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Deputy Administrator for Operations

Sustaining efforts

to serve the farmers

Our primary concern

WELCOME to another tobacco trading season. Putting the effect of freak rains behind, tobacco growers have started lining up at the buying stations to trade their crops, hoping for a better profit.

We still are in the pandemic, and farmers are expecting so much for assistance, and the agency invite the opportunities for change and growth that come with every trading season. Yet some things stay the same each year—like our mission to serve the farmers and help them produce quality leaves and earn more from their produce.

Our field workers, our extension workers, and our people from the Regulation Department are on their toes. They will assist the farmers, and see to it that the trading rules are implemented. They will proudly deliver our message of full assistance during the trading, and uphold the mission of NTA. Our staff involved in the trading will stay with their farmers in case there are conflicts in classification and trading.

And while our staff are busy on the trading floor, our leaders are continuously working on the cash assistance due our farmers who were affected by calamities. Already included in the General Appropriations Act of CY 2022 is the P50-million as stand-by emergency fund, and the assistance out of the Quick Response Fund of the Department of Agriculture has already been approved by Secretary William Dar. We appreciate our Administrator and CEO, Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., for continuously coordinating with our partner LGUs to join as in this endeavor to help the farmers. As beneficiaries of the excise tax, LGUs are expected to be more responsible in serving their constituents.

Each tobacco grower is our primary concern. We rise and fall with all of our farmers. In a month's time, after the trading, we continue providing them with more income-generating projects. Amidst challenges such as the pandemic, freak rains, and rising prices of farm inputs, the agency will remain steadfast in its effort to accomplish its mission. That's our primary concern. ■



Cover Photo: Jerome B. Alcantara, Agriculturist I of NTA La Union, captures an image of farmer Wenie C. Andrada during the sticking activities in tobacco-growing barangay of Mamat-ing Norte in Naguilian, La Union.

Thank you for reading

I WILL be leaving the editorial board as I have transferred to another department. It's been the privilege of a lifetime to be entrusted with the publication, one important pillar in agency's Communication Support project

I'll forever be grateful to have worked for the PR Office. I came on board under the term of NTA Administrator Edgardo D. Zaragoza, who revived the Philippine Tobacco News from its hiatus. It's been a privilege working with my first boss, Dr. Perlita L. Baula, who entrusted me with the overall management of the newsletter, beginning in the last quarter of 2013 and ended after 25 bi-monthly issues in March 2018.

My work schedules, supervising other PR projects, and coming out with an Ilokano newsletter for farmers caused huge delays in the newsletter preparation beginning 2019 until the onset of the pandemic in 2020. I've made mistakes and have worked hard to quickly correct them.

I'm indebted to Administrator Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. for his passion to strengthen the Communication Support Project and his full trust and invaluable confidence on my management of the newsletter despite the challenges. This allowed me to release the Special Issue in 2020 and all quarterly issues in 2021, even as we all quarantined at home during the virus surge and worked on staggered office schedules at the onset of the New Normal.

A special thank you is owed to my staff and to all designated information officers in the branch offices. Despite their busy schedules in the Operations, some never failed to submit their reports when I asked them

Most importantly, thank you to all the employees, especially the Department and Branch Managers who have supported me in my PR jobs.

Even when I'm in my new job at the Corporate Planning, I won't be straying far. In fact, I'm still helping at the Public Relations Office, particularly in the completion of this issue, and maybe the Special Issue for our 35th Anniversary. Hopefully, I'll leave the editorial staff in better shape than when I started.

Journalism and public relations are still in my blood but my current loads in planning and evaluation of our agency programs provide me an equally significant purpose.

Dr. Virginia Duldulao, first editor and founder of this publication, highlighted the importance of a newsletter: "So that the people, and all the stakeholders, know that the agency is doing something good." A good image invites support. That matters a lot.

Thank you for reading. **(Neyo E. Valdez)**



Year-End Report: As COVID is still around

Sustaining efforts to serve the farmers

NOW entering its third year, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to place significant pressure on Filipino farmers. The prolonged periods of restrictions which reduced the available workforce, along with disasters and high prices for farm inputs, have resulted in production and income losses.

Despite the challenges, the National Tobacco Administration stood as a steadfast partner to nearly 42,000 farmers in their pursuit of enhanced livelihoods and opportunities, while undertaking the necessary actions and strategies to ensure the growth and development of the industry.

It keeps with the DA's goal of attaining a "Masaganang Ani at Mataas na Kita." The vision seeks to double the incomes of smallholder farmers through collective empowerment, skills development and the use of innovative technologies. Our objectives are bolstered with the alignment of our project implementation with the Department's OneDA reform agenda to transform Philippine Agriculture.

To cushion the impacts of the ongoing crisis, the NTA, led by Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., continues the implementation of the "Farmers First" policy introduced by the late Administrator Dr. Robert L. Seares.

The agency conducted programs, projects, and activities geared toward increasing productivity and income as well as developed interventions to respond to the tobacco farmers' varying needs amid the pandemic.

As a result, the tobacco industry remained resilient and, in many cases, thrived as in the previous years.

Also, the first quarter of the year was marked with the off-season rain (freak rain) in January and February that hit the tobacco-growing provinces in Northern Luzon, damaging crop worth P77 million in about 1,200 hectares of tobacco farms, and affecting 4,000 farmers. The rain hit at a time when most of the crops were on vegetative stage, with crops in some areas ready for harvest early next month.

As an immediate intervention to assist farmers affected by the "freak rain," the agency implemented the restructuring of the production assistance given to the affected farmers, in addition to the provision of farm

inputs and livelihood assistance through its various intervention programs.

Tobacco Trading and Regulation

Tobacco production reached 46.28 million kilos in 2021, valued at P4.1 billion. That was 5.8% decline from the 49.15 million kilos of the total production last year, mainly due to a considerable decrease (almost 45%) of Burley production in the same period.

Native tobacco increased by almost 30% and now accounted for about 44% of the total production, overtaking Virginia (38.8%), and Burley (17%)

Despite the decrease in production, the average buying price of P88.91 per kilo was the highest in the last five years of tobacco trading. And this is expected to increase in 2022 after a new tripartite agreement for the tobacco floor prices between the farmers, private sector, and NTA was reached during the two-day virtual Tripartite Consultative Conference in November last year. The agreement calls for a P3 increase in floor



Monitoring of tobacco trading in Rosales, Pangasinan



Management Committee Meeting

prices per kilogram across all grades for Virginia and Burley, and a P4 increase across all grades for Native tobacco.

One notable achievement in tobacco regulation is the completion of all critical onboarding activities in the TradeNet Platform, an online portal developed by the government to improve the ease of doing business. The NTA was one of 10 Trade Regulatory Government Agencies to fully transition to automated transactions. The Regulation Department issued clearances or permits to 557 importers, exports, manufacturers and licenses to 47 trading centers/wholesale tobacco dealers/redrying plants.

Boosting Production

Unlike their food crop-growing counterparts, tobacco farmers have a higher risk of food insecurity. Tobacco is more labor-intensive and thus, more costly to cultivate. To make smallerholder farmers more competitive, the NTA continued to expand the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) project under the Integrated Farming and Other Income Generating Program (IFOIGAP).

For CY 2021-2022, the NTA assisted a total of 7,305 tobacco farmers tilling an aggregate area of 4,936 hectares, with a total released budget of P204 million. Production/credit assistance per hectare averages P50,000 with a 40% subsidy on fertilizers/pesticides.

Top beneficiary branches were La Union (with 1,631 FCs), Candon (1,466) and Vigan (1,022). They were followed by Ilocos Norte (816), Abra (722), Pangasinan (669), Isabela (500) and Cagayan (356).

The TCGS assures farmers access to the following: (1) financial assistance to increase production; (2) technology

to improve leaf quality; (3) and a ready market to boost revenue, among others. To regulate the practice of contract farming, the project also ensures that all produce is accurately weighed, documented and graded and the farmers promptly paid.

Under the Improved Tobacco Seedling Production (ITSP) Project, NTA provided 3,000 FCs with technical assistance and farm inputs and implements worth P20 million to grow 30 million tobacco seedlings. The seedlings were distributed for free to farmers nationwide.

Finally, 4,029 tobacco farmers availed of the Curing Barn Assistance project (CBAP) to construct or repair curing barns and air-curing sheds damaged by typhoons. The CBAP had a budget of P100 million.

Resources for Livelihood

NTA also allotted an additional P10 million to the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay project. It distributed 33,350 Sasso chicks and 4,002 packs of fast-growing vegetable seeds as well as provided technical assistance on vegetable and poultry farming to 1,342 farmers affected by off-season rain during the first quarter.

The agency gave away separate vegetable packs, consisting of eggplant, corn, mustard, string beans, onions, tomato, and pechay seeds, to 6,685 farmers under the Vegetable Seeds Distribution project. The initiative aims to promote the adoption of integrated farming systems to reduce the risks facing tobacco farmers and stabilize their incomes in the long term.

Meanwhile as, part of an ongoing effort to jumpstart the beef cattle industry in tobacco-growing provinces, another P20.3 million was allocated to the Beef Cattle Production Assistance

Project (BCPAP). The initiative provided 500 farmers each with a ready-to-breed Brahman heifer, an American cattle breed regarded as a model for hybrid vigor and profit potential.

Block Farming

One of the major activities undertaken was the inventory of tobacco-based cooperatives, numbering 309 in 83 tobacco-growing municipalities, who will be conduits of assistance of the block farms. Fourteen cooperatives with a total of 636 tobacco farmers were identified as initial beneficiaries of block farms.

The rice-corn program officially started the block farming scheme for tobacco production areas in the country, as required under the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP) to increase quality production and farmers' income

Administrator Seares signed the release of the P71 million budget for the production assistance to farmer-cooperators from major tobacco-producing areas, based on the cropping pattern of the area. Farmers from the Ilocos provinces, La Union, Pangasinan, and Abra were given assistance for rice production, while those in Cagayan and Isabela, for corn production. This year's budget is higher than the P49.5 million released last year for rice production.

The agency also increased the number of farmers from 3,537 to 4,976, and coverage area from 2,829 to 4,038 hectares.

Smart Farming

To build up its database, the agency also conducted an inventory of 309 cooperatives in 83 municipalities under the Farmers Organizational Development. It successfully carried out the pilot implementation of the



Meeting with farmers in Piddig, Ilocos Norte

Photos: John James B. Canosa

Tobacco-Related Activities and Facility Maps for the Stakeholders of the Tobacco Industry (TRAFMAP) in Ilocos Norte. Nearly 75% of 3,898 registered tobacco farmers were geotagged and surveyed, including their curing structures, farm machineries (e.g., water pumps and tractors) and livestock.

Data gathering is essential as it will offer predictive insights into farming operations and processes. The TRAFMAP is particularly significant as it will provide the agency a digital visual representation of the country's tobacco farms on a map. Most importantly, it will give precise, rapid and consistent location-specific data on real time, thereby allowing for smarter forecasting and planning. Geotagging activities will be expanded to the rest of the country in the near future.

