

The Deputy Speaker wanted the agency, in partnership with concerned agencies, to concentrate on the basic needs of farmers in quality tobacco production, particularly irrigation, farm mechanization, provision of farm inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides, curing facilities, and renewable fuelwood program. ■

## “Pimminya” Batek, a high-yielding variety

**T**HROUGH the years, Native Batek (Chewing) tobacco, more popularly known as Batek, is widely planted in La Union and Pangasinan. The six varieties of Batek tobacco that the farmers plant are Karag, Lampangog, Lawit, Pimminya, Sagedsed, and Sinay.

Among the six varieties, Pimminya, a high-yielding variety of good quality and resistant to insect pests and diseases, is the first Batek variety ever registered by the NTA at the National Seed Industry Council. The registration was facilitated by the Technical Working Group chaired by Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan.

Before its registration, the Farm Technology and Services Department headed by Imelda N. Riñen together with Benjamin Fiesta, Nelly Castro and the extension workers of NTA La Union conducted field evaluation trials in Gumot, Rosario, La Union with the group of Engr. Albert Casison and at the NTA experimental area in Tabug, Batac City.

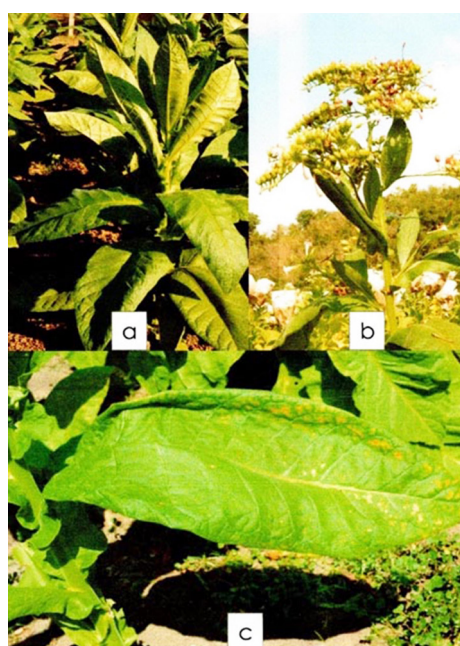
The Native Batek (Chewing) tobacco subtype, which is highly recommended for the Ilocos Region, gives the highest income (P80-P120/kg) than any of the other types and subtype; thus, a yearly increase of farmers engaged in planting. It is a topped tobacco plant with 18-20 leaves. The lower leaves which are harvested first are called “Liso.”

In the following month after the harvest of the Liso, the larger upper leaves or “Batek” are harvested.

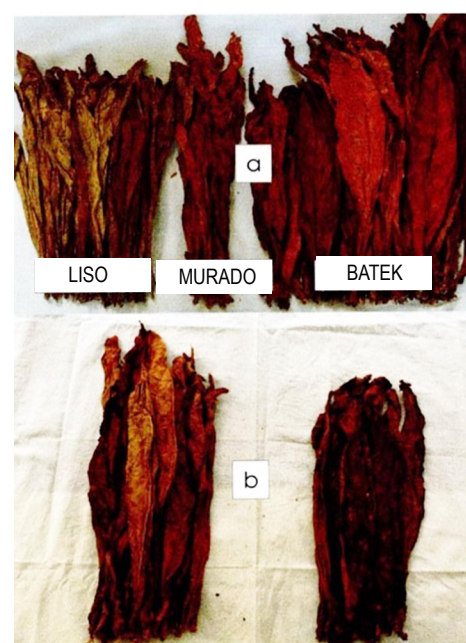
A mature Batek leaf is long and broad with brown spots.

The leaves, Liso and Batek, are hung in a sunlit area for one day. After sun-wilting, the leaves are transferred to the curing shed for air-

drying for 30-40 days. These then are stacked and covered in a dry place, for fermentation and conditioning until the leaves turn chocolate brown and ready for trading. Two suckers per plant “pasanga” with two leaves each and base sucker with six leaves are also maintained as “second crop.” The suckers have the same size as the main crop leaves.-oOo-



**Figure 1.** Photographs of the Pimminya: (a) whole plant at vegetative stage; (b) flower head; (c) harvestable tenth leaf position in the replicated trial in NTA Batac City.



**Figure 2.** Photographs of the cured leaves of Pimminya in (a) replicated trial (Batac City); (b) farmer's field in Gumot, Rosario, La Union.

### DESCRIPTION OF VARIETY/HYBRID - Pimminya

		Farmers Field Gumot, Rosario, LU **		Average	Experimental Trial (NTA Expt Batac, IN)		Average
1. AGRONOMIC CHARACTERS		2018-2019	2019-2020		2018-2019	2019-2020	
1.1.	Days to flower (days after transplanting, DAT):	-	-	-	68	69	68.5
1.2.	Days to topping (DAT):	-	-	-	55	66	60.5
1.3.	Days to first priming (DAT):	-	-	-	78	72	75
1.4.	Days to last priming (DAT):	-	-	-	98	88	93
1.5.	Number of harvestable leaves:	16	15	15.5	22	17	19.5
1.6.	Leaf length (cm):	69.29	73.10	71.195	76.2	82.1	79.15
1.7.	Leaf width (cm):	27.64	30.1	28.87	29.57	34.4	31.985
1.8.	Stalk length (cm):	79.36	89	84.18	155.52	111.8	133.66
1.9.	Cured yield (t/ha):	2.64	1.64	2.14	2.27	2.27	2.27
1.10.	Crop value (t/ha):	P 236,303	P 135,073.56	P 185,688.3	P 223,443	P 181,410.05	P 202,426.5
1.11.	Grade distribution (%/grade):						
	Liso	30%			34%	15.02%	
	Morada					4.64%	
	L1	-	-		-	-	
	L2	-	13.42%		-	-	
	L3	-	10.57%		-	-	
	Batek	70%	76.01%		66%	77.44%	

\*\* The only location where Pimminya is planted.

# A Decade of Setting Standards for Quality Tobacco Leaf and Product

## Project 1

### Annual Physical and Chemical Evaluation of Philippine Grown and Imported Tobacco (Virginia, Burley and Native)

THIS project monitors and evaluates the physico-chemical quality of locally produced tobacco leaves grown under various technology applications and locations. This is to determine quality composition, material usability and deficiencies; as inputs to technology adjustments, production programming and regulatory purposes.

The Quality Assurance Division (QAD) team, headed by Lina O. Cera, gathered tobacco leaf samples used in the evaluation in areas where a particular tobacco type is produced, i.e., Virginia leaf tobaccos produced in Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Abra, and La Union; Burley in Pangasinan, Cagayan and Isabela; and Native in Cagayan and Isabela.

For the characterization, the QAD team used the proposed Harmonized Grading and Classification System then under pilot testing until its approval in April 21, 2017. See Tables 1 and 2 for results generated from the evaluation of tobacco leaves collected for the period 2011-2018 in terms of % grade distribution and the corresponding weight of the tobacco leaves along with the equivalent grade marks in the approved NTA Grading System.

