



PHILIPPINE TOBACCO NEWS

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INSIDE

Who runs the NTA? Empowered Women!

*Accomplishment Report, 2 * Winning Essay: WE for Gender Equality and Inclusive Society, 16 * IRD Research, 18 * Provincial News, 23 * Tobacco Festival, 24*

Boosting production, quality services: top priorities in 2022



THE NATURE of operations of the National Tobacco Administration (NTA) lies on its mandate to improve the economic and living conditions and raise the quality of life of the tobacco farmers and their communities. It stands as steadfast partner to nearly 42,600 smallholder farmers in their pursuit of enhanced livelihood and opportunities, while undertaking the necessary actions and strategies for the growth and development of the industry.

The agency conducted programs, projects, and activities geared toward increasing productivity and income, anchored on the DA's goal of attaining food sufficiency and modernization of agriculture and agribusiness, under the 8-point economic agenda of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.. NTA also developed interventions to respond to the tobacco farmers' varying needs amid the pandemic.

These accomplishments were achieved in close coordination with the different Branch Offices, Departments and Units, and with funding support through the 2022 General Appropriations Act by virtue of SAGF-151 charged against R.A. 4155 (Tobacco Fund) as well as its Corporate Funds.

Boosting local production, raising farmers' income

NTA continuously promotes market-oriented approach in tobacco production through the adoption of a contract growing scheme, and enhanced participation of the private sector in production technology transfer, credit assistance, and leaf marketing. Of the production/credit assistance, the agency provides 40% subsidy on fertilizers and pesticides.

As of December 31, partial tobacco leaf acceptances for the CY2021-2022 production in all tobacco types have reached 43.77 million kilos, valued at about P4.24 billion. This represents about 88.5% of the total estimated production of 49 million kilos.

Average buying price so far is P96.74 per kilo or 14% higher than the five-year average of P82.84 per kilo.

For crop year 2022-2023 which started at the last quarter of the year, P200 million budget for production assistance was released to the Branch Office, for 8,355 tobacco growers covering 5,311 hectares under the TCGS project.

The agency implements the Curing Barn Assistance

Project (CBAP), which addresses the tobacco farmers' need for new flue curing barns and air-curing sheds, by replacing old/damaged ones that have been destroyed by calamities in the recent years. It is a continuing project with a subsidy of P100 million. For the first quarter, 3,825 tobacco farmers availed of the assistance for construction/repair of their curing barns and curing sheds amounting to P50,000 for curing barn and P40,000 for curing shed.

For the Improved Tobacco Seedlings Production, a total of 144 tobacco growers have been recruited for the 170 modules to produce seedlings for crop year 2022-2023. This year's budget is P7.84 million. The seedlings will be bought back by the agency as an additional income to the seedling growers and distributed free to TCGS farmers. The project aims to provide additional income of P15,000 with 5-hectare module per seedling grower.

Raising farmers' income

As a component of the Integrated Farming and Other Income Generating Activities Project (IFOIGAP), the



Rice Production Project is implemented in line with the rice self-sufficiency program of the government, and to augment the income of tobacco farmers, other than tobacco production. Farmer-cooperators are granted production/credit assistance to an average amount of P20,000 per hectare with a 40% subsidy from the agency's Corporate Funds.

The agency assisted a total of 4,987 farmer-cooperators, with an area of 3,741 hectares in Region 1 and Abra (for rice production) and Region 2 (for corn production). The total production assistance released was P60 million.

Also part of IFOIGAP is the Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project (BCPAP), which provides selected tobacco farmer-cooperators with one ready-to-breed upgraded Brahman heifer, as a source of additional income of the tobacco farmers. As of October 31, all 825 cattle distributed since 2020 had produced a total of 146 offspring.

For the Synchronized Tree Planting (STP) activities in July, as part of the Renewable Fuelwood Project to restore the ecological integrity of the tobacco-growing regions, a total of 881,857 tree seedlings were planted in various greening areas in Region I and 2 and Abra. The seedlings were sourced from 78 farmer-cooperators who were given a total of P1.9 million production assistance to produce the seedlings. The farmer-cooperators earned a total of P913,388 as buyback or an average of P11,855 net income per farmer.

Delivering the needed quality services

The Emergency Cash Assistance, with 2022 budget of P51 million, benefitted tobacco farmers affected by calamities such as typhoons, freak rains, and earthquake in tobacco-producing provinces in Regions 1 and 2, and Abra. The amount was augmented by the agency's

Corporate Funds. Each of the 34,225 beneficiaries received P1,500 each, with the breakdown per province as follows: Abra, 2,198; Ilocos Norte, 3,701; Ilocos Sur, 11,734; La Union, 3,830; Pangasinan, 3,390; Isabela, 8,594; and Cagayan, 778.