Increasing Climate Resilience

In an effort to restore the ecological condition of tobacco-growing areas, the Branch Offices planted a total of 872,119 million tree seedlings in various municipalities in the Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley and Cordillera Administrative Region under the Synchronized Tree Planting (STP) project.

The Branch Offices produced a total of 704,173 tree seedlings under the Kahuyang Pangkabuhayan ang Pangkalikasan (KPP) project, involving 80 farmer-cooperators.

The first off-grid, solar powered curing barn designed by the agency was also constructed in Barangay Camanga

in Badoc, Ilocos North. The NTA expects this will improve tobacco growing operation which traditionally relies on fuelwood while reducing the carbon footprint of the industry.

Advancing Research

Finally, in line with an ongoing effort to promote alternative industrial and commercial uses of tobacco, the agency scaled up production of tobacco handmade paper and held demonstration trials on the use of tobacco lead extract ointment against livestock skin diseases in Ilocos Norte.

The Farm Technology and Services Department conducted researches with the objective of improving the quality of the leaf and reducing the cost of production: Tobacco Germplasm collection, purification, maintenance and characterization; Pest Clinic – Quick Response; Tobacco seed production and distribution; Monitoring of Soil and Water Quality in Different Tobacco Growing Areas.

ANY good news of industry performances and achievements in 2021 would not be complete without mentioning the leadership of Administrator Seares. Administrator Seares has been consistent in rallying the NTA family, from the Top Management to our extension workers in the Branch Offices, to continue their dedication and commitment in the service of our farmers, despite some incredible obstacles. ■

by Jenny Marie B. Molina

“I’m reminding everyone to not put our guards down, despite the declining COVID-19 cases and the downgrading to Alert Level 1 status of Metro Manila. Kailangan pa rin natin mag-ingat dahil hindi pa tapos ang laban.”

Robert Victor G. Seares Jr.
NTA Administrator/CEO
during the flag-raising ceremony on Monday
February 28, 2022



Tobacco Trading



Tobacco trading at TMI buying station in Agoo, La Union and at the ULPI buying station (right photo) in Candon City. [Keith Hipol Madayag & NTA Candon]

Trading operations open in Ilocos

TOBACCO trading has started in the Ilocos Region with the opening of 11 buying stations in Candon, La Union, and Pangasinan beginning March 4, opening opportunities for tobacco growers to get a better price of their produce for 2021-2022 cropping season with increased floor prices for all tobacco types.

The Tripartite Consultative Conference last November reached a P3 increase in floor prices per kilogram across all grades for Virginia and Burley, and a P4 increase across all grades for Native tobacco beginning this year.

In La Union, TransMania, Inc. opened two buying stations for Virginia and Burley tobacco in Agoo and Balaoan

on March 4 and 15, respectively. Continental Leaf Tobacco (Phils.) Inc., in Bacnotan opened its trading activities on March 18, while Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. (ULPI), its three buying stations for Virginia, Burley and Native in Agoo on March 23.

Trading operations in Pangasinan officially started with the opening of two buying stations for Native and Burley of Universal Leaf Philippines Inc. (ULPI) in Carmay East, Rosales, Pangasinan on March 17.

ULPI also opened their buying stations for Virginia in Candon City and Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur on March 17. ConLeaf opened its Virginia buying station in Sta. Cruz on March 18.

According to the NTA Regulation Department (RD), the rest of the buying stations in Ilocos will begin trading operations in the coming weeks. Trading operations in Region 2 for Burley and Native tobacco will start in mid-April. The department has issued licenses to purchase tobacco to 28 buying stations in tobacco-growing areas in Region 1 and 2.

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. enjoined the buying stations to use the required documents in the purchase of tobacco from tobacco farmers and to display tobacco grades samples alongside the NTA Grades Standards in conspicuous area in the buying stations.

Before the opening of trading, the Monitoring Team of each NTA Branch has ensured accurate weight of tobacco in the trading floor with the inspection and calibration of weighing scale paraphernalia in the buying stations.

Extension workers from the Branch Offices are also assigned in each buying station to monitor trading operations and assist the farmers on the proper handling and preparation of tobacco before delivery.

According to RD Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, seven registered wholesale tobacco dealers have committed to purchase a total of 49.4 million kilos of tobacco this trading year.

Last cropping season, the total acceptances of tobacco was 46.28 million kilos of tobacco, valued at P4.1 billion. ■

[with reports from **Candido Liangao** (La Union) & NTA Pangasinan]



Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana joins NTA Pangasinan in monitoring trading operations on March 17 at the ULPI buying stations in Carmay East, Rosales Pangasinan. The Branch Office has designated inspector/s to supervise the trading activities in the buying stations. [Ann Desiree N. Gacayan]

Tobacco monitoring point in Ilocos Norte

by Divina D. Pagdilao

NTA Ilocos Norte launched the Tobacco Monitoring Point at the Ilocos Norte-Ilocos Sur Boundary with a multi-sectoral orientation seminar at the Branch Office in Batac City on March 8.

Branch Manager Luzviminda U. Padayao and Dir. Nestor C. Casela of the NTA Governing Board spearheaded the pre-trading activity, with representatives from cooperating agencies and units in attendance.

The participants were Atty. Pancho Jose, Chief of Staff of the Office of the Governor (representing Gov. Matthew Marcos Manotoc); PLtCol. Paul Parado, representing PCol. Julius C. Suriben, Provincial Director of the Philippine National Police; Engr. Ma. Teresa L. Bacnat, officer-in-charge, Provincial Agriculturist Office; Luzviminda Ortal, OIC Sustainable Development Center, representatives of the different tobacco-producing municipalities, and the private sector.

After the orientation, Padayao and some participants proceeded to the Ilocos Norte-Ilocos Sur boundary along the national highway in Barangay Sta. Cruz in Badoc, Ilocos Norte for the inspection of the checkpoint quarter.

“Monitoring of the goods ensures that tobacco production in Ilocos Norte is properly documented and that the leaf buyers have the proper documents issued by the NTA,” said Padayao.

She added that protocols in monitoring the tobacco production in the province will result in the correct and verified documentation of areas planted and that the local government units will have an equitable share from the tobacco excise tax under Republic Act (RA) Nos. 7171 and 8240, as amended by RA 10351.

Acting Chief Agriculturist Divina D. Pagdilao explained that checkpoint personnel will inspect travel documents of buyers and transporters of leaf tobacco, which include License/Certificate of Authority, Certificate of Inspection, Permit to Transport, and Certificate of Purchase (for Field Canvassers), and indicated Buying Station or the destination of their deliveries outside the province.

Trading season officially started on March 17 with the opening of the buying station of Leaf buyer Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. (ULPI) in the province.

Tobacco sectors renew collab for tobacco trading

As part of the preparation for the trading season in the province, NTA Ilocos Norte, in collaboration with the Sustainable Development Center (SDC) of the Provincial Government of Ilocos Norte, conducted a multi-sectoral meeting on Tobacco Contract Growing System and Installation of Tobacco Monitoring Point on February 11, held at the new INAFEC building in Laoag City.

Participants were representatives of various sectors and the municipal agriculturists of tobacco-producing municipalities in the province.

Branch Manager Padayao presented the accomplishment of the agency in the last two years, specifically in documenting/safeguarding the tobacco produce in the province, and review of the activities done and problems encountered in the checkpoints in the past trading operations.

Also in attendance who gave their messages on the multi-sectoral cooperation for the local tobacco industry were Dir. Nestor C. Casela of the NTA Governing Board; Sanggunian Panlalawigan Member Domingo Ambrocio, Chairman on the Committee on Agriculture; Atty. Pancho Jose, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor, PLtCol. Paul Parado, representing the PNP Provincial Director; Engr. Ma. Teresa Bacnat, Provincial Agriculturist; and Engr. Erickson Biag, representing the Municipal Agriculturists.

SDC OIC Luzviminda Ortal, in her closing message, encouraged all sectors to maintain close collaboration in the proper documentation of tobacco production, for the benefit of the province and more importantly, for the tobacco farmers. ■



The Monitoring Team at the Ilocos Norte-Ilocos Sur Boundary in Badoc, Ilocos Norte [Norvelyn D. Cabanatan]

Upgrading of tobacco trade documentation, certification

by **Kathleen Bulquerin**

AS part of ongoing efforts to enhance its documentation and certification of tobacco acceptances and production, the Regulation Department (RD) conducted on March 15 a virtual orientation-seminar on the systems and procedures on the DA-NTA Joint Memorandum Circular No. 001-2022, or the implementing guidelines for the efficient system of documentation and reporting of tobacco production.



Administrator Seares speaks during the annual orientation for NTA personnel, tobacco buying stations, wholesale tobacco dealers, redrying plant operators, and field canvassers as part of the major preparations for the tobacco trading. **[Melanie Rapiz-Parel]**

Participants were tobacco buyers, representatives from tobacco-growing local government units, and officials and extension workers in the branch offices who are directly involved in the trading operations.

Developed by the Management Information System Division of the Corporate Planning (CorPlan) Department and in close collaboration with National Technical Committee and Joint Monitoring Team of each NTA branch office, the system will streamline the documentation of tobacco acceptances and issuances of certificate of tobacco production using global positioning system (GPS), standardized monitoring and validation form, and upgraded database.

According to RD Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, the agency is taking the next steps towards enhancing transparency in assessing growth progress of tobacco area to ensuring high-accuracy precision on the volume of tobacco production per barangay, municipality or province, to be implemented starting this 2022 trading operation.

“This method or strategy is unique to NTA and relatively new in our usual trading processes, so we need this orientation to capacitate our staff using the system and database and to inform our stakeholders how this is done,” he said.

He added, the agency is implementing the new system to ensure the effective and efficient implementation and validation in the documentation and reporting of tobacco production, pursuant to DOF-BIR-DOH-DBM-DA Joint Circular No. 001-2014.

Said circular, which implements Republic Act (RA) 10351 that amended RA 7171 and 8240, mandates the Department of Agriculture and NTA to implement efficient system of documentation and reporting or tobacco production as basis for the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) in the allocation of tobacco excise tax share of each tobacco-producing LGU.

Resource persons and their topics were Engr. Felisa R. Aurellano, officer-in-charge of FTSD, and Joel Binwag of the Universal Leaf Philippines Inc. on GPS and aerial drone; Dir. Nestor C. Casela of the NTA Governing Board, on the required monitoring forms; Fortuna C. Benosa, CorPlan Manager, on database creation, storage and maintenance; and Engr. Alex L. Borje, chief of the Tobacco Leaf Regulation Division, on the specific roles of extension workers, tobacco buyers and LGUs in the implementation of the new system. ■

NTA renews reminders on trading rules

by **Melanie Rapiz-Parel**

TOBACCO traders have been strictly reminded not to buy tobacco leaves without licenses or registrations from NTA and commit other violations of trading rules.