Proper grading and classification determines the profitability of this crop; high grade leaves command higher market value compared with the inferior grades. Under the Harmonized Method of Grading (Table 1), out of the 401.63 kg of Neutral Flavor Flue-Cured Virginia leaves subjected to grading and classification for the same period, 83.45% were of High Grades (AA, A, B, C), with an equivalent weight of 335.16 kg; while 16.53% were of the Medium and Low grades combined. Most of the 433.6 kg of Improved Flavor tobacco leaves classified or 77.76% were of the High Grades (AA, A, B, C), with an equivalent weight of 337.17 kg; while the



Leaf grading and classification



Left: Manual measurement on design and specification of cigarette construction materials. Right: Analysis of nicotine content of tobacco leaves and cut filler rod



remaining 5.82% and 16.47% were of the Medium (D, E) and Low (F1, F2, R, ND) grades, respectively.

A similar trend was established in the result found in grading and classification of the Burley leaves using the same grading system conducted for the same period as shown on Table 2. For the Neutral Flavor, 85.04% of the 288.31 kg of leaves graded were of High Grades (A, B, C), with an equivalent weight of 245.18 kg; 14.96% were of Medium (D, E) and Low (F, R) grades; split between the two at 10.66% and 4.30%; respectively.

The QAD team graded and classified a total of 378.86 kg of Burley Improved Flavor leaves from CY 2011-2018. Of the volume, 85.23% were of High Grades (A, B, C), or an equivalent of 322.90 kg; 11.85% were of the Medium Grades D

and E, with an equivalent weight of 44.89 kg; and a mere 2.95%, with an equivalent weight of 11.18 kg, were of Low Grades F and R.

## Project 2

### Annual Physical and Chemical Evaluation of Manufactured Tobacco Products

THIS project monitors and evaluates physico-chemical quality of tobacco products to determine Nicotine, Total Particulate Matter (TPM), Tar (Dry Particulate Matter, DPM), Carbon Monoxide (CO), and other physical and chemical characteristics for quality assurance and regulatory purposes.

**Table 1**  
**Grade Distribution in Harmonized Grades and Its NTA Grade Equivalent for Tobacco Leaf Samples Graded and Classified CY 2011-2018**

Grading System		% Grade Distribution by Harmonized Grading System and the corresponding weight of tobacco leaf samples			
		Virginia Neutral Flavor		Virginia Improved Flavor	
NTA Equivalent Grades	Harmonized Leaf Grade Marks	%	Wt (Kg)	%	Wt (Kg)
AA	B10	6.93	27.83	5.23	22.68
	B1R	0.04	0.16	0.12	0.52
	B1L	2.28	9.16	0.55	2.38
	C10	13.66	54.86	8.86	38.42
	C1L	2.14	8.59	1.77	7.67
	X10	5.41	21.73	3.46	15.00
	Sub Total	30.46	122.33	19.99	86.68
A	B20	4.55	18.27	9.18	39.80
	B2R	0.07	0.28	0.11	0.48
	C20	9.13	36.67	8.60	37.29
	C2L	1.69	6.79	2.01	8.72
	X20	4.76	19.12	4.23	18.34
	X1L	0.43	1.73	0.37	1.60
	Sub Total	20.63	82.86	24.50	106.23
B	T30	3.59	14.42	0.36	1.56
	T3R	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	B30	3.95	15.86	6.92	30.01
	B3R	0.02	0.08	0.18	0.78
	B2L	1.71	6.87	1.32	5.72
	C30	5.18	20.80	7.32	31.74
	X30	3.82	15.34	5.55	24.06
	X2L	0.75	3.01	0.40	1.73
	Sub Total	19.02	76.39	22.05	95.61
C	T40	1.20	4.82	0.0	0.0
	T4R	0.05	0.20	0.0	0.0
	T3L	0.89	3.57	0.01	0.04
	T3V	0.32	1.29	0.08	0.35
	T3K	0.43	1.73	0.0	0.0
	B40	1.76	7.07	1.22	5.29
	B4R	0.04	0.16	0.05	0.22
	B3L	1.85	7.43	1.73	7.50
	B3V	1.43	5.74	0.86	3.69
	B3K	1.32	5.30	1.24	5.38
	C4D	1.03	4.14	2.03	8.80
	C3L	1.68	6.75	2.19	9.50
	C3V	0.35	1.41	0.81	0.78
	C3K	0.14	0.56	0.10	0.43
	X3L	0.67	2.69	1.44	6.24
	X3V	0.18	0.72	0.05	0.22
	X3K	0.0	0.0	0.04	0.17
	Sub Total	13.34	53.58	11.22	48.65
D	T50	0.29	1.16	0.0	0.0
	T5R	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	T4L	0.24	0.96	0.02	0.09
	T4V	0.10	0.40	0.03	0.13
	T4K	0.04	0.16	0.0	0.0
	B50	1.33	5.34	0.81	3.51
	B5R	0.03	0.12	0.04	0.17
	B4L	0.18	0.72	0.36	1.56
	B4V	0.06	0.24	0.36	1.56
	B4K	0.52	2.09	0.26	1.13
	C50	0.52	2.09	0.86	3.73
	C4L	0.68	2.73	1.67	7.24
	C4V	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	C4K	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	X4V	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	X4K	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Sub Total	3.99	16.03	4.41	19.12
E	T5L	0.01	0.04	0.0	0.0
	T5V	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	T5K	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	B5L	0.29	1.16	0.16	0.69
	B5V	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	B5K	0.19	0.76	0.04	0.17
	C5L	0.29	1.16	1.21	5.25
	C5V	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	C5K	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	X5V	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	X5K	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Sub Total	0.78	3.13	1.41	5.42
F1	X40	2.38	9.56	2.13	9.24
	X4L	1.02	4.10	0.81	3.51
	Sub Total	3.40	13.66	2.94	12.75
F2	X50	0.92	3.69	1.42	6.16
	X5L	0.84	3.37	0.69	2.99
	Sub Total	1.76	7.07	2.11	9.15
R/ND	TND	0.52	2.09	0.0	0.0
	BND	0.84	3.37	0.99	4.29
	CND	1.99	7.99	2.84	12.31
	XND	3.25	13.05	7.59	32.91
	Sub Total	6.60	26.5	11.42	49.52
	Total	100.00	401.63	100.00	433.60

**Legend:** Total weight of tobacco leaves CY 2011-2018  
FCVNF – 401.63 Kg  
FCVIF - 433.60 Kg

\* NTA grades equivalent – NTA Grading System / Board Resolution No. 011 dated Feb. 15, 2000



*Analysis of nicotine and moisture component in smoke yield using Gas Chromatography*

From CY 2007 to 2018 this project conducted a very thorough investigation on nicotine transfer from tobacco leaves to smoke.

Nicotine, the desired active component of cigarettes, plays a very important role in the smokers' sensory assessment of mainstream smoke quality, particularly its impact and irritation, the two identified major factors that determine nicotine satisfaction. The "impact" effect is that localized sensation felt momentarily at the back of the throat. The "irritation" effect, on the other hand, is the lingering harsh sensory property of smoke. These two effects, however, are softened by the presence of the right amount of "tar," another equally hazardous component.