The P50-million Quick Response Fund (QRF) from the Department of Agriculture was likewise extended to farmers affected by the calamities this year in Region 1. A total of 1,231 tobacco growers received 4,924 bags of fertilizers, 3,693 packs of Bio-stimulants, while 750 tobacco growers will each receive one head of cattle.

NTA distributed bio-stimulants to farmers who were affected by the freak rain in the first quarter to help them in the recovery of their crops. A total of 4,567 in major tobacco growing areas each received a bottle of bio-stimulant.

Setting up policy directions to fast-track modernization

In light of the consistent efforts of the government to increase productivity and income of smallholder farmers and accelerate the modernization and industrialization in agriculture, the agency formulated the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP). This is a five-year development roadmap (2021-2025) to raise socio-economic standards in the industry. Budget for the component projects has been presented to and got endorsement from the Provincial Development Councils (PDCs) and the Regional Development Councils (RDCs) of Regions 1 and 2.

NTA initiated the NTA Projects Facility Maps for the Stakeholders of the Tobacco Industry in keeping pace with technological advancement 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. The Phase 1 of the project conducted last year surveyed the current tobacco farmers, curing barns and shed, machinery, facilities, animals, and other projects of the NTA in all municipalities of Ilocos Norte.

For Phase 2, the project surveyed the current tobacco farmers, curing barns and shed, machinery, facilities, animals, and other projects in Ilocos Sur, Pangasinan, La Union, Cagayan, Isabela, and Abra. As of December 31, 2022, the total number of geotagged tobacco farmers is 15,040.

The link for the data and maps was uploaded to the agency website in October.

NTA, through the Management Information System of the Corporate Planning Department, also developed the Farmer Masterlist Management Information System (FMMIS) including mobile and desktop apps to provide extension workers an automated system containing information needed to support the application and processing of tobacco farmers availment of farm inputs.

Turn to next page

Women's Empowerment in the NTA

AS the NTA is continuously evolving, some women executives led by Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez are occupying vital positions in the agency.

This only shows that gender equality and women's empowerment existed in the management and operations of the only tobacco regulatory agency in the country where men usually occupied the key management positions.

The embarking of more women in the managerial positions of the agency will not only uplift them professionally but also, have them part of the laying up of the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP) roadmap of the agency.

Empowering women entails dismantling the deep-seated gender stereotypes and biases that usually hinder development and progress. We must nurture an environment that encourages women to pursue their passions, interests, and careers without limitations.

Empowerment of women in the agency encompasses the creation of a society that thrives on diversity, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for all.

Thus, women holding key management positions in the agency are considered an investment in a prosperous and sustainable future. Their vital positions in the agency will probably unlock their potential to shape a better NTA

Kudos to our Women Leaders in the NTA!■

Strengthening manpower capability

In preparation for the crop year 2022-2023, the Quality Assurance Division (QAD) conducted capability enhancement trainings on the harmonized grading system and classification of the internationally accepted standards for 57 new extension workers and researchers in Region 1 and 2 and Abra.

To equip the extension workers in the Branch Offices with the latest know-how and technology in the application of modern agriculture, the agency also conducted training seminars for its Branch Office extension workers, as follows: (1) Virtual Training on Mobile App TCGs Monitoring on Arc GIS for TAFMAP; (2) Mobile TCGs Monitoring System and Development for Maps for NTA projects and Tobacco-Related Activities; (3) Virtual Training for Tobacco Production and Regulation Officers on tobacco trading rules and regulations; and (5) Orientation on the Farm Input Voucher Management System.

A total of 130 extension workers and the branch managers participated in the first Annual Seminar-Workshop on Enhancing Extensionists' Capabilities (ASWEEC) in Pansol, Calamba, Laguna in November. The ASWEEC aims to review the current tobacco production practices; and to boost the knowledge of the extension workers to be more effective in disseminating the accurate tobacco production technology. It is also a venue for sharing tobacco farming best practices with consideration on environmental protection and maintenance.

At least 120 officers of the National Federation of Tobacco Farmers Association and Cooperatives (NAFTAC), the country's largest group of tobacco farmers, the block farm leaders, and the Farmers Organizational Development (FOD) branch coordinators attended the training on leadership management skill for cooperatives.

THE accomplishments proved that the hard work and cooperation of the NTA family and the inspiring leadership of NTA Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez beginning in the last quarter of 2022. These things serve as a springboard to a higher performance level as our top officials and industry leaders continue their pursuit of sustainable industry. *(Corporate Planning Department)* ■



Cover Photo: Women Power!