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G Seares Jr. gave the reminders during the virtual orientation and seminar of the 2018 Revised Trading Rules and Regulations on Locally Grown Leaf Tobacco on March 10.

He said traders found guilty of doing so were subject to appropriate sanctions under the trading rules and regulations.

Personnel of the Branch Offices involved in the trading operations as well as the LGUs would be working together to closely monitor the trading operations in the provinces, and ensure proper documentation of tobacco acceptances or purchases and tobacco production. Said documents will be the basis in the computation of excise tax shares of the tobacco-growing provinces, pursuant to Republic Act (RA) Nos. 7171 and 8240, as amended by RA 10351.

The annual orientation for NTA personnel, tobacco buying stations, wholesale tobacco dealers, redrying plant operators, and field canvassers is one of the major preparations for the tobacco trading.

This was presided by Regulation Department Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, who also discussed the legal basis of the mandate of the agency in the enforcement of the Tobacco Trading Rules and Regulations.

Other resource persons and their topics were: Engr. Alex L. Borje, Chief of Tobacco Leaf Regulation Division on salient features and updates of the TRR and licensing procedures; Eleanor A. Rapanut, Chief of Tobacco Products Regulation Division, on system and procedure in the proper accomplishment and monitoring forms; and Primitivo M. Abalos Jr., Senior Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer, on violations in the trading activity and penalties.

The Regulation Department has issued licenses to 28 trading centers, Permit and Authority to Purchase to 14 wholesale tobacco dealers, Permit and Authority to Redry to three redrying plants, and Certificate of Authority to 219 field canvassers and *vijeros*. ■

Industry stakeholders join modernization and industrialization planning workshop

by Kathleen Bulquerin

NTA concluded the two-day Tobacco Industry Stakeholders Consultative Workshop on the National Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization and Industrialization Plan (NAFMIP) 2020-2030 held virtually on February 17-18.

The consultative workshop, spearheaded by the Corporate Planning Department, saw the participation of farmer leaders of different organizations, representatives from local government units (LGUs), and representatives from the private sector.

The workshop aimed to present the development plans for the modernization and industrialization of the tobacco industry, aligned with the OneDA reform agenda of Secretary William D. Dar and the NTA Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program, and identify the challenges the sectors face in major tobacco-growing provinces.

In his message, Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. said that the NAFMIP Consultative Workshop is the first time in a long while that NTA gathered in one occasion all our major stakeholders for a planning consultation by the agency.

“All of your contributions here in the workshop will serve as inputs for a roadmap or a development plan, not only for the tobacco industry, but also for the Philippine Agriculture in general,” he said.

He added that the result of the consultation will serve as a guide, and inspire our stakeholders in taking cohesive action and to galvanize sector-wide public and private funds and other resources to support action.

“*Kasama kayo sa pagpapalano sa simula pa lang, na hindi tulad ng dati na we only consult you para hingiinang inyong approval para sa ginawa naming plano dito sa NTA,*” he said.

Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana expressed his gratitude to everyone who took the time

to join the consultation, despite their hectic schedules.

“It is very rare that all sectors of tobacco are here with us, enjoining us as we discuss and develop plans, for the benefit of Philippine agriculture,” said Sambrana.

“This activity will address the concerns of the tobacco industry in the most efficient manner and maintain the volume of tobacco that we produce so that the gross value-added money will not be totally affected,” added Sambrana.

Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano said that every stakeholder has a responsibility not just in the tobacco industry but in the agriculture sector in general.

“Making sure that every stakeholder in this workshop is heard is one of our responsibilities. As we share common goals, we are confident with your contributions and together we’ll be able to reach our desired transformations for the sector together,” Savellano added.

Corporate Planning Manager Fortuna C. Benosa presented the industry update, NTA current programs aligned with OneDA Reform Agenda and Strategies, and the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program.

Warlie V. Oribello, Supervising TPRO of NTA La Union, Noralyn I. Idica, acting Chief Agriculturist of NTA Vigan, and Felisa R. Aurellano, officer-in-charge of the Farm Technology and Services Department presented various topics on the NAFMIP, as provided by the Department of Agriculture, for stakeholders’ consultations.

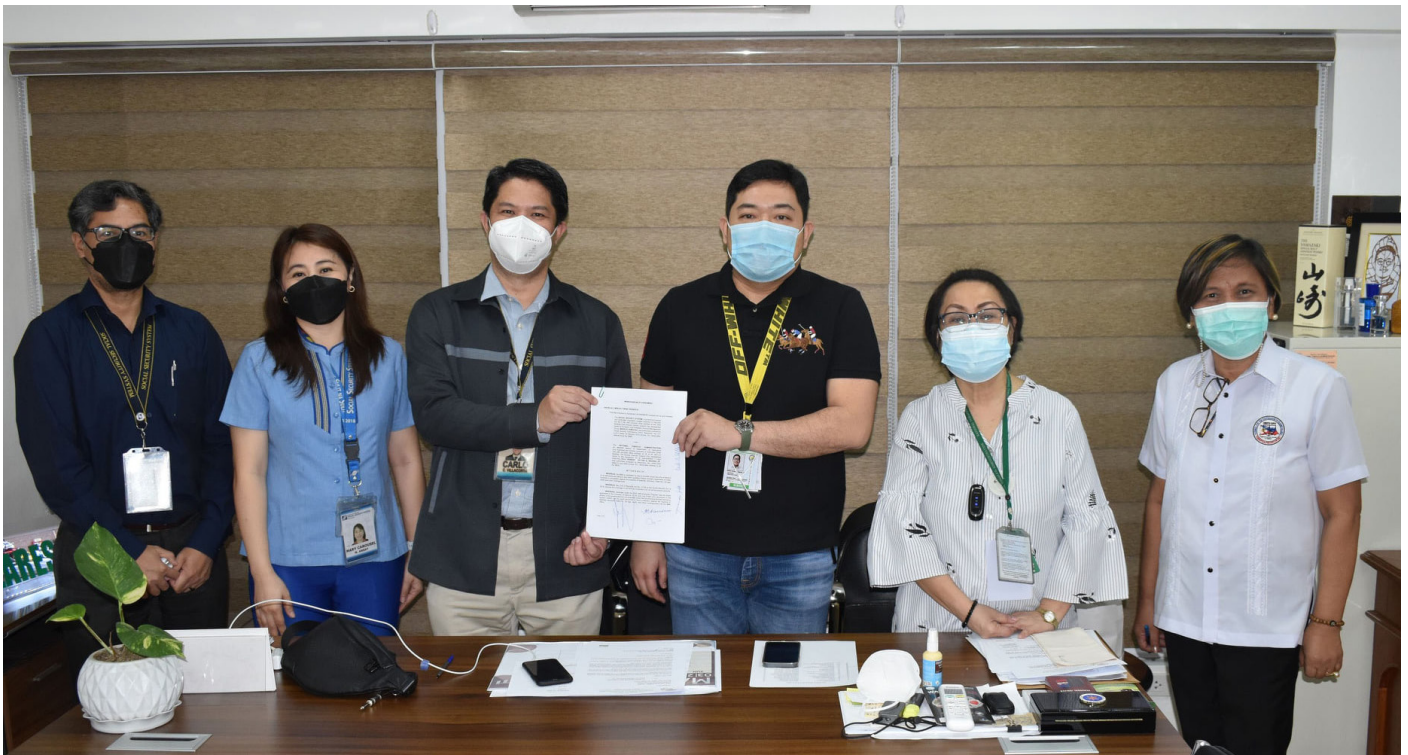
All the consolidated inputs from the two-day consultation were presented to the National Consultation of NAFMIP for Attached Corporations on March 2-4.

NAFMIP is a sector-wide development plan of the Department of Agriculture that will serve as a directional plan and link to other sectors such as commodity system roadmaps and provincial commodity investment plan. It is expected to launch transformative actions that will accelerate agro-industrialization and modernization and mobilize a whole-of-nation resources for recovery and sustainable growth.

“This is wonderful plan, because we believe that we are beginning a legacy of a development plan for the tobacco industry that will be supported at the national level notwithstanding the changes in political leadership,” said Administrator Seares. ■



Screengrab of the virtual consultation



(L-R) Raul F. Matan, Mary Carousel M. Ansay, Carlo C. Villacorta, Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., Ma. Teresa B. Laudencia, and Perla C. Manzon. [Melanie Rapiz-Parel]

NTA, SSS sign MOA for social security coverage of JOs

by **Melanie Rapiz-Parel**

JOB Order (JO) personnel of NTA will be entitled with social security coverage with the signing of Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the NTA and the Social Security System (SSS) on March 7 at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City.

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. and Mario R. Sibucan, Senior Vice President of SSS Account Management Group signed the MOA, witnessed by Administrative Department officer-in-charge Perla C. Manzon and Finance Manager Ma. Teresa B. Laudencia for NTA, and Carlo C. Villacorta, Department Manager III and Mary Carousel M. Ansay, Junior Specialist for SSS.

Under the MOA, 268 JO hires, as of March 2022, will be classified as self-employed members of SSS, and can avail of benefits in times of contingencies, such as sickness, maternity, retirement, disability, and death. They shall also become eligible to various loan programs of SSS.

NTA will assist the employees to register or enroll at SSS and in ensuring the prompt remittance of their SSS contributions.

Administrator Seares thanked SSS for the opportunity to provide social

security protection to fellow workers in the government.

“The NTA Management will continue to seek for additional ways to better provide an avenue for the social security of our workforce because this is a basic necessity, especially in these challenging times,” he added.

Government contract of service and JOs are not covered by the Government Service Insurance System due to their employment status.

Once they are SSS members, the JOs can have access to financial assistance during times of contingencies such as maternity, sickness, disability, retirement or old age, and death.

Also under the MOA, regular or permanent employees who are existing SSS members by virtue of private employment or self-employment may also opt to continue paying contributions as Voluntary members, to which SSS has already agreed to extend assistance for the remittance of their preferred monthly SSS contributions.

Prior to the MOA signing, the JOs attended a free seminar on the Self-Employed Coverage Program of SSS for Government Job Order and Contract of Service Personnel under a Salary Deduction Scheme, held via Microsoft

Teams on March 2.

Villacorta discussed the coverage of self-employed persons, social security and employees’ compensation benefits, registration of JO as self-employed, loan programs and recent SSS policies.

In his message, Administrator Seares said the activity is in line with his priority programs to promote the interest of the JO workers by granting them the maximum benefits that they can avail under the law.

“We would also like to protect you, our employees and your beneficiaries, against events that may lead to monetary loss, at ‘*yan din po ang main concern ng SSS,*” he said.

Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano commended the Administrator for said initiative, emphasizing that the orientation is very timely as the country is still in the grip of a pandemic.