The cigarette is a scientifically engineered nicotine delivery device. Its design specification and construction components control the amount and quality of the smoke delivered. Each cigarette construction material was dissected and characterized for physical properties. As for the chemical aspect, analysis includes nicotine level in the cut filler blend and in the smoke yield, TPM, "tar" (DPM), CO, and the Physical Smoking Attributes.

QAD has collected and characterized a total of 75 different brands of Philippine manufactured cigarettes and 142 imported combined (Transshipped, constructive importation, contract manufactured brands).

Cigarettes were classified into three groups: Prime, Medium, and Low Priced Brands. (See Table 3)

The Prime Price is composed of cigarettes regarded with highest equity as the most preferred based on smoking quality. It is best expressed in terms of Ventilation/Dilution and Pressure Drop or Resistance to Draw (RTD) which is the degree of resistance felt as the smoker sucks smoke. This property does not only contribute to a cigarette's smoking

**Table 2**  
**Grade Distribution in Harmonized Grades and Its NTA Grade Equivalent for Tobacco Leaf Samples CY 2011-2018**

Grading System		% Grade Distribution by Harmonized Grading System and the corresponding weight of tobacco leaf samples			
NTA Equivalent Grades	Harmonized Leaf Grade Marks	Burley Neutral Flavor		Burley Improved Flavor	
		%	Wt (Kg)	%	Wt (Kg)
A	B1F	9.09	26.21	11.47	43.46
	B1R	2.32	6.69	8.61	32.62
	C1F	18.40	53.05	10.89	41.26
	C1L	8.12	23.41	3.40	12.88
	X1F	2.71	7.81	1.70	6.44
	X1L	1.75	5.05	1.08	4.09
	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>42.39</b>	<b>122.21</b>	<b>37.15</b>	<b>140.75</b>
B	B2F	6.03	17.39	5.90	22.35
	B2R	0.77	2.22	3.24	12.28
	C2F	8.43	24.30	11.25	42.62
	C2L	2.60	7.50	3.50	13.26
	X2F	4.28	12.34	2.06	7.80
	X2L	1.57	4.53	1.95	7.39
	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>23.68</b>	<b>68.28</b>	<b>27.90</b>	<b>105.70</b>
C	T3F	2.81	8.10	0.22	0.83
	T3R	1.18	3.40	0.44	1.67
	B3F	4.98	14.36	2.82	10.68
	B3R	0.60	1.73	1.81	6.86
	B3K	0.10	0.29	0.18	0.68
	B3V	0.08	0.23	0.10	0.38
	C3F	3.58	10.32	5.29	20.04
	C3L	1.14	3.29	2.98	11.29
	C3K	0.24	0.69	0.34	1.29
	C3V	0.05	0.14	0.15	0.57
	X3F	3.42	9.86	4.04	15.31
	X3L	0.79	2.28	1.81	6.86
	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>18.97</b>	<b>54.69</b>	<b>20.18</b>	<b>76.46</b>
D	T4F	0.62	1.79	0.21	0.80
	T4R	0.37	1.07	0.00	0.00
	T4K	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	B4F	1.25	3.60	1.03	3.90
	B4R	0.14	0.40	0.25	0.95
	B4K	0.13	0.37	0.34	1.29
	B4V	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	C4F	2.18	6.29	1.79	6.78
	C4L	0.86	2.48	0.59	2.24
	C4K	0.00	0.00	0.34	1.29
	C4V	0.00	0.00	0.11	0.42
	X4F	1.90	5.48	2.88	10.91
	X4L	0.35	1.01	1.26	4.77
	X4K	0.00	0.00	0.73	2.77
	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>7.80</b>	<b>22.49</b>	<b>9.53</b>	<b>36.12</b>
E	T5F	0.21	0.61	0.00	0.00
	T5R	0.15	0.43	0.00	0.00
	T5K	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	T5V	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	B5F	0.47	1.36	0.17	0.64
	B5R	0.00	0.00	0.23	0.87
	B5K	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.34
	B5V	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	C5F	0.48	1.38	0.43	1.63
	C5K	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.30
	C5V	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	X5F	1.55	4.47	0.85	3.22
	X5K	0.00	0.00	0.47	1.78
	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>8.25</b>	<b>2.32</b>	<b>8.78</b>
F	C5L	0.28	0.81	0.36	1.36
	X5L	0.61	1.76	0.78	2.96
	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>2.57</b>	<b>1.14</b>	<b>4.32</b>
R/ND		0.50	1.44	0.02	0.08
		0.52	1.50	0.47	1.78
		0.36	1.04	0.33	1.25
		2.03	5.85	1.00	3.79
	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>3.41</b>	<b>9.83</b>	<b>1.82</b>	<b>6.90</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.00</b>	<b>288.31</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>378.86</b>

**Legend:** Total weight of Tobacco leaves; CY 2011-2018  
BNF – 288.31 Kg  
BIF – 378.86 Kg

desirability; it does also affect the levels of constituents in the smoke yield.

The ten-year mean value of Ventilation derived from the characterization for the Prime Priced is at 15.92%; Pressure Drop at 107.50mm H<sub>2</sub>O Column, the delivered Smoke constituents with 1.30 mg of Nic, 15.67 mg of TPM, 11.20 mg of tar and 9.86mg of CO per stick are noticeably of low levels, compared with the two inferior groups.

### Project 3

## Harmonization of Tobacco Leaf Grading Standard

THE project's objective is to conduct research studies relative to harmonization and development of an improved tobacco leaf grading system in line with internationally accepted standards.

QAD conceptualized the Harmonized Grading and Classification System to meet the requirement of a common system in leaf grading that is internationally acceptable as well. It characterized tobacco leaves produced for several cropping season in order to establish a trend, match and consistency. From its studies, QAD found out that locally grown Virginia has 72 varying grades, while for locally-grown Burley, 58 grades. The varying grades are considered with respect to leaf positions which have a corresponding grade marks in the official NTA grading system approved by the NTA Governing Board on February 15, 2000.

QAD devised the grading system that went through a series of evaluation and review for comments and suggestions through consultations with tobacco stakeholders. The output became the Implementing Rules and Guidelines of the NTA Grading and Classification, known as the Harmonized Grading System, which was approved by virtue of Board Resolution No. 653-2017 of the NTA Governing Board on April 21, 2017. Then on February 20, 2018, then Administrator Robert L. Sears issued Memorandum Circular No. 001 Series of 2018 ordering the adoption of the Harmonized grades for locally grown Virginia and Burley leaf Tobacco by all registered tobacco buying stations and field canvassers.