The women leaders of NTA (L-R) Evangeline C. Cabigan (FTSD), Engr. Noralyn I. Idica (NTA Vigan), Myrna O. Lozano (IRD), Fortuna C. Benosa (CorPlan), Dir. Luzviminda U. Padayao (Governing Board), Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez, Minerva P. Mizal (Management Consultant), Dinah E. Pichay (IAD), Zenaida T. Arrojo (Administrative), and Milagrios C. Tiu (Finance); with women farmers featured in the National Women's Month videography contest (Top photo, L-R) Babylyn Pajela, Jocelyn Marinas, Rolyn De Fiesta, Susan Coballes, Arlyn Vega, Mary Grace Bautista, and Maribel Ezzeb.

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NTA Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez (seated, 2nd from left) joins other officials in the signing of the MOA for KALAP, an private sector initiative for the establishment of MSMEs in the agriculture sector. President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. (center, standing) witnesses the signing of the memorandum of agreement at the Ceremonial Hall of Malacañang Palace.

NTA joins KALAP launch, MOA signing in Malacañang

NTA Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez took part in the ceremonial signing of memorandum of agreement (MOA) of the private sector-led initiative Kapatid Angat Lahat for Agriculture Program (KALAP) at the Ceremonial Hall of Malacañang Palace in Manila on March 6.

The NTA signed the MOA with Go Negosyo, a non-stock and non-profit organization, represented by its Founding President and Chairperson, Jose Ma. A. Concepcion III, along with officials from the Department of Agriculture, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Trade and Industry with heads of the Philippine Coconut Authority, National Irrigation Administration and National Commission on Indigenous Peoples.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., who witnessed the MOA signing, welcomed the establishment of the KALAP to enable farmers and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to become more productive, profitable, sustainable, and globally competitive.

KALAP aims to provide farmers access to mentoring, funding, and markets; and to help boost their

livelihood. It is an avenue where agriculture meets job creation and an opportunity to make a lasting impact on the country's economy.

Also present in Malacañang during the signing were tobacco farmer leaders headed by NAFTAC President Bernard Vicente, and Winston Uy, president of Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc.

Go Negosyo, NTA Partnership

Go Negosyo presented its KALAP program for the agriculture sector to Administrator Sanchez on January 26 at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City.

Administrator Sanchez said that meeting provided an opportunity to establish a good working relationship with the private partners for the benefit of the tobacco farmers and their communities.

KALAP Senior Adviser and former Department of Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar discussed partnership of NTA with Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. (ULPI) to transform the tobacco industry in the country.

"We are optimistic that NTA will embrace and accept the partnership with ULPI and other stakeholders to attain a real change in the said industry," Dar added.

During the meeting, ULPI and

Gilan Global Ventures Corp. (GGVC) presented innovative agriculture programs that will help the end-users to gain higher yields of production and be successful.

GGVC President and CEO Isidor Gilan presented the Drip Irrigation System, which is the most efficient water and nutrient delivery system for growing crops and will give a tremendous saving in water.

ULPI President Winston Uy expounded data management of the firm's Universal Leaf Farm System that will help tobacco farmers to be globally competitive. Uy said that the system is the big brother approach in making, providing, and helping the farmers improve themselves.

Also in the meeting were Go Negosyo Representatives, Abigail C. Famadico, Programs Development Officer, and Thermina Ann Akram, Executive Director; Ciel De la Cruz of GGVC; and members of NTA top management.

Go Negosyo was created with the help of like-minded trustees after the appointment of Joey Concepcion as the Presidential Consultant for Entrepreneurship in 2005. The movement advocates for a positive and enterprising attitude among Filipinos – a mindset that would help them move up in life. ■ (FGL/MRP)

NTA crafts 5-year strategic plan

Text and Photos by **Freddie G. Lazaro**

NTA conducted a three-day Strategic Planning Workshop to formulate its Strategic Plan for CY 2023-2028, with highlights on the medium-term goals and objectives and to outline programs, initiatives, and strategies to achieve them. The NTA Governing Board and Top Management Officials headed by Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez attended the workshop that took place at the Hotel Dominique in Tagaytay City on February 1-3.



Administrator Sanchez



(Front row table, L-R) CorPlan Manager Fortuna C. Benosa, Acting Deputy Administrator for Support Services Dinah E. Pichay, and Acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay

A total of 37 participants, composed of department and branch managers, division chiefs and chief agriculturists participated on the series of workshops for the strategy map with the revised mission, vision and core values and newly formulated strategic objectives across identified perspectives; and the balanced scorecard with identified performance measures, targets and threshold, and strategic initiatives and programs.