The Social Security Commission, per its Resolution No. 170-s.2014 dated February 19, 2014, approved the coverage of Government Contractual and Job Order Personnel under the Self-employed Program. Per CS- COA-DBM Circular No. 1, s. 2017, JO/COS workers have option to enroll themselves in SSS as self-employed. ■

NTA to intensify drive vs illegal cigarette trade

TO help curb the selling of smuggled and illicit cigarettes in many parts of the country, NTA will step up its information drive against illicit trade of tobacco products.

NTA, as the country's sole regulatory agency on tobacco, will adopt initiatives that are outside its administrative and regulatory powers to help the National Government in the campaign against untaxed brands and provide information on the existing policies and programs against illegal tobacco trade.

These initiatives, according to NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., are in support of the coordinated efforts of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, Bureau of Customs, the Philippine National Police, and the National Bureau of Investigation, in going after those involved in illegal trading.

"We will produce and distribute Anti-Illegal Trade (AIT) posters to the communities in tobacco-growing provinces, in coordination with the provincial branch offices and the local government units in their coverage areas," Administrator Seares said.

A video campaign on the effects of the illegal trade on the tobacco industry will also be released through NTA's online assets.

"Also in the coming months, we will conduct webinars with resource persons from various government agencies to help us explain the ill effects of illegal tobacco trade," he added.

The illicit trade has been affecting tax collections in the industry, thereby hampering the economic gains from the tobacco industry.

Based on estimates by the House Committee on Ways and Means last year, the government is losing about P30 billion to P60 billion a year from illicit trade in cigarettes.

"Had these billions of pesos been collected, our LGUs would have received

more shares from the tax collections for their development program to benefit our farmers and their communities, and more funds for the national health insurance program," he said.

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

In 2020, the government collected P148.45 billion in excise taxes from the tobacco industry alone, and part of the tax collections are used to fund the Universal Health Care program of the government. ■



Administrator Seares shows samples of AIT posters; (inset) a screengrab of the video campaign on the effects of illegal tobacco trade for release

Online training on mobile data collection

by Rhonelle P. Sulicipan

THE Farm Technology and Services Department conducted a virtual training on the use of mobile applications for data collection on various projects of the agency and other tobacco-related activities and facilities, held via Microsoft Teams on January 17.

The one-day training was attended by the extension workers and senior staff from the branch offices of the agency.

The objective of the training was to enable extension workers to be familiarized with the Survey 123 application for data collection and monitoring of the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) project, and the ArcGIS (geographic information system) application for the Development of Tobacco-Related Activities and Facility Maps for the Stakeholders of the Tobacco Industry (TRAFMAP).

FTSD launched TRAFMAP last year with the pilot implementation of the project in Ilocos Norte.

According to FTSD officer-in-charge Engr. Felisa R. Aurellano, the project implementers were able to identify, locate and monitor, and come up with a map containing all the socio-demographics, tobacco farmers in specific locations and monitor production activities.

She added that the TRAFMAP project is keeping pace with technological advancement to generate web maps, story maps, and operations dashboards that will be embedded in the NTA official website.

"With the mobile TCGS monitoring, we will do away with manual filing of forms, thereby saving time, effort, and resources; and affording us faster data

generation," added Aurellano.

Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana encouraged the extension workers to use the apps to come up with an accurate record of the volume of tobacco production per municipality in relation to the area planted to tobacco.

"This will help us address issues concerning volume of production as basis for the shares of local government units from the tobacco excise tax collections," he said.

FTSD is also conducting Geographical Information System for its Monitoring on Soil and Water Quality in Different Tobacco-growing Areas.

Adapting to technology innovations including digital agriculture is a priority project of NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. ■

NTA to release P100-M emergency aid to tobacco growers

by Kathleen Bulquerin



NTA Governing Board meeting in Candon City [Arman Anga-angan]

NTA will release P100 million emergency cash assistance to tobacco farmers affected by two-day freak rains in late January.

According to Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar has approved NTA's request for P50 million funding to assist affected farmers during the NTA Board Meeting on February 24 in Candon City.

This is to supplement the P50 million provided last year by the Office of Sen. Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go for the Emergency Cash Assistance Program of the agency.

He said that the agency requested the fund from the Senator, which is already included in the General Appropriations Act of CY 2022 as stand-by emergency cash assistance for tobacco growers.

"Thanks to Senator Bong Go's timely support, the agency now has available

cash assistance to our farmers affected by the freak rain," he added.

The administrator added that with the extensive damage, the agency needs additional fund to assist all the affected farmers as listed during the damage assessment conducted by the Branch Offices.

"We are also very grateful to Secretary Dar, for acting favorably on our requests for funding to supplement the P50 million NTA ECA Fund," Administrator Seares said.

The Office of the Deputy Administrator for Operations has reported crop damages worth P505 million in 5,304 hectares of tobacco farms in major tobacco-growing provinces, with about 15,300 farmers still suffering from the impact.

The rain hit at a time when most of the crops were on vegetative stage, with crops in some areas ready for harvest

early next month.

The Administrator explained that the assistance will be given to the farmers as soon as the funds and the implementing guidelines are released, assuring farmers of the agency's absolute commitment to helping and supporting them in their farming endeavor.

This is the second straight year that the off-season rains affected tobacco-producing areas. A three-day off-season rain in January last year affected 1,206 hectares of tobacco farms in tobacco growing provinces, with a total of P77-M worth of crop damages.

The agency implemented the restructuring of the production assistance given to the affected farmers, in addition to the livelihood assistance given to more than 4,000 affected farmers through the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay project. ■

#CropRecovery. Tobacco farmer Mar Alambra tends to his tobacco crops, now fully covered, more than three weeks after an off-season rain damaged almost half of the tobacco farms in tobacco-growing regions. He is expecting to harvest in the coming weeks. Alambra's prompt application of fungicide and biostimulant fertilizers two days after the water subsided in his farm in Barangay Tubod in Sto. Tomas, La Union, caused the quick recovery of the crops, which were initially assessed at 100% damage. The distribution of P7-million worth of biostimulant fertilizers to affected farmers is one of the immediate interventions provided by NTA for the recovery of the crops. [Kristin Mae S. Castañeda]





From left (front row): Jomar Paguirigan, Marisa Reciles, Mary Grace Bautista, Administrator Seares, Leonila Riambon, Nemar Aquino, Emmanuel Abalos; (back row): Virgilio Garcia, Archie Versola, Nestor Padron, Hilario Olidan, Gerry Manzano, Rodel Carpio, and Lorante Antalan. [Arman Anga-angan]



NTA fetes 13 TGY provincial winners

ADMINISTRATOR/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. awarded plaques of recognition to 13 tobacco growers from different tobacco-producing provinces who were adjudged provincial winners of the Tobacco Growers of the Year contest for Crop Year 2020-2021.

The awarding ceremonies were held on February 24 at Ban-aw Resort in Barangay Gabor Sur, Candon City.

The winners per category were:

Virginia (Improved Flavor) - **Rodel M. Carpio** of Ocup, Pilar, Abra; **Lorante F. Antalan** of Aglipay, Pinili, Ilocos Norte; **Leonila G. Riambon** of Nagsupotan, San Juan, Ilocos Sur; **Emmanuel A. Abalos** of Cabaroan, San Estban, Ilocos Sur; **Hilario O. Olidan** of Bububut Sur, Balaoan, La Union;

Burley (Improved Flavor) - **Nestor V. Padron** of Nambaran, Bacarra, Ilocos Norte; **Gerry B. Manzano** of Lebug, Laoac, Pangasinan; **Jomar D. Paguirigan** of Taguing, Baggao, Cagayan; **Nemar P. Aquino** of San Juan, Quirino, Isabela;

Native (Cigar Filler) - **Archie B. Versola** of Centro Sur, Alcala, Cagayan; **Mary Grace S. Bautista** of Santiago, Reina Mercedes, Isabela; (*Batek*) - **Virgilio B. Garcia** of Cupang, Sto. Tomas, La Union; and **Marissa T. Reciles** of Gatang, Malasiqui, Pangasinan.

According to Administrator Seares, the agency gives the recognition as a way of giving back to our farmers for their efforts in producing quality tobacco, thus helping the growth of the industry in the country.

In his video message, Agriculture Secretary William

D. Dar cited the awardees for inspiring excellence and innovativeness to Filipino tobacco farmers, for observing the adoption of Good Agricultural Practices for tobacco, and for the application of science and technology-based production that helped them get the maximum income from the tobacco industry.

The TGY awards also cited extension workers who assisted the provincial winners. They are:

Mardelito B. Bacaricas, Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer (TPRO) I of Abra Branch; Jessa Mae A. Alcantara, TPRO I of Ilocos Norte; Immanuel A. Rafanan, TPRO I of Vigan; Fayrene Kay P. Milan, TPRO I of Candon; Corazon V. Dacumos, TPRO I of La Union; Mae Angela U. Lacamora, Agriculturist II of Ilocos Norte; Manuel M. Delfin Jr., TPRO I of Pangasinan; Jerwin P. Tapulao, TPRO I of Cagayan; Jovanie C. Gante, TPRO I of Isabela; Orlando B. Arugay, TPRO I of Cagayan; Joey A. Pascual, Agriculturist I of Isabela; Joannaliza D. Ordinante, TPRO I of La Union; Marcos G. Atela, Agriculturist I of Pangasinan.

Also in attendance during the awarding ceremonies were the two Deputy Administrators Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana (Operations) and Benedicto M. Savellano, members of the NTA Governing Board, farmer leader and NAFTAC President Bernard Vicente, and Candon City Councillor David D. Wagayen.

The TGY winners, who are all qualified for the National Category, each received P25,000 cash prize and a Plaque of Recognition.■

Deputy Administrator for Operations
ENGR. CESARIO G. SAMBRANA

Passion to serve the farmers is key to his success

HIS own experience of hardship in the farm in his younger years and his struggles as an extension worker serving the smallholder farmers early in his job motivated Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, to do his best for the tobacco farmers and the tobacco industry.

He worked in a tobacco farm in his teens, raised goats and sold bamboo poles that he gathered from mountainsides to earn extra money for his family and some for his school allowance. He knew hardship and have had shares of discrimination due to poverty.

Despite his conditions, he dreamt to have a life better than what they had in Catucdaan, Cabugao with his carpenter-farmer father, his mother, and nine siblings (he was the second eldest). He wanted to take aeronautic engineering, but he was convinced by his father to take up agricultural engineering instead, because it is more affordable at that time.

He enrolled at the Gregorio Araneta University Foundation (now De La Salle - Araneta University), and graduated in 1979 with the degree Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering. In the same year, he became professional Agricultural Engineer after passing the board on his first try with a passing grade of 84.85%.

After his graduation from college, he was employed as Farm Management Technician by the now defunct Philippine Virginia Tobacco Administration (PVRTA). He got his permanent position as Agricultural Engineer and remained in his position after the merger of PVRTA with seven other tobacco agencies that resulted in the creation of NTA in 1987.