The approved Implementing Guidelines was published in 2018 as Manual on the NTA Harmonized Grades of the Locally Grown Virginia and Burley Leaf Tobacco. Since its release, the manual has been a reference guide for extension workers (TPROs, PDOs, Agriculturists), leaf graders in buying stations, and researchers.

see PAGE 47

**Table 3**  
**Summary of Data on Chemical and Physical Evaluation of Philippine-manufactured Cigarette by Price Range from Year 2007-2018**

PARAMETER	PREMIUM PRICED BRAND	MEDIUM PRICED BRAND	LOW PRICED BRAND
<b>Chemical Evaluation</b>			
A. Based on Smoke Condensate			
Nicotine (mg/cig stick)	1.30	1.45	1.63
Total Particulate Matter (mg/cig stick)	15.67	22.25	21.70
Tar (mg/cig stick)	11.20	17.63	17.08
Carbon monoxide (mg/cig stick)	9.86	14.77	14.99
B. Based on Raw Cigarette			
Raw Nicotine (mg/cig stick)	11.97	13.08	14.21
<b>Physical Evaluation</b>			
A. Quality Test Machine (QTM) Physical Smoking Attributes			
Weight of cigarette, mg	889.41	1,032.33	1,005.56
Circumference Size, mm	24.85	24.73	24.71
Roundness, %	93.62	93.63	93.41
Ventilation, %	15.92	5.01	2.50
Pressure drop at open ventilation, mmH2O	107.50	123.23	118.48
Pressure drop at close ventilation, mmH2O	106.21	115.88	117.78
B. Measurements of the Construction Components			
Tipping Paper			
Average Length, mm	30.05	29.28	27.35
Average Weight, mg	45.03	42.30	43.75
Cigarettes Filter			
Average Length, mm	24.66	23.74	21.47
Average Weight, mg	106.53	94.41	101.24
Tobacco Rod / Cut Filler Blend			
Average Length, mm	63.18	71.23	68.62
Average Weight, mg	694.73	805.14	812.63
Cigarette Stick			
Average Length mm	87.87	94.38	89.84
Cigarette Paper/Wrapper			
Average Length, mm	63.18	71.23	68.62
Average Weight, mg	44.35	50.21	50.09

# SPECIAL FEATURE

## NTA VIGAN

### Manager's Corner

**MINERVA P. MIZAL**  
*Manager, Vigan Branch Office*



#### QUICK GLANCE: BRANCH PROFILE

- Number of Tobacco Farmers/Hectarage: 4,507 FCs / 3,219.9 has
- Number of Tobacco-growing Municipalities: 21
- Number of Staff: 23 Regular; 12 Job Orders

### NTA Vigan hosts launching of Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay Project

by Immanuel A. Rafanan

NTA Vigan was the first to launch the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay Project as part of the agency's food sufficiency program during the national health emergency.

This was held on April 27 in Barangay Nagsupotan, San Juan, Ilocos Sur, one of the six pilot areas from four different municipalities in the First District of Ilocos Sur.

Each farmer beneficiary was given 25 chicks, vegetable seed packs (eggplant, okra, upland *kangkong*, *pechay*, *ampalaya*, string beans, *upo*, and winged beans), and other material inputs such as initial feeds for the chicks, fertilizers, CPAs, and nets with the total package costing around P10,000.

The launching was attended by San Juan Mayor Ma. Elaine A. Sarmiento, NTA Director Teofilo R. Quintal, and Rommel C. Hilario, Municipal Agricultural Officer of San Juan.

Three more subsequent batches were released benefitting 270 farmers in the first district.

The branch office also initiated the distribution of assorted vegetable seed packs (tomato, upland *kangkong*, string beans, *patola*, squash) to 771 farmers as part of the Vegetable Seed Distribution Project.

According to NTA Vigan Branch Manager Minerva P. Mizal, this was a remarkable feat considering that almost all economic industries have plummeted during the same period due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "And, of course, we laud the farmers who have proven time and time again, that they truly are the backbone of the country's economy," she added. ■

### Crux of challenges in the workplace amidst COVID-19 pandemic

WHAT a coincidence that the Luzon-wide lockdown due to COVID-19 started just a day before my birthday, and I never saw it coming and had not really prepared for months of potential "isolation" at my workplace. Since then, the pandemic has brought unprecedented changes, difficulties and challenges; and we had no choice but rise to the occasion and act appropriately and swift enough.

Our priority has been twofold: to keep our workplace and those we work with safe; and to migrate to a new way of working so as not to jeopardize delivery of our services to our clientele, especially so as it was the peak of tobacco trading, the be-all and end-all of tobacco production. If we fail on any of these, the hard work and efforts of the tobacco farmers would have gone for naught.

Each one of us has to be proactive – engaging in practices and observing safety protocols that were circulated ad nauseam during the lockdown period, and ensuring compliance thereof. In the light of all that is happening, we have a lot on our plates to put in place crucial processes to address the challenges brought about by the pandemic – all these on top of performing our regular job duties.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to every problem or how work should be done. Every organization and culture is different, and so are the circumstances of every individual employee. Amidst all these, we appreciate and thank our men-on-the-ground: extension workers, researchers; and support staff who remained fully engaged. They were so scared but emerged and felt like superheroes. They were our source of great inspiration to lead and carry on during these challenging times.

But above all, on a more personal note, despite the lingering uncertainty, COVID-19 silently offered me an opportunity to reflect on its spiritual impact on the world, in general, and every one of us. The steady drumbeat of news and too much information had sapped my spirit, at times. But prayers helped, particularly when I was drawn to a closer relationship with God. During the lockdown/community quarantine periods, I had ample time for reflection. And it gave me the most opportune time to focus on what is most important: Just slow down, live life simply and in gratitude. I just trust in the Lord, take delight in Him, and commit my way to Him (Psalm 37:3-5).

In a way, COVID-19 is also a battle for our souls; and it's a battle we will win! ■



Ceremonial sowing of pechay seeds at the field by the participants during the project launching.



## Activities, Programs, Projects

**NTA Vigan Branch** is located right in the heart of the culturally rich and historically significant City of Vigan. The employees are a close-knit family that works together for the greater good of everyone.

The Branch Office has the First District of Ilocos Sur as its area of coverage, with seven tobacco-growing municipalities, namely, Sinait, Cabugao, San Juan, Magsingal, Sto. Domingo, San Ildefonso, and five municipalities that comprise Metro Vigan, namely Bantay, Caoayan, San Vicente, Sta. Catalina, and Vigan City.

As of the latest crop year 2019-2020, the Branch Office had 4,507 registered tobacco farmers tilling a total area of 3,214.88 hectares, which increased over the last four years by about 7% in terms of number of farmers, and 25.5% in terms of area planted (baseline CY 2016-2017 was 4,210 tobacco farmers and 2,561.54 hectares).

For the past 33 years, the Vigan Branch has been serving its clients through the dynamic leadership of four Branch Managers in succession, namely, Rodrigo T. Pagtulingan (July 1987 - April 1989), Teofilo S. Batin (May 1989 - April 1997), Reynaldo D. Perez (May 1997 - July 1999), and Minerva P. Mizal (August 1999 to present). From May 2013 to March 2017, Faustino O. Taal, Branch Chief Agriculturist, was the officer-in-charge, when Ms. Mizal was designated Project Manager of the NTA AgriPinoy Project in Narvacan, Ilocos Sur.