To organize and conduct the workshop on the formulation of Strategic Plan, the agency has sought technical expertise of Advocates for Development Management and Sustainability, headed by Dr. Alan S. Cajes, with Catherine S. Luzuriaga and Trygvy Bolante as trainers and consultants.

According to Corporate Planning Department Manager Fortuna C. Benosa, the workshops allowed the Top Management and senior officers to develop strategic options that would enable the NTA to assess the present state of the industry and chart the direction it should take in fulfilling its mandate of promoting farmers' welfare, and prioritize among strategies to implement a menu of reforms that will make the agency more responsive to its changing environment.

Ilocos Sur First District Rep. Ronald V. Singson, in his message during the opening program, assured NTA of his full support for all the programs and projects, and that he would do his part to convince the executive department to give priority on the needs of the agency to address the concerns of the tobacco farmers.



The participants with the resource persons and workshop facilitators during the closing program.

Rep. Singson vows full support for NTA projects



Rep. Singson

Ilocos Sur First District Rep. Ronald V. Singson speaking before NTA's top management and senior officials during the opening program of their Strategic Planning Workshop said that he will give preferential attention to the request of NTA for additional funding from the multi-billion Tobacco Fund for the development of the tobacco industry and addressing the concerns of the tobacco farmers.

Tobacco Fund, per Section 5 of the Republic Act (RA) 4155, or an Act to Promote and Strengthen the Virginia Tobacco Industry, shall be used for operational, office, and field expenses, including the establishment of the Research and Grading Institute.

The agency has already made a request to the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) for the release of a portion of the Tobacco Fund for the implementation of the various projects under its Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP).

"I will bring this concern of the NTA to the higher authorities, especially if you furnish me the copies of the project proposals for funding by the Tobacco Fund, with supporting documents justifying the need for the release of the Fund," said Singson.

In response, NTA Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez expressed her gratitude to the Ilocano legislator for his commitment to strengthening the country's tobacco industry.

She said that the NTA has always given priority to address the concerns of the tobacco farmers because they are the key players for the sustainability of the tobacco industry in the country. ■

Administrator Sanchez presented the six-point agenda (STEP-UP) for the next six years, with focus on the following: sustainable local production; transforming small-scale farming into a larger commercial food system; enhanced productivity and income-generating activities; partnership with key stakeholders to sustain inclusive and resilient growth; upgrading farm technology, infrastructure and research facilities; and priority programs to promote welfare of employees.

She expected the participants to be well-equipped to formulate a strategic plan, and to design and implement programs and services that address the issues affecting productivity and income of tobacco growers, including food sufficiency and poverty reduction program of President Ferdinand "Bong Bong" Marcos Jr.

In preparation for the workshop, the participants also joined the discussion on the Customer Satisfaction Survey, Self-Assessment and Performance Review based on the submission of the various departments and branch offices, and SWOT Analysis during the Environmental Scanning and performance review conducted by the Corporate Planning Department on January 20. ■

STEP-UP AGENDA

Policy Framework: Ambisyon Natin 2040, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, 8-Point Economic Agenda / **Strategic Plans:** DA Multi-Year Plan 2023-2028, Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program

S

Sustainable local production

Increasing productivity and income are essential conditions for the sustainability of tobacco. Tobacco industry spurs development in the tobacco-growing areas, hence it must be protected and developed.
Strong industry to become next exporter of tobacco – meet the demands of local manufacturing of quality tobacco thereby reducing importation and becoming a net exporter in the long-term.

T

Transforming small-scale farming into a larger commercial food system

Full implementation of Block Farming / Farm Clustering as an essential core of the livelihood system of the smallholder farmers.

E

Enhanced productivity and income-generating activities

Sustainable agricultural infrastructure to facilitate production and trading of tobacco, other crops
Attracting young people to engage in agri-production and agri-business activities.

P

Partnership with key stakeholders to sustain inclusive and resilient

Partnership to local government units to ensure delivery of services to tobacco growers.
Cooperative efforts with the LGU partners to sustain inclusive and resilient growth of the industry – infrastructure and facilities for quality production, processing and marketing.

U

Upgrading farm technology, infrastructure and research facilities

Breakthrough technologies must be consciously applied to enhance tobacco production, ensure efficient use of water and land, and improve seed quality
Adoption of digital technologies is a vital in agriculture

P

Priority programs to promote welfare of employees

Creating a strong workforce that will drive growth and prosperity across all sectors of the industry.