His vast trainings and experiences in the field of Research, Extension and Management propelled him to rise from the ranks in NTA. From Farm Management Technician/ Research Assistant, he was promoted to Agricultural Extension Specialist I of the La Union Branch. Later, he was promoted to the position of Division Chief and later Department Manager III in the NTA provincial branch office of Iloilo. He assumed leadership of NTA Pangasinan in 2000.

To enhance his knowledge on supervisory/management, he took up Masters in Development Administration (MDA) at the Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University in Agoo, La Union. He is also at present a Career Service Executive Eligible.



When there was a vacancy in the DAOP Office after the timely demise of Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, Engr. Sambrana was rightfully chosen to lead the Operations Chief, as acting DAOP beginning April 7, 2021, in concurrent capacity as NTA Pangasinan Manager and overseer of NTA Candon Branch.

He got his official appointment signed by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, as the Deputy Administrator for Operations on March 7.

In taking the helm of the Branch operations, including agriculture and industrial research and tobacco regulation, Engr. Sambrana focused his efforts in organizing farmers into block farms.

He was the manager of the Pangasinan Branch when the idea of clustering the farmers into block farm came out as the key strategy to implement the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP), a five-year development program for the tobacco industry.

He believed in the idea, proposed by Agriculture Secretary William Dar in his OneDA Agenda, which lumps farm consolidation with modernization, industrialization and professionalization, and science-based key strategies as the pillars to make the agriculture sector competitive.

He immediately organized block farms for the pilot in Alcala and Villasis. Then as the acting DAOP, he pursued the organization of more block farms after the pilot implementation, including the one in Sta. Maria Ilocos Sur that Secretary Dar visited in January last year.

Now the agency has a total of 170 block farms. "Except for the funding that we have been requesting from the DBM, I think the farmers are starting to learn the benefit of organizing," he said

He is looking forward to seeing the establishment of the Tobacco Research and Grading Institute within the next five years. The institute, along with block

farming, will be key to empowering farmers who will be able sell their tobacco at better prices.

He also pushes forward its vision to modernize and industrialize the country's tobacco industry, when he initiated the Tobacco Farm Mechanization Program. Through modernization, he said, the industry can produce self-reliant farmers organizations who produce tobacco of global quality.

Aside from the challenges in overseeing the institutionalization of block farming as key strategy in productive tobacco industry, he works doubly hard to face the major challenges facing him in his current role: (1) tobacco regulations; (2) highly profitable tobacco farming; (3) climate change and environmental hazards; and (4) strong anti-smoking agenda.

Despite these, he is confident that the industry, with the able leadership of Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. and support from the national government, will survive as it has already outlasted claims that the industry is on its twilight years.

As what he had done for more than four decades in the industry, he wanted every employee to keep the flame of passion burning to help farmers and contribute to the development and enduring stability of the tobacco industry.

His advice: "Do you work, no matter how small, to the best of your abilities. An opportunity will always come for you to show the world what you are capable of. You have to be prepared so you can grab and take advantage of it."

Take that advice from the one who has been undaunted by challenges even in his younger years. His life, as the industry, gained success, thanks to his risk-taking, his decisiveness and for not being afraid of failure. ■

by **Jenny Marie C. Molina**
& **Neyo E. Valdez**



Engr. Sambrana takes his oath of office as Deputy Administrator before Agriculture Secretary William Dar at the DA Central Office in Quezon City. [John James B. Canosa]

Testimonials

Thank you, NTA

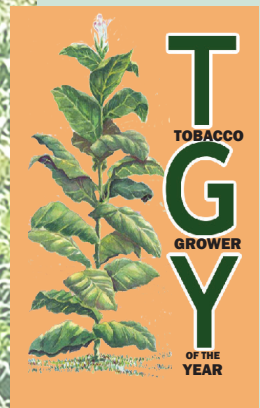
Rodel Molina Carpio

I GREW up having my parents, Bernardo and Melita Carpio primarily depending on planting tobacco. I used to help them in their farm activities. At 18, I already learned how to cultivate tobacco. I begun tobacco production by my own when I got my own farm in 2000. I produce Neutral Virginia and Flue-cured Virginia tobacco types (*paltong*).

For me, planting tobacco is just like having a family. I have the responsibility to protect, love and take good care of my crop.

I had marketing contracts with various buyer firms like Philip Morris and Fortune Tobacco Corporation (PMFTC) and Universal Leaf Philippines Incorporated (ULPI) in 2019. That was before one of the assisting technicians of NTA Abra visited me in my farm in Barangay Ocup. I decided to join the agency as their farmer cooperater of their Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) project. As a farmer cooperater, I am qualified for production assistance, not only in tobacco production but also in Rice Wet Season Project, Curing Barn Assistance Project (CBAP), Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project (BCPAP) and Improved Tobacco Seedling Production Project (ITSP). I was also given the opportunity to receive production assistance under the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay (GMB) Project.

Expert technicians from NTA Abra really helped me in various farm activities to produce good quality tobacco. They never get tired teaching farmers like me step-by-step process in growing tobacco using the required package of



technology, that includes the right application of fertilizers and crop protection agents.

My production of tobacco for crop year 2020-2021 was recognized by the Branch Office. They selected me as contestant in the Tobacco Growers of the Year contest. I won the provincial level for the Virginia Improved Category, and now qualified for the National Level.

In all these endeavors, I thank our very approachable and skilled assisting technician, Mr. Mardelito B. Bacaricas who has always been ready and willing to teach and guide me in all my farm activities. And I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to the NTA for the opportunity to show my achievement in tobacco production and be recognized for my effort.

(Rodel, 38, is, a tobacco farmer from Ocup, Pilar Abra. He is married to Melody Almazan Carpio and blessed with two beautiful daughters: Zyrine Nicole and Meriah Nisha.)



Tobacco farming changes the lives of small farmers

Joshua Z. Gazmen

MY FATHER has been growing tobacco in our small piece of land for 35 years now and it has been our major source to sustain our daily living and education. I entered college in 2011 and enrolled for a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) degree. That time I was a little bit hesitant to pursue a six-year course, considering the capability of my parents to sustain my studies for six years. But luckily on that year, NTA is recruiting scholars for the deserving legitimate sons and daughters of registered tobacco farmers. I was chosen as one of the scholars of NTA Cagayan under the leadership of Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda. NTA shouldered part of my tuition fees and allowances. This somehow lessened the burden of my parents in sending me to college, thus giving me the motivation to finish my degree in June 2017. I took the board exam for veterinarians on August 17, 2017 and passed. I am currently

employed at the Bureau of Animal Industry, San Fernando, La Union.

My father has availed of all the programs and projects, including this scholarship program, implemented by NTA which helped him to bring us his three children into college and now practicing different professions. This gave us an opportunity to touch more lives.

Thank you so much, NTA, especially to Engr. Elmerante Ginez, my father's assisting technician and the one who recruited me to be a scholar, Ms. Zeny Arrojo, the Administrative Officer V that time, who kept on reminding me to study harder and maintain good grades, and Dr. Riazonda, the Branch Manager. Thank you for changing the lives of small farmers!

(Joshua of Baculod, Alcala, Cagayan is NTA Scholar from school year 2011 to 2017.)



Chicken Layer Assistance Project (CLAP)

by **Melanie Rapiz-Parel & Edgar C. Torres**

TERESITA Agcanas of Barangay Pacang, Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur gathers an average of 45 eggs a day from the chicken layers provided by the National Tobacco Administration for the pilot implementation of its Chicken Layer Assistance Project (CLAP).

Agcanas is one of the 60 beneficiaries of the P3-million project implemented by NTA Candon in a block farm covering three barangays (Ag-agrao, Pacang, and Silag) in Sta. Maria.

The beneficiaries received on August 23, 2021 a package consisting of 48 heads ready-to-lay layer chicken, egg layer machine set, with drinkers and feeders, and assorted feeds.

In a very short time, they started collecting an average of 40 to 45 eggs per day for each set or equivalent to 83 percent laying. Medium-sized eggs are sold at an average price of P150 per tray.

“We are so glad that NTA has this kind of project for the tobacco growers, especially that we are still under the pandemic. We harvest the eggs for family consumption and sell the rest to earn additional income,” Agcanas told NTA Candon during the project monitoring on January 13.

According to Administrator/ CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., the CLAP intends to create an alternative livelihood option to the tobacco growers as well as to meet the growing demand



CLAP beneficiary Teresita Agcanas

for eggs in the Ilocos Region and CAR.

CLAP is in line with the Livestock Development program of the Department of Agriculture and the livelihood assistance for the block farms under the NTA Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) project.

“The pilot project has been a success, so we are driven to start its full implementation this year with wider coverage area in major tobacco-growing provinces,” said Administrator Seares.

He added that the project has bolstered the efforts of the agency to provide livelihood options for the tobacco contract growers.

NTA is currently implementing the Beef Cattle Assistance Project and the Gulayan at Manukan sa Barangay Project as part of the agency’s intervention programs that seek to provide the farmers and their families with additional sources of income during the pandemic. ■



Photos: Edgar C. Torres

Curing Barn Assistance Project (CBAP)



NTA La Union released P11.6 million the facility assistance of the Curing Barn Assistance Project (CBAP) for crop year 2021-2022 to 398 registered farmer cooperators in the province. NTA La Union Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay led the ceremonial releases from January 3 to 11, held at the Branch Office in Bauang, La Union.

Before the distribution, the Branch Office gave the farmers a brief orientation on the project, particularly on the prescribed curing barns/sheds designs for efficient use of fuelwood that results in a reduction in fuel consumption and the production of properly cured tobacco.

Branch Chief Agriculturist Emma Beth B. Fantastico, Senior TPRO and Project Coordinator Engr. Christopher R. Supang, and TPRO III and District I Supervisor Engr. Potenciano H. Apilado assisted Branch Manager Palabay in the orientation and distribution. ■ **Aryann Sangil**

NTA Ilocos Norte Branch Manager Luzviminda U. Padayao led the distribution of facility assistance to Ilocos Norte tobacco growers for the agency's Curing Barn Assistance Project (CBAP) for crop year 2021-2022. The ceremonial distribution, held on January 7 at the lobby of NTA Building in Batac City, was attended by 32 of the 374 farmer cooperators of CBAP. ■

Norvelyn D. Cabanatan



NTA launches radio program for farmers via live streaming

IN JANUARY last year, Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. announced some reforms to strengthen the communication and information capability of the agency under the "new normal." This includes effective online presence with a quality website and social media links to provide a more comprehensive source of information on its programs and services. On February 7 the agency hosted the launching of its "Oras ni Mannalon ti Tabako" radio program streamed live on its official Facebook page for wider reach and sustainability.

The event was opened by Administrator Seares who reported on updates of the off-season rain that

affected tobacco farms in Northern Luzon in January.