Vigan Branch is proud of its highly dedicated and experienced personnel complement of 35 regular staff (25 from the Operations Group; 10 from the Administrative and Finance Section), and 12 Job Order employees, who all possess the technical know-how and expertise to implement various programs and projects of the agency.

### **IFOIGAP-TCGS**

For CY 2019-2020, the Vigan Branch assisted a total of 1,044 tobacco farmers covering an area of 738 hectares. Total production assistance delivered was P22.9 million, with a collection efficiency at 95.84%. Local government units provide 100% subsidy to all farm inputs for their tobacco growers.

### **Tobacco Trading**

The number of trading centers (TCs) and farmer representatives (FRs) operating in the branch area of jurisdiction has declined since 2017: from four TCs and 69 FRs to only two TCs and 46 FRs at present. The trading centers are located in Cabugao (ULPI TC#88) and in San Juan (TMI). Of the registered FRs, two are from Ilocos Norte and one from Abra, the rest are from Ilocos Sur. The wholesale tobacco dealer (WTD)/Redrying Plant (RP) of PMFTC in Vigan City is no longer operational.

### **Rice Project**

Under the Agency's Rice Wet Season Project for 2019, the Vigan Branch covered a total of 439 tobacco-rice farmer beneficiaries tilling an aggregate area of 325.5 hectares. Total production assistance was P2.59 million. Loan collection efficiency was 96.56%. Except for Cabugao, Magsingal and Sto. Domingo, all tobacco-growing municipalities in the second district of Ilocos Sur provided subsidy for farm inputs.

For Rice Wet Season Project for 2020, the Branch Office is currently assisting 680 tobacco-rice farmers, tilling an aggregate area of 529.25 hectares, more than the target of 504 FCs and 252 hectares this cropping season. Total assistance was P5.9 million.

## BRANCH OFFICE STAFF



*Front Row, Seated (L-R) :* Delia R. Giron (TPRO I), Cleofe V. Argel (TPRO I), Gloria L. Abella (TPRO I), Ruth B. Yabes (Agriculturist I), Patricia Lourdes Cortez (Cashier II), Jannalie T. Esquierdo (Accountant III), Noralyn I. Idica (Administrative Officer V), Minerva P. Mizal (Department Manager III), Diosdado L. Maduli (Supervising TPRO / Acting Chief Agriculturist), Gilbert I. Yadao (Senior TPRO / Acting Supervising TPRO), Jose A. Taclas, Jr. (TPRO III / Acting Senior TPRO), Tomasito G. Taloza (Agriculturist II, Area Supervisor - Cabugao), Reynaldo A. Pugrad (TPRO I, Acting Area Supervisor - Magsingal, Sto. Domingo, San Ildefonso), Victor V. Valledor (Agriculturist I, Acting Area Supervisor - San Juan), and Felicitas T. Tagad (TPRO I, Acting Area Supervisor - Sinait).

*Second Row (L-R):* Laura V. Abelita (JO TPRO), Elma S. Bayading (JO TPRO), Megan C. Genganian (JO Forester), Rychelle C. Cuentas (JO Forester), Liezl Margarette R. Guzman (JO Secretary I), Dyesebele I. Corpuz (JO Administrative Aide I), Pamela Bianca T. Asuncion (JO Administrative Aide I), Charlotte T. Antiporda (JO Administrative Aide I), and Ligaya L. Remillo (JO Administrative Aide I).

*Back Row (L-R):* Crisanto A. Ibbay (Agriculturist I), Nasser Jhon F. Ragasa (JO TPRO), Jeffrey Q. Dy (JO Computer Operator), Juanito S. Urulaza (TPRO I), Godofredo C. Alvarez (Driver II), Elpidio T. Gonzales (TPRO I), Christopher S. Cabanog (Agriculturist I), Mark Louie I. Silario (JO Driver II), Laurence R. Bueno (TPRO I), and Ian Michael C. Ventura (TPRO I). (Not in Photo: Immanuel A. Rafanan, TPRO I)



### **Renewable Fuelwood Energy Farm Project**

Vigan Branch conducted inventory and shape-filing of tree plantations of cooperators under the Kahuyang Pangkabuhayan at Pangkalikasan (KPP) project. For trees planted covering crop year 2013-2015, the Branch Office were able to shape-filed 269 cooperators covering 359.38 hectares. Of the 146 Certificates of Tree Plantation Ownership (CTPOs)/Permit to Cut, involving 146 cooperators with an area of 195.08 hectares, filed with DENR-CENTRO, 53 of them have been approved as of June 30.

### **Curing Barn Assistance Project**

Vigan Branch assisted 94 farmers for barn construction, and 54 farmers for barn repair, with a total of P4.36 million facility assistance.

### **NTA Scholarship Program**

Since the NTA started offering scholarship grants in School Year 2011-2012 to deserving students who are dependents of tobacco farmers, the Vigan Branch has recommended a total of 30 scholars who enrolled in various courses at tertiary institutions in Ilocos Sur: University of Northern Philippines, Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, and Mariano Marcos State University, for the first semester of School Year 2019-2020. Total assistance, which covers P3,000 for miscellaneous fees and P2,800 allowance per semester for each scholar, was P174,000.

### **Emergency Cash Assistance**

Vigan Branch distributed P2.088 million cash assistance to 1,044 farmer-cooperators of its Tobacco Contract Growing System, as an immediate support during the lockdown brought about by the pandemic. Each cooperator received P2,000 cash.

### **Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay**

Vigan Branch allocated P1.47 million for the Gulayan at Manukan Projects sa Barangay, in two batches. The first batch, including pilot areas, the Branch office assisted 74 farmer-cooperators with 7.4 hectares of vegetable area (at 1,000 square meters per farmer). At 25 heads of Sasso chicks per farmer, the Branch Office distributed 1,850 heads of organic chicken to the farmer cooperators. For the second batch, the Branch Office assisted 81 farmer-cooperators with 8.1 hectares of vegetable area, and 2,025 heads of organic chicken.

### **Vegetable Seeds Distribution Project**

Vigan Branch distributed P385,500 worth of seed packs (5 kinds of vegetables per pack) to 771 farmer-cooperators in the initial implementation of the project. The seed packs were given free to the farmers, in support of the food sufficiency program of the Department of Agriculture. ■

Proposed design of the NTA Tobacco Farmers' Training Center



**Lowering of the Time Capsule.** (L-R) NTA Vigan Branch Manager Minerva P. Mizal; House Deputy Speaker Deogracias Victor Savellano, and San Juan Mayor Ma. Elaine V. Sarmiento.

## **Tobacco farmers center breaks ground in San Juan, Ilocos Sur**

NTA had official ground-breaking ceremony for the proposed NTA Tobacco Farmers Training Center in Barangay Bannuar, San Juan, Ilocos Sur.

Its location is strategically situated at the center of the First District of Ilocos Sur, guaranteeing easy accessibility to all tobacco farmers within the district.

The event held on January 30 was graced by the presence of Deputy House Speaker Deogracias Victor "DV" Savellano, provincial leaders, local officials of San Juan. The NTA Governing Board was represented by Directors Teofilo R. Quintal and Wilfredo C. Martinez.