(L-R) Acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay, JTI staff, IRD Manager Myrna O. Lozano, Atty. Jun Fred V. Parado, Budget Officer V Reynaldo R. Aquino, Management Consultant Minerva P. Mizal, Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez, Private Secretary Hazel Ann M. Inguillo, Raffy Ledesma of JTI, RD Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, and Public Relations Officer V Freddie G. Lazaro.

NTA visits JTI Plant in Batangas

NTA officials led by Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez visited the cigarette-processing warehouse of the Japan Tobacco International Asia Manufacturing Corporation (JTI-AMC) based in Lima Ecozone in Batangas on January 27.

The visit was conducted to monitor the compliance of the company on the current governing rules and regulations on cigarette manufacturing.

During the short tour inside the cigarette-manufacturing warehouse, a JTI's public relations staff apprised the NTA officials about the current operations on the processing of their cigarette products. The staff discussed the two major processes in cigarette manufacturing: the primary process, which is the conditioning of the tobacco leaf like cutting and drying, and the secondary process involving blending, flavoring, packaging, and cigarettes packing for distribution.

JTI is a global tobacco company focused on innovation and sustainability in producing cigarette products for export and local consumption and other products like processed food and pharmaceuticals. JTI began operations in the country in 2000 with JT International (Philippines), Inc. (JTIP).

JTIP, JTI-AMC and JTI Global Business Services Center (JTI-GBS) has employed at least 5,000 Filipinos. In 2021, JTIP paid P82 Billion excise tax to the government. ■ (FGL)



Administrator Sanchez with Ms. Inguillo during the warehouse inspections

Administrator leads warehouse inspections

NTA Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez joined the Regulation Department in the inspection of cigarettes and imported tobacco raw materials at cigarette warehouses of tobacco companies on separate schedules in January.

The inspection of tobacco manufacturing and trading firms, plants and warehouses is one of the duties of the NTA to ensure transparency and to closely monitor the arrival of cigarettes and imported tobacco raw materials in the country.

Administrator Sanchez inspected the cigarettes and imported tobacco raw materials arrived in the warehouse of two tobacco companies at Subic Bay Freeport Zone in Zambales on January 10.

With Administrator Sanchez during the inspection were Jerymy Ann E. Feria of the NTA Regulation Department and Hazel Anne M. Inguillo of the Office of the Administrator.

Those inspected were 1,964 cases of cigarettes owned by Seng Hong Subic Company for transshipment to Vietnam and imported tobacco cut fillers owned by TM8 Enterprises Incorporated are for local cigarette production.

The Administrator proceeded to Tabaqueria De Filipinas, Inc. in Barangay San Antonio, San Pedro, Laguna for the inspection of the company's rolled cigar product for export on January 23.

With her during the inspection were Franklin Ross Mendoza of the NTA Regulation Department, and Inguillo.

The inspected tobacco products, composed of 175 boxes loaded with 3,500 assorted rolled sticks of the cigars, is bound for export to the United Kingdom.

To institutionalize the inspection of tobacco manufacturing and trading firms, plants and warehouses, the NTA had created a composite team composed of the Office of the Administrator/CEO, Regulation Department and Industrial Research Department. ■ (FGL)

Orientation seminar on complaints handling, FOI

NTA conducted virtual orientation-seminar on Feedback Mechanism, Complaints Handling and Freedom of Information (FOI) on February 7. This was attended by identified frontline officers from different departments and branch offices and designated decision makers for the Freedom of Information program.

Jointly facilitated by the Administrative Department and the Public Relations Office, the one day orientation-seminar aimed at ensuring that all staff members are familiar with feedback mechanism and complaint lodgment process, and the implementation of FOI program in the agency.

Dinah E. Pichay, Internal Audit Manager and Focal on Ease of Doing Business, discussed on various government issuances and policies, including internal policies, that deal on customer/client relations and proper rendering of services to the public.

Neyo E. Valdez, Division Chief III of PPED-CorPlan, and Complaint Officer, discussed the procedure of complaints

handling in the agency and feedback mechanism according to existing guidelines.

A forum and a workshop were held after the discussion to boost the knowledge of the concerned staff on the requirement for the compliance of the ARTA, the R.A. 11032 or Act of Promoting Ease of Doing Business.

The second part of the seminar was the re-orientation on FOI, with officers from FOI program of the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) as resource persons. They were: Patricia Marri Maranan, Lead Compliance Officer; Francis Nicolai Pallada, Information Technology Officer; and Dianne Gammad, Compliance Monitoring Officer.

Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez in his message commended the staff for their initiatives to enhance the complaint handling system, as she reminded