He bared the immediate intervention and long-term assistance being worked out by the agency to the affected farmers, which include emergency cash assistance, provision of biostimulants to help in the crop recovery, and restructuring of production assistance.

Joining Administrator Seares were Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur Sangguniang Bayan Member Arlon Serdenia, and NTA Candon officer-in-charge Adonis D. Lazo.

The guests used their time to discuss the ongoing damage assessment and immediate assistance to the affected

Transplanting operations for the varietal trial for Native Broadleaf



Photos: C. Queddeng/J. Pascual

THE Operations Group of the NTA Isabela and its Research Team set up the verification trial for Native Broadleaf tobacco on separate locations in San Placido, Roxas and Rang-ayan, Mallig, Isabela on January 8.

Branch Chief Agriculturist Joefrey T. Bautista and Acting Supervising TPRO Perpetuo C. Dalloran supervised the establishment of the trial in Mallig and Roxas, respectively.

The Branch Office will evaluate the agronomic performance along with the qualitative characteristics of the Native Broadleaf tobacco hybrids (C9, D1 & D2) grown in Isabela), following the recommended layout and the package of technology for the tobacco varieties.

The farms of farmer cooperators Augusto Pigao (Roxas) and Rosita Aguilar and Eliza Pascual (Mallig) served as varietal trial sites. The farmer cooperators also planted Native (Simmaba variety) as check variety. ■

farmers. According to Engr. Sambrana, affected farmers reached 15,180. Of the number, 6,039 are contract growers under the NTA Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) and 9,141 are non-TCGS farmers.

The guests also answered queries from live audience through the comment section during the Q&A moderated by OMT host Melanie R. Parel, Public Relations Officer III.

According to Administrator Seares, the OMT radio program, which will be live-streamed weekly, will be a venue to educate the farmers on the quality tobacco production, adding that the anchors and their resource persons are all experts in tobacco production.

OMT radio program is streamed live on this FB page every Thursday and Friday (1:30 to 2:15 PM), with designated anchors from the Branch Offices in Abra, Candon, Vigan, Ilocos Norte, La Union, Pangasinan, Isabela and Cagayan.

The first OMT broadcast from the branch was co-hosted by NTA Candon and NTA Abra on February 11, with anchors Marcelia Peralta and Charito Masiglat for Candon, and Marife Peralta and Ryan Jay Zape for Abra.

This was followed by two OMT broadcasts on February 18 in Vigan with anchors Immanouel Rafanan and Jessica T. Isnec and in Ilocos Norte with anchors Ferdimark R. Rosario and Mae

Angela L. Lacamora.

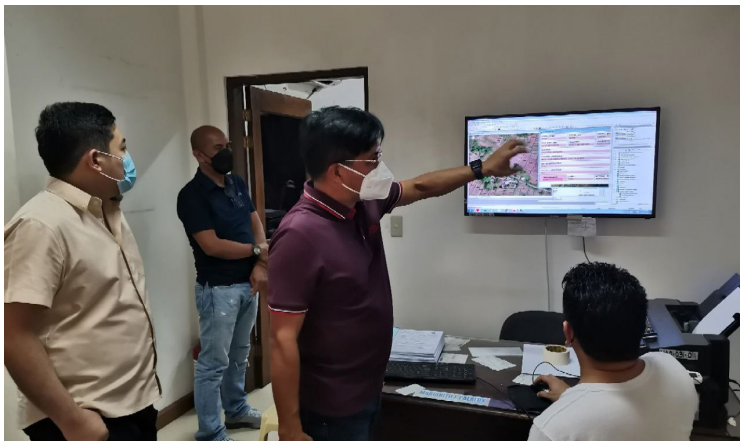
Other broadcast schedules and anchors were NTA La Union with Ruby Dacanay and Ambrocio Nisperos on March 3; NTA Isabela with Lagrimas Beltran and Joey Pascual and NTA Cagayan with Bryanne Marke William Simeon and Orlando B. Arugay on March 7; and NTA Pangsinan with Eulalia Z. Elle and Venbel V. Echalar on March 9.

OMT is one of the various activities under the Communication Support Project of the agency. This was previously aired in radio stations in major tobacco-growing provinces during tobacco season. ■

Administrator Seares visit Ilocos Norte on March 17

#CourtesyCall ADMINISTRATOR/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. paid a courtesy call on Ilocos Norte Gov. Matthew Marcos Manotoc at the Provincial Capitol in Laoag City. With Administrator Seares were Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana and NTA Ilocos Norte Branch Manager Luzviminda U. Padayao.

Administrator Seares and Governor Manotoc assured partnership between NTA and the Provincial Government, which includes giving immediate assistance to the local tobacco growers affected by the off-season rain early this year. *[Photos: Luzviminda U. Padayao / John James B. Canosa]*



#PartnerLGU Piddig, Ilocos Norte Mayor Eduardo Guillen gives NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. a tour on some flagship projects of the municipality, such as the tobacco storage facility, tobacco curing sheds, rice milling facility, and cattle dispersal, during the latter's first official visit to the province. Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana and NTA Ilocos Norte Manager Luzviminda U. Padayao joined Administrator Seares in the project visitation. Piddig also hosted the committee meeting of the NTA Governing Board on the same day. *[John James B. Canosa]*



#StaffMeeting NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., in his first official trip to Ilocos Norte, had the chance to meet the branch officials and staff of NTA Ilocos Norte, the Farm Technology and Services Department, and the Industrial Research Department and discussed some of their concerns. With the Administrator during the meeting were Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, Directors Nestor C. Casela, Teofilo R. Quintal, Danilo C. Trongco, and Jesse Pat M. Serna, all members of the NTA Governing Board. *[John James B. Canosa]*



Candon City distributes knapsack sprayers to farmers

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. joined Deputy Speaker and Ilocos Sur (2nd District) Rep. Kristine Singson-Meehan, former Rep. Eric D. Singson, Candon City Mayor Ericson G. Singson and some local officials in the distribution of knapsack sprayers to the tobacco growers on February 23. The farm implements are from the Office of the Deputy Speaker and the City Government of Candon.

Administrator Seares affirmed his support for immediate assistance, remedial interventions and future preventive measures to be undertaken by the local government units for the benefit of the tobacco growers. ■ (John James B. Canosa)



Ilocos Sur 2nd District NTA Candon had series of meetings with the local government units in the second district of Ilocos Sur to discuss immediate assistance and other interventions to tobacco growers whose farms were damaged by the off-season rain in January.

In his report to the “Oras ni Mannalon ti Tabako” radio program via FB live on February 10, NTA Candon officer-in-charge Adonis D. Lazo said he had met with the local leaders of the municipalities of Sta. Lucia, Narvacan, Sta. Maria and Burgos, Ilocos Sur in separate schedules last week.

He said he also met with Deputy Speaker and Ilocos Sur 2nd Dist. Rep. Kristine Singson-Meehan in Candon City for the coordination of all LGUs as regards assistance to the tobacco growers.

“We will continue cooperating with our LGUs, with the help of our extension workers assigned in their areas, to ensure that our farmers are given the assistance they need,” Lazo said, adding that the local leaders “are very supportive of our farmers.”

He reported that about 76% of the total 5,702 tobacco contract growers in the district, and about 57% of the 2,712 hectares of tobacco farms were affected. The Branch Office had already furnished copies to LGUs who requested for the data for damage assessment. (NTA Candon) ■



Roxas, Isabela The Provincial Government of Isabela distributed cash and rice to 1,235 famers from funds out of their share from the Tobacco Excise Tax collections. Governor Rodito T. Albano III, along with LPGMA Partylist Rep. Allan U. Ty, Sangguniang Panlalawigan Members Dax Paolo C. Binag and Antonio Hui, Mayor Jonathan Jose C. Calderon and local officials, led the distribution held at the Roxas Astrodome on February 18. (Isabela Public Information Office) ■





Farm lands in Piddig

PIDDIG, ILOCOS NORTE

“Waging-wagi ang mga tobacco farmers”

by Divina D. Pagdilao

Photos: John James B. Canosa

PIDDIG is a third-class municipality in the first district of Ilocos Norte engaged in tobacco production. It continues to expand its cropping intensity, with 17 of its 23 barangays engaged in tobacco in the current season.

There is a remarkable increase of 27.80 hectares in area planted to tobacco from crop year 2020-2021.

The total number of farmers and area planted to tobacco for CY 2021-2022 is shown in the following table:

TOBACCO TYPE/SUB TYPE	NO. OF BARANGAYS INVOLVED	TOTAL FC	TOTAL AREA, HA
Virginia Neutral Flavor (VNF)	1	16	16.75
Virginia Improved Flavor (VIF)	4	56	41.86
Virginia Suncured (VSC)	16	123	74.40
Sub Total		195	133.01
Native – LP2	5	43	29.25
GRAND TOTAL	17	238	162.26

This was a result of the campaign of Mayor Eduardo G. Guillen to increase tobacco areas and tobacco production. Many farmers here have started planting tobacco as one of their alternative crops because all the needed farm inputs except labor is provided to them at no cost.

The municipality provides material inputs such as fertilizers, crop protection agents, farm equipment like water hose, knapsack sprayer, water pumps and the construction of wells, where the farmers can draw water to irrigate tobacco plants and other crops.

Mayor Guillen also pursued consolidating tobacco farming

to lower costs and make production more efficient. To date, the municipality has more than 200-hectare consolidated farm lots dedicated to tobacco farming and will entitle the municipality to additional revenue of approximately P200 million annually.

Newly dug wells are visible in the expansion areas, which were planted with Virginia suncured (VSC) tobacco, in addition to those already established in other tobacco areas. Tobacco seedlings for the VSC project were given free to tobacco growers through a communal seedbedding project of the local government unit.

Tobacco farmers were given farm inputs such as bags of 10-18-24, 0-0-50, 46-0-0, 21-0-0 and packs of 17-8-17 fertilizers, bottles/sachets of crop protection agents and suckercide. Also, hand tractors with trailers and farm tractors were also awarded to qualified farmers' cooperative.

Piddig LGU also provides cattle and carabao assistance to tobacco farmers, at one head of livestock per hectare of tobacco area. The distribution is under the municipality's Wagyu Cross and Branded Beef Development Program.

NTA projects that are being implemented in the municipality include the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS), Curing Barn Assistance Project (CBAP) and the Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project (BCPAP). For the TCGS, the municipality provides free material inputs needed for tobacco production, while the NTA provided the cash portion with 40% subsidy.

The CBAP, which includes assistance in curing barn construction, curing barn repair, curing shed construction and curing shed repair, was extended to 132 farmers in CY 2021-2022, and additional 22 farmers in CY 2020-2021.

The BCPAP, on the other hand, was given in three batches



(L-R) Piddig Municipal Hall and awarding of financial assistance to tobacco growers with Agriculture Secretary William Dar and



Mayor Guillen with top officials from NTA headed by Administrator Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. during the distribution of cattle

to 28 tobacco farmer beneficiaries in the municipality from November 2020 to February 2022. As of now, two Heifers have been successfully parturiated.