According to NTA Vigan Branch Manager Minerva P. Mizal, the training center will be used by tobacco farmers for their various tobacco production seminars and livelihood trainings and will also serve as a venue for the many program launchings and events of the NTA Vigan Branch and the continuing capability enhancement programs of its personnel.

Once completed, the training center will have two floors. The ground floor will consist of the living, dining and kitchen area, two visitors' quarters with each having a toilet and a bath, and an executive quarter. The second floor will house the Training Room which can accommodate up to 170 people, two bathrooms, a lobby and a balcony.

In his message, Savellano underscored the importance and urgency of the implementation Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP), the five-year development program for the tobacco industry spearheaded by NTA. He also called on the expansion of the coverage of the NTA Scholarship Program with increased incentives and allowances for tobacco farmer dependents who will pursue Agriculture-related courses.

San Juan Mayor Elaine Sarmiento thanked the agency in choosing San Juan as the site of the NTA Tobacco Farmers' Training Center, as she promised support of the municipality to the programs and projects of the NTA that benefit their farmer constituents.

The program ended with the ceremonial lowering of the time capsule with the building's blueprint. ■



Victor V. Valledor (left) receives his PRAISE Outstanding Employee 2018 Award (Model Agriculturist Category) during the NTA's 31st Anniversary Celebration in 2018. With him are Directors Nestor C. Casela and Teofilo R. Quintal of the NTA Governing Board.

## 2018 PRAISE Awardee

# Striving to make things better and efficient at work

by Immanuel A. Rafanan

VICTOR Villon Valledor, or Vic to his NTA Vigan family, started in humble beginnings. He was brought up in the life of farming. When he was younger, he worked as a farm helper at the ginnery of the Philippine Cotton Corporation near their residence in Lapping, San Juan, Ilocos Sur. The little wage he received from the job was used to support his studies. During this time, he recalled, seeing extension workers from PhilCotton, riding their own motorcycles to work was a rarity during the 80s. He was inspired by this and dreamed of having a career as extension worker just like them, with his own motorcycle.

Vic finished Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering at Mariano Marcos State University in 1986. In January 1987, he was hired as Science Research Assistant I (casual) at the Philippine Virginia Tobacco Administration (PVTa). From July 1989 to June 1996, he worked as Farm Management Technician (casual/contractual) at what is now the National Tobacco Administration (NTA). He was promoted to Agriculturist I, a permanent position which he holds up to present.

What distinguishes Vic from other extension workers is that, by tending his own farm, he practices what he preaches, and sometimes, due to his innovative nature, he was also the one who “discovered” what he preaches.

Being an Agricultural Engineer, Vic never settles for what is a common practice. He conducts “researches” on his own and is very keen at tinkering farm implements and equipment to his advantage. He always strives to make things better and more efficient.

Vic is always the trusted and the go-to guy of the NTA Vigan for anything technical when it comes to best practices in farming. When the agency first introduced the tobacco subtype in the 90s, the Branch Office entrusted him the task of a coordinator for Virginia-Improved Flavor for the First District of Ilocos Sur.

Vic is also regularly invited by tobacco companies as a resource person to demo tobacco production technology in tobacco-producing provinces.

For his accomplishments, he received numerous awards

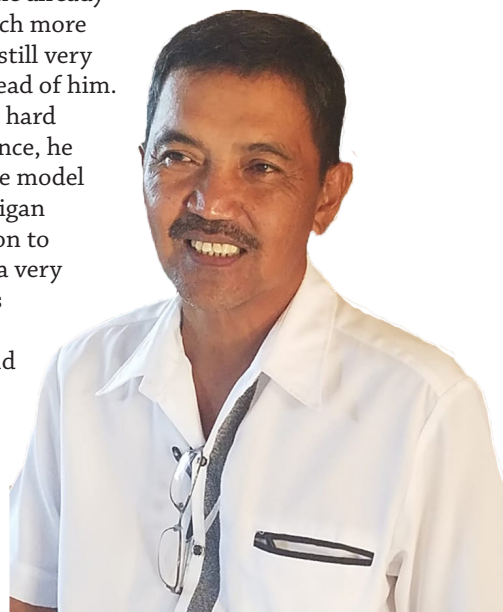
and recognitions throughout the years. The more recent were the Program on Awards and Incentive for Service Excellence (PRAISE) Outstanding Employee 2018 (Model Agriculturist Category), and the Certificate of Recognition he received as Assisting Extension Worker to Eligio Vega, National Awardee of the Tobacco Grower of the Year for Virginia-Improved Flavor Category, contest year 2018-2019.

Vic is also consistent at the top when it comes to hitting performance targets of Extension Workers (rated on the number of farmer-cooperators assisted, Area Coverage, and collection percentage) in all NTA projects.

At present, he serves as the Acting Area Supervisor for San Juan Area Office, and responsible for overseeing four extension workers handling a total TCGS coverage of 401 farmer-cooperators and 252 hectares.

Vic is married to Dely S. Valledor, a teacher, and they are blessed with four children: Darryl Vic (died in 2015), Mark Carlo, Darwin, and Princess Daphne. Mark Carlo and Darwin are presently employed as seafarer and I.T. at Manila, respectively, while Princess Daphne is Top 1 among her Senior High School Science Class.

Looking back at his dream when he was younger, it is safe to say that he already achieved it, with much more to spare, and with a still very promising future ahead of him. Because of his skills, hard work, and perseverance, he remains as one of the model employees of NTA Vigan Branch, an inspiration to younger colleagues, a very good friend to all his farmer-clients and a good, dependable and loving provider for his family. ■



# Testimonials

## Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay Project

**Rene G. Balangue**, 39, tobacco grower of Sta. Lucia, Aringay, La Union, is one of the beneficiaries of the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay Project, an intervention program of NTA in support of the tobacco growers during the pandemic. He received from NTA La Union 30 broiler chicks and assorted vegetable seed packs for his one-hectare farm, and started harvesting last September.

“Malaking tulong ang proyekto sa aking pamilya sa panahon ng pandemya. Yung napagbentahan ko ng mga manok at gulay, ginamit kong ipinambili ng kambing na ngayon ay may mga anakna. Nabigyan ko rin ang aking mga kapitbahay ng mga gulay. Salamat, NTA!”

- Kristin Mae S. Castañeda



## Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project

**Roger Pacapac**, 53, tobacco grower from Salucag, Dolores, Abra, is one of the beneficiaries of the Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project (BCPAP). He received his ready-to-breed upgraded Brahman heifer from NTA Abra Branch Office during the dispersal in Dolores.

“Maraming salamat sa NTA sa pagpili sa akin bilang beneficiary ng beef cattle dispersal. Malaking tulong ito sa aking pamilya. Sana tuloy-tuloy ang programang ito ng ahensiya at mas marami pa ang matutulungan na mga magsasaka ng tabako katulad ko.”