The tobacco growers also availed of other NTA projects such as the: IFOIGAP Rice project, Vegetable Seed Distribution, and Improved Tobacco Seedling Production (ITSP) for tobacco contract growers.

The LGU had assigned tobacco focal person from the municipal agriculture office to give special attention to the commodity, and along with it, the monitoring of the documentation of the tobacco produce.

The NTA extension worker coordinates with the LGU staff for the reconciliation of data and faster transfer of reports.

With his achievements in consolidation production of tobacco and other crops, including livestock, Agriculture

Secretary William D. Dar has commended Mayor Guillen, and the rest of the local official including the Sangguniang Bayan members headed by Vice Mayor Edwin E. Salazar.

“We have chosen Piddig to be the role model in terms of farm consolidation following the OneDA Reform Agenda to transform Philippine agriculture,” said Secretary Dar in his visit to the municipality last December.

Secretary Dar led in the distribution of P712,250 worth of cash assistance for the TCGS and P4.565M for the Curing Barn Assistance Project. This was part of the P66.93-million worth of interventions that DA distributed to farmers and livestock raisers of Piddig.

With the mayor’s laudable agricultural initiatives, you can hear positive feedbacks from government agencies and other sectors. They can really say “*Sa Piddig, waging-wagi ang mga tobacco farmer.*” ■

Performance Evaluation of Flue-Cured and Burley Tobacco Hybrids

by Nelly U. Castro, Nessa Marie Suniga, David Paulo V. Ogatis, Evangeline C. Cabigan and Imelda N. Riñen

Rationale/Background of the Study

Tobacco is the most widely grown non-food crop in the world. It is being grown in a wide range of soil types and under a relatively wide range of climatic conditions. Tobacco also has an inherent ability to withstand growth stresses caused either by the shortage of water or nutrients and extreme temperatures, without adversely affecting yield or quality. Traditional tobacco varieties have a potential high yield that can be attained with the proper application of production technology. However, the variety may have reached the maximum potential yield and additional input may no longer be advantageous, rather it can increase the production cost without increasing profit.

It is the main goal of tobacco production to have high yield and quality and consequently attain a bigger profit. One way to achieve this objective is through the use of high-yielding hybrid varieties. These hybrid varieties have to undergo testing in farmers' fields to assess their performance under local conditions.

Objectives of the Study

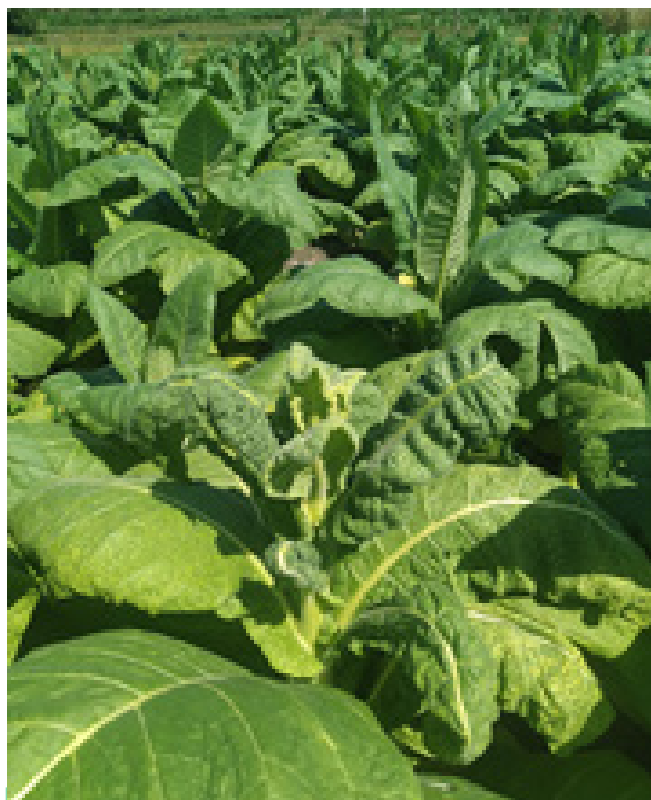
The study was conducted to compare the agronomic performance and quality of hybrid varieties to our recommended variety in research-managed and farmers' fields.

Locale of the Study

Two flue-cured tobacco hybrids and one Burley hybrid were evaluated along with their check varieties. For flue-cured tobacco, the hybrids PVH2254 and PVH2261 were compared to the check variety NC2326, while the hybrid Burley variety CC812G was compared to the check variety TN90.

Seeds of the flue-cured hybrids were obtained from Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. (ULPI) and Trans-Manila Incorporated (TMI), while the Burley hybrid was obtained from ULPI.

The evaluation was conducted in two settings, one was research-managed and the other was in farmers' fields wherein the plants were maintained according to the farmer cooperators' practices. The research-managed setup was in Parangopong Experimental Farm in Batac City. The farmer-managed setups were located in the following municipalities: (1) Banna, Ilocos Norte for flue-cured hybrid PVH2254 with four farmer-cooperators; (2) Badoc, Ilocos Norte for flue-cured



A Burley- hybrid variety CC812G in a farmer-managed setup grown by Mr. Ernesto Padron of Barangay Nambaran, Bacarra, Ilocos Norte.

hybrid PVH2261 with four farmer-cooperators; and (3) Pasuquin and Bacarra, Ilocos Norte with four farmer-cooperators.

Research-Managed Setup

The flue-cured and Burley hybrids were set up separately and laid out in Randomized Complete Block Design (RCBD) with four replications. Each plot had five rows with one meter between rows and each row is 5.5 meters long.

Farmer-Managed Setup

Each farmer-cooperator served as replication and the experimental design was RCBD. The data were analyzed using STAR. Data were gathered from 50 randomly selected plants for plant height and 10 randomly selected plants for leaf length and width within the setup of each farmer. Yield data was gathered by weighing the cured leaf of the randomly selected 100 inner sample plants. Grade distributions depended on the quality of the lugs, cutters, and leaf of the 100 sample plants.

Significant Findings/Implications

The two flue-cured tobacco hybrids, PVH 2254 and PVH 2261, and the check variety NC2326 were comparable in both research and farmer-managed setups in the following parameters: (a) plant height at 15, 45 and 60 DAT; (b) leaf width and (c) yield per hectare.

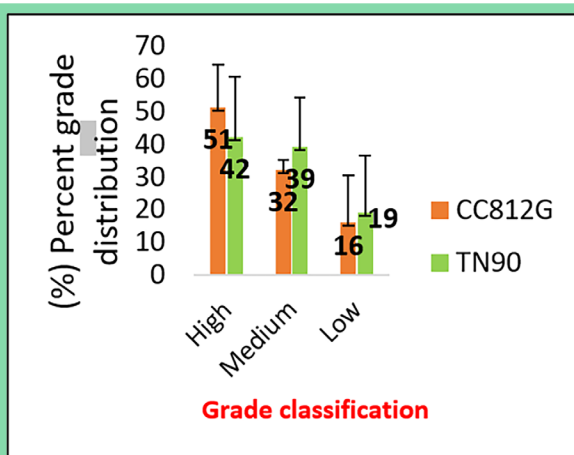
In the research managed setup, PVH2261 yielded 3,286.0 kg/ha, PVH2254 yielded 3,620.4 kg/ha and NC2326 yielded 2,921.0 kg/ha. In the farmer-managed setups, PVH2261 yielded 1,480.5 kg/ha and NC2326 yielded 1,947.5 kg/ha. Cured leaves were classified mostly under high and medium grades.

In flue-cured tobacco, statistical analysis showed that PVH2254 and PVH2261 were comparable to NC2326 in both setups in three parameters, specifically, plant height at 15 and 60 DAT, cured leaf yield, and percentage of high and medium grade cured leaf. Significant differences among varieties were observed in plant height at 30 DAT and in leaf area.

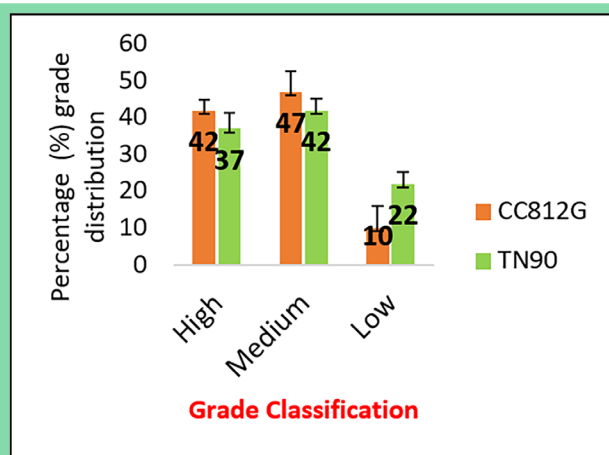
Under research, PVH2254 and PVH2261 outyielded NC2326 by 699 kg and 365 kg, respectively, but the differences were not significant.

Under farmer-managed, yield data was gathered from only two out of the four farmers who planted PVH 2261 and no data was gathered from those who planted PVH2254. Of the two farmers who planted PVH2261, NC2326 outyielded the hybrid by 467kg, but the difference was not significant. Both hybrids produced more high-grade cured leaves which is 16% in PVH 2254 and 13% in PVH 2261; while NC2326 had only 2%. NC2326 produced the highest percentage (30%) of low-grade cured leaves which was significantly higher than PVH2261 (15%) but comparable to PVH2254 (24%).

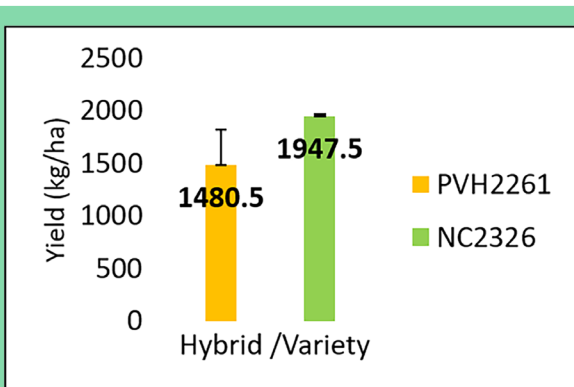
In Burley tobacco, CC812G was comparable to TN90 in all parameters, both in research- and farmer-managed setups. In both setups, the two varieties attained the target yield for Burley as specified in the 2020-2021 Tobacco Production Manual (2.6 tons/ha). In the research setup, CC812G produced 7% more high-grade cured leaf and 12% less low-grade than TN90; while in the farmers' setup, CC812G produced 51% high grade compared to 42% in TN90. However, the two varieties were comparable in both cured yield and leaf grade distribution. ■



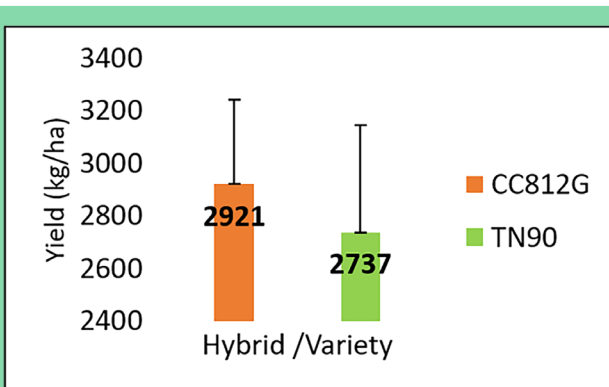
Grade distribution (%) of tobacco hybrid Burley var. CC812G and non-hybrid TN90 grown in farmers' field.