-- Marife P. Peralta



**NATIONAL TOBACCO ADMINISTRATION**  
nta.da.gov.ph

## Ilocos LGUs support tobacco farmers



Provincial Government of Ilocos Norte



LGU Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur



LGU Sta. Lucia, Ilocos Sur

### Ilocos Norte

THE Provincial Government of Ilocos Norte, in coordination with the NTA Ilocos Norte, distributed 20 water pumps, 20 irrigation hose, 40 sprayers and 2,370 bags of fertilizers to tobacco contract growers on November 20.

The distribution, held at the NTA Office Gallery at NTA-Philrice Building in Batac City, was graced by the presence of Provincial Board Member Domingo Ambrocio, Atty. Pancho Jose, and Edwin Cariño who represented Gov. Matthew Marcos-Manotoc.

Director Nestor C. Casela, member of the NTA Governing Board, also joined the distribution spearheaded by NTA Ilocos Norte Branch OIC Luzviminda U. Padayao and Nelly U. Castro of the Farm Services and Technology Department.

Ilocos Norte is one of the top producers of Virginia tobacco in the country. In the latest distribution of LGU shares from the tobacco excise tax collection in 2017, per DBM Local Budget Memorandum 81 released in November 4, the Provincial Government will receive P321.67 million out of the P1.072 billion share of the whole province.

### Ilocos Sur

LOCAL chief executives of two municipalities in the second district of Ilocos Sur, in coordination with the NTA Candon Branch Office, distributed facility assistance to the local tobacco growers, in preparation of the tobacco season in their respective areas.

Mayor Brigido “Boy” Camarillo of Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur distributed 510 water pumps and 400 units of electric pumps to 520 Virginia and Native tobacco growers, held at the town center on October 6.

Sangguniang Bayan Members Arlon Serdenia and Severino Dagdag, and Municipal Agricultural Officer Grace Cardona assisted the mayor in the distribution.

In Sta. Lucia, Ilocos Sur, Mayor Joseph Simon Valdez and some SB Members led the distribution of 387 units of generators to the tobacco growers. Recipients are registered tobacco farmers tilling at least half-hectare of tobacco farm lots.

Last cropping season, Sta. Maria had 520 farmer-cooperators for the agency’s Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS), tilling an aggregate area of 394 hectares of tobacco farms. Sta. Lucia had 475 TCGS farmers with 382 hectares of tobacco farms.

Meanwhile, the neighbor municipalities of Narvacan and Nagbukel in central Ilocos Sur also gave production inputs to the tobacco growers for the upcoming cropping season.

Narvacan Mayor Luis Chavit C. Singson distributed basal fertilizers to the local tobacco growers on October 23. Governor Ryan Luis V. Singson, the mayor’s son, graced the event held at the town plaza, where he also distributed hybrid corn seeds to farmers.

In Nagbukel, Mayor Amelia Cabrera spearheaded the distribution of 5,222 bags of fertilizers, including 36 units of 8 HP multi-tiller, and 270 rolls of pressure hose to the tobacco growers. NTA Candon extension workers Nestor H.

# Abra town tops RA 7171 share in 2017

THE municipality of Pilar in Abra got P594.4 million share in tobacco excise tax, biggest among beneficiary local government units, based on the latest release on the government tobacco excise tax collections by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

The share of the fifth-class municipality is about 39% more than its share from the excise tax from Virginia-type cigarettes in 2016.

Pilar outranked Candon City, the perennial topnotcher in tobacco production, and five other municipalities of Ilocos Sur (Cabugao, Sinaít, Sta. Cruz, Magsingal, and Burgos) in the annual release. Claveria in Misamis Oriental and Balaoan in La Union get the next highest share, with P518.69 million and P516.87 million, respectively.

Meanwhile, two municipalities in Isabela get the biggest shares from excise tax collections on locally grown Burley and Native type tobacco: Quirino, with P288.5 million and Roxas, P216.9 million.

The shares of LGUs from the collection of tobacco excise tax on locally manufactured Virginia-type cigarettes, and burley and native tobacco in 2017 are based on Local Budget Memorandum 81, issued by DBM on November 4, which provides the guidelines on its release and utilization by the LGUs.

The DBM said the funds shall be chargeable against the 2019 General Appropriations Act.

Tobacco-producing LGUs will receive a total of P18 billion as their share from the government's tobacco excise tax collections in 2017.

The five provinces producing Virginia-type cigarettes – Abra, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union and Misamis Oriental – are entitled to a share of P14.4 billion. Meanwhile, 14 provinces that supply barley and native tobacco will get P3.61 billion. These are Abra, Kalinga, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Tarlac, Occidental Mindoro, Misamis Oriental, Maguindanao and

North Cotabato.

Under Republic Act 7171, LGUs producing Virginia-type cigarettes are entitled to a 15 percent share of national tax collections. Of this amount, 30 percent will be divided among the beneficiary provinces, 40 percent among component cities and municipalities, and 30 percent to the component cities and municipalities.

Republic Act 8240, on the other hand, provides that LGUs producing barley and native tobacco will also receive 15 percent from excise tax collections, of which 10 percent will go to beneficiary provinces and 90 percent to the component cities and municipalities.

Per DBM guidelines, the funds are earmarked for the promotion of self-reliance by tobacco farmers through cooperative projects; livelihood projects focusing on developing alternative farming systems; post-harvest and secondary processing facilities; and infrastructure projects such as farm-to-market roads. ■



LGU Narvacan, Ilocos Sur



LGU Nagbukel, Ilocos Sur

## Relief operations in Cagayan, Isabela

NTA Cagayan Branch Office extended assistance to tobacco farmers affected by Typhoon Ulysses that hit Region 2 and the rest of Northern Luzon.

Cagayan Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda spearheaded from November 18 to 20 the distribution of relief goods to tobacco growing communities in Pared, Baculod, and Agani in Alcala; Paccac, Annafatan, Tana, and Palacu in Amulung, both in Cagayan; and Moldero in Tumauni, Isabela.

According to Riazonda, who is also the concurrent manager in charge of Isabela Branch, the relief goods are sourced from generous donors who immediately responded the call for support by the agency to the flood victims in the region.

“Most of our donors are our co-workers from the NTA, some are our friends and relatives. May our good Lord reward the generosity of their hearts,” she said.

The whole staff of Cagayan and Isabela branches helped in the packing of reliefs and in the distribution in their respective areas.

The Branch Office also received donations from the Central Office, through the efforts of Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. and the Department Managers. “We used them in our next relief operations in Tuguegarao and in Ilagan,” she said

Isabela and Cagayan are two of the most affected provinces, with nearly P4 billion worth of damage to the country's agriculture sector, according to Department of Agriculture's (DA) Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM). ■



*Many ideas grow better when transplanted to another mind than the one where they sprang up. – Oliver Wendel Holmes*

When will you know that your team is in treading the right way? Teach them, show to them and they will learn! Collaboration and sensible ideas are the most important in a team.

The photo was captured during a visit to a tobacco farmer and his tobacco on March 10, 2020 in Gumot, Rosario, La Union. A team from NTA told the farmer on how to improve his production despite the dry soil affecting the growth of his tobacco. Here, the farmer talked about lack of water source in his location and lack of seedlings. The team gathered suggestions and possible collaboration to sustain the production of tobacco in the farmer's area. Concerning the practices and management in farming, one team member suggested to implement improved seedling production in the area, one suggested to construct a SFR that will service all tobacco areas, and other suggested to change the cropping pattern or early planting to help the farmer in producing tobacco.

This collaboration shows that one could come up with fruitful ideas and definite action to take when different expertise and professions are combined.

A team will never leave a teammate. A team must work and think together and set asides self-interests. The NTA team may be an efficient team, but without the tobacco farmer as partner, its goals are impossible to achieve.

So at this time of pandemic crisis, we will never leave behind our number one teammate, our tobacco grower.

**-- Kenneth Russel L. Tanaval**

## ECQ Chronicles: Positive Images

by FTSD Staff

*Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success. - Henry Ford*

When we talk about working together, it's usually in the context of a group of people working together towards a goal. You could argue that a team worked well when they have reached their goal. However, achieving the goal is not the sole determinant of a successful team. How this team reached their goal and what impression they left on each other is just as vital.

Only a team that feels great together can eventually accomplish great things! Thus, when we speak about working together effectively, we mean that the goal was reached and team dynamics are even better than before. It is not just getting people together, it really is about having a motivated and diverse group of people, who are willing to work together on behalf of everyone.

Alongside with unsung heroes of this COVID-19 pandemic, dedicated workers of NTA have emerged. These workers are embracing and continually working with the deliverables of the agency with little recognition from the public. Despite this lack of recognition, the workers are doing a good job for the farmers, the government, and other industry stakeholders. Even in these trying times, they never cease to appreciate their job, knowing that doing something for others is a recognition itself. **-- Raymart P. Guzman**





*Agriculture was the first occupation of man, and as it embraces the whole earth, it is the foundation of all other industries. – E.W. Steward*

The COVID19 pandemic can't stop us from doing field work, true to our commitment in our job and profession. There are activities, like seed production, that cannot be delayed nor cancelled despite the health crisis. We need to sun-dry matured seedheads that we harvested, before rainy season comes. We are very thankful that we can do this activity, which is a long process/activity of Seed Production Project until their distribution to our tobacco farmers. Good enough, as this will make us busy and beat boredom living under the Enhanced Community Quarantine. Patience and hard work make us win over the challenges we are facing now.

Tobacco is the cash crop in the agriculture sector. The tobacco industry produces a huge tax revenues for the national government. This source of fund for various projects of the government down to the local government units is not possible without the cultivation, manufacture, and distribution and sale of tobacco and its products. Consider also the jobs that the industry generates for the good of the economy.

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy because it gives us food on the table. So the farming sector, and that includes the tobacco growers and other industry players, are also front liners, just like medical practitioners, during the pandemic.

As extension workers, it is our commitment to ensure the profitability in tobacco farmers with the proper application of production technology.

We are proud to be part of Agriculture, the sector that stays in the frontline against hunger and poverty. Together we work as one to make our life better.

-- Thine E. Elvena

## Quality Assurance Division... from page 38

### Project 4

#### Capability Enhancement on Leaf Grading

THE project aims to develop technical competence in leaf grading for professional graders from the agency and the private sector, tobacco farmers and Researchers including issuances of Certificates of Proficiency and Accreditation for Virginia and Burley Tobacco.

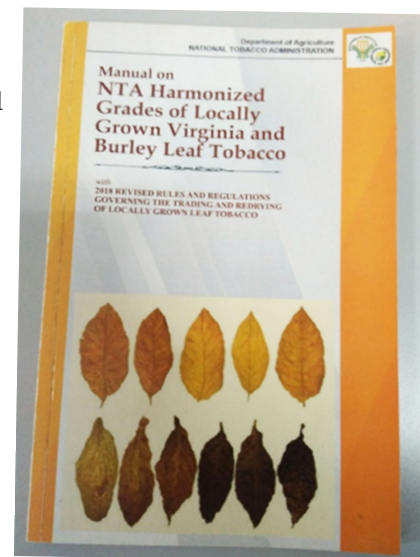
The project started during the conceptualization of the NTA Harmonized grading system. Prior to this, trainings and

orientation seminars were conducted using the US standard grading system which is internationally accepted. One of the leaf grading systems were fused together which now comprise the NTA Harmonized Grading system.

Upon approval of the NTA Harmonized Grades System on April 21, 2017, the agency intensified its leaf grading capability enhancement trainings and orientation seminars. To date, a total of 488 individuals participated in the said trainings and seminars, which included TPROs and Agriculturists (For Virginia and Burley combined) from the eight Branch Offices, including tobacco farmers, researchers, and professional graders from trading centers. They are now equipped with the knowledge on the application of the grading system. Of the total participants, 179 were from the Branch Offices and 62 from the Central Office. The rest, or 247 participants, were farmer leaders and leaf graders from trading centers. The Branch Offices conducted re-echo orientation seminars designed for farmer cooperators with a total of 2,145 participants for the Virginia and 155 for Burley.

QAD facilitated the conduct of group-specific training on USA Official Standard Leaf Grades on Flue Cured and Burley Tobacco under Cooperative Agreement between NTA and the Agricultural Marketing Services, US Department of Agriculture (AMS, USDA).

This was held at the NTA Central Office on July 9-13, 2018 for the Flue Cured and July 16-20, 2018 for Burley, attended by 60 extension workers from the Branch Office and QAD personnel. Mr. Bobby Wellons, a Division Training Instructor with Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS, USDA), was the resource person. He brought along with him US-grown Flue Cured and Burley leaves that were used in the leaf grading and characterization exercises. -oOo-



**PRESIDENT Rodrigo Roa Duterte** has cited the important contribution of the National Tobacco Administration to the nation's socio-economic growth, particularly in its invaluable role in empowering tobacco farmers through programs that provide financial assistance and promote self-reliance. **Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar** has been very supportive of the industry since day one of his term at the Department of Agriculture. His vision for the agriculture sector has inspired NTA to use all its available resources to accelerate the modernization and industrialization of the tobacco industry, and see to it that the tobacco farmers will have more income. **Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr.**, driven by the legacy of his father to the agency, has been inspiring men and women of the agency with his leadership, reminding everyone to remain true to the mandate of the agency and committed in fostering sustainable development, and remain resilient as we overcome the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Words of Thanks** WHILE we profusely thank our field personnel working on the front line in the branch offices, we offer the same degree of gratitude to all the government units who support us in upholding our commitment to serve our tobacco growers, particularly in the distribution of the Emergency Cash Assistance (ECA) to 6,668 farmer-cooperators. Thanks to the governors, mayors and other local officials in Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Abra, La Union, and Pangasinan for facilitating the movement of our personnel and our farmers in the distribution of the cash assistance. Some mayors provided safe venues for farmers' gathering, and some offered their vehicles to bring our field personnel to the communities or shared their strategies for the safety of everyone, and snacks for our personnel.

We, at the National Tobacco Administration, are very thankful that our purpose of giving immediate assistance to tobacco growers during the emergency is fulfilled by your cooperation. **Maraming, maraming salamat.**