Grade distribution (%) of tobacco hybrid Burley var. CC812G and non-hybrid TN90 grown in research-managed setup.



Cured yield (kg/ha) of tobacco hybrid flue-cured var. PVH2261 and non-hybrid flue-cured NC2326 grown in farmers' field in Badoc, Ilocos Norte.



Cured yield (kg/ha) of tobacco hybrid Burley var. CC812G and non-hybrid TN90 under research-managed setup.



NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. administered the oath-taking of the new NTA Candon staff (L-R): Cristy V. Gabayan, Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer (TPRO) I; Nic Angelo A. Masiglat, TPRO I; Marvin B. Gambala, TPRO I; Julius Caezar G. Briones, TPRO I; Vanessa dela Cruz, TPRO I; Josephine Cotillon, TPRO I; Edgar C. Torres, TPRO I; Jannel O. Valdez, Agriculturist I; Johnny Q. Rosendo Jr., TPRO I; and Roan G. Daproza, Agriculturist I. [Arman Anga-angan]

NTA has 34 new extension workers

NTA issued regular appointments to 34 extension workers, all entry positions for Agriculturist and Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer TPRO, from different branch offices. The Civil Service Commission confirmed their permanent status in separate issuances in the first quarter.

NTA Ilocos Norte: *Agriculturist I* - Nessa Marie Suniga, Dynel Lourena C. Bumocli; *TPRO I* - Jan Jan A. Gudoy, Jazlyn D. Obien, Judith Ann A. Sarian;

NTA Vigan: *Agriculturist I* - Laura V. Abelita, Wesley M. Salem; *TPRO I* - Jessica T. Isnec, Elma S. Bayading, Jonard C. Manglal-lan, Melissa P. Sumao-i, Johnley E. Ramos, Mica Ella G. Pagal;

NTA Candon: *Agriculturist I* - Roan G. Daproza, Jannel O. Valdez; *TPRO I* - Vanessa J. Dela Cruz, Julius Caezar G. Briones, Cristy V. Gabayan, Marvin B. Gambala, Nic Angelo A. Masiglat, Edgar C. Torres, Josephine B. Cotillon, Johnny Q. Rosendo Jr.;

NTA La Union: *Agriculturist I* - Joseph R. Ramos, Mildred M. Hidalgo, Jerome B. Alcantara; *TPRO I* - Clarence M. Lucina, Arnel M. Acosta;

NTA Cagayan: *Agriculturist I* - Bryanne Marke William R. Simeon, Aljun M. Aquebay; and

NTA Isabela: *TPRO I* - Edgar R. Lagasca, Jonely Rose B. Manuel, Mae Anne F. Mina, Joey A. Pascual.

NTA Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr. personally administered the oath-taking of the new extension workers of NTA Candon on February 24 at the Ban-aw Resort in Barangay Gabor Sur, Candon City, and the new extension workers of NTA Vigan on March 16 at the Farmers Training Center in San Juan, Ilocos Sur.

Two others were given original appointments and approved by CSC in the same period. They were: Erwin B. Venus, Secretary I of Vigan Branch; and Roberto P. Abela Jr., Driver II of the Administrative Department. ■

Promotions

Promotions on the same period were Teresita D. Dela Rosa, from Project Evaluation Officer III to Economist IV of the Corporate Planning Department; Carol Lynn R. Sambo, from Senior Science Research Specialist (SRS) to Supervising SRS of the Industrial Research Department; and Carmelita V. Albano, from Senior Bookkeeper of the Finance Department to Tobacco Production and Regulation Assistant II of the Regulation Department. ■



NTA Vigan Manager retires

IN THE *Salamat, Mabuhay* Program hosted by the Vigan Branch Office, the Agency bid farewell to Minerva P. Mizal on March 16 at the NTA Vigan Tobacco Farmers Training Center in Bannuar San Juan, Ilocos Sur. The program was in celebration of her 65th birthday and mandatory retirement in government service.

In attendance were Administrator/CEO Robert Victor G. Seares Jr., members of the NTA Governing Board, Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, managers from various departments and branches, San Juan LGU officials headed by Vice Mayor Benjamin V. Sarmiento, NAFTAC National President Bernard Vicente, representatives of tobacco companies, and family, friends and coworkers of the retiree.

The program highlighted Mizal's devotion of her life to public service, whose career spanned for nearly 44 years. She started as an Emergency Research Assistant on May 1978 on what was then the PVT, and rose from the ranks to become the Department Manager III of NTA Vigan.

In his message to the retiree, Administrator Seares cited Mizal for doing an excellent job and thanked her for her commitment and hard work throughout the years. Colleagues and friends, in their messages, also echoed the same sentiment and highlighted Mizal's conviction to fight for her beliefs, her intellect and rational thinking, and her passion to serve had made her stand out and defined her career. ■

La Union tobacco farmers get SSS coverage

FORTY-EIGHT tobacco growers in Bulbulala, Balaoan, La Union can now avail of social security protection and benefits with their membership to the Social Security System. The voluntary membership of the tobacco growers was the initiative of Estrelita E. Nabua, Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer I of NTA La Union.

Abraham N. Casugay, Social Security Officer III, and staff from SSS Balaoan conducted briefing and orientation on the value of SSS membership on March 31 organized by NTA La Union in coordination with farmer leader Alma M. Silapan.

Most of the farmers paid their first contributions after the seminar.

“Our farmers during this trading season are receiving payments of their harvest, and they are glad they have the money to pay for their contributions,” Nabua said.

According to NTA LA Union Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay, the farmers now recognize the value of SSS coverage, particularly the benefits and privileges the pension fund offers, especially during these challenging times.

He added that the farmers, one of the most vulnerable sectors of the society, deserve social security protection in times of contingencies such as sickness, maternity, disability, unemployment, retirement, funeral, and death.

“I hope that this initiative of our extension worker and in cooperation with SSS and our farmers in Balaoan will convince farmers in other areas to join SSS,” Manager Palabay said. ■



Photo: Alejandro Ordinario

Meet the OICs in the Branch Offices

THE appointments and promotions of 94 employees in 2021 towards the first quarter of 2022 brought new vacancies, but the retirements of Branch Managers in the same period gave an opening for Chief Agriculturists, supervisors and administrative officer to take the helm of the Branch Offices. Three of the officers-in-charge have worked closely to their retired superiors and one of them has earned more experiences in Branch Operations than most of his counterparts.

It was always going to be a big task for these OICs to follow on from their retired superiors whom they have worked closely for the longest time in their career in Branch Operations.

We hope for the best to the OICs in the Branch Offices.



NORALYN I. IDICA
Chief Agriculturist
OIC, NTA Isabela



RANDY I. ABELLA
FTSD Chief Science
Research Specialist
OIC, NTA Abra



ADONIS D. LAZO
Chief Agriculturist
OIC, NTA Candon



Salamat Program for Dr. Riazonda. NTA Isabela held a special program for Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda on her last day as manager-in-charge of the Branch Office and the formal transfer of leadership to incoming officer-in-charge (OIC) Joefrey T. Bautista, in concurrent capacity as Branch Agriculturist, on February 28.

Riazonda headed the Isabela Branch Office, in concurrent capacity as Department Manager III of NTA Cagayan, after the retirement of Herman C. Torres in February 2020. ■ (Joey A. Pascual)

NTA Budget presented in Region 1

DEPUTY Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana and Corporate Planning Manager Fortuna C. Benosa presented the FY 2023 Proposed Budget for Priority Programs and Projects for Region 1 during the 1st Quarter Regular Economic Development Sectoral Committee (EdSeCom) Meeting on March 9.

Presided by Regional Executive Director of DA Region 1 Nestor Domenden, the virtual meeting was attended by representatives of agencies who are members of the Economic Development Sector of Region 1. Most of the programs, activities and projects are included in the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP) presented to the Regional Development Council last year. According to Benosa, the STEP has already been approved by the same committee for endorsement to the Regional Development Council (RDC Full Council) which will meet later for the discussion and approval. ■



Bryanne Marke William R. Simeon



Mark Joseph R. Forges



Gay Ann B. Ronduen



FIRST PRIZE



SECOND PRIZE



THIRD PRIZE

2022 National Women's Month Photo Contest Winners

A PHOTO of a woman farmer in Centro Sur, Alcala, Cagayan steering a carabao pulling a cariton filled with Native tobacco leaves captured by Bryanne Marke William R. Simeon, Agriculturist I of NTA Cagayan, won First Prize in the 2022 National Women's Month Photo Contest.

Simeon's entry bested 52 other photographs entered by NTA employees and Job Order hires. All the entries captured images of women playing an important role in agriculture, particularly in the tobacco industry.

The contest is in line with the celebration of the National Women's Month by the National Tobacco Administration, through the Gender and Development (GAD) Executive Committee with this year's theme "Agenda ng Kababaihan, Tungo sa Kaunlaran."

A photo of a woman farmer harvesting Batek tobacco in Parian Este, in Balaoan La Union by Mark Joseph R. Forges, TPRO I (Job Order) of NTA La Union, won Second Prize. Gay Ann B. Ronduen, Science Research Specialist I of the Farm Technology and Services Department, won Third Prize with her photo of a woman under the sun watering her tobacco plants in Barangay Parioc II in Candon City.

Seven finalists were given consolation prizes. They were

Keithlyn Joy H. Madayag Research Assistant (JO) of NTA La Union; Jennelyn M. Valdez, Data Encoder (JO) of NTA La Union; Jaimes C. Rivera, Administrative Aide I (JO) of NTA La Union; Ann Margaret P. De Fiesta, Research Assistant (JO) of NTA Pangasinan; Jomar M. Casibang, TPRO I (JO) of NTA Cagayan; Joseph R. Ramos, Agriculturist I of NTA La Union; Christian T. Verceles, Research Assistant (JO) of NTA La Union.

Deputy Administrator for Support Services Benedicto M. Savellano headed the Board of Judges, with Regulation Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, Internal Audit Service Manager Dinah E. Pichay, Atty. Jun Fred V. Parado of the Legal Office, Neyo E. Valdez of the Public Relations unit, and Dinah E. Dela Reyna of the Industrial Research Department, as members.

Valdez announced the winners during the Culminating Program of the National Women's Month celebration of NTA on March 29.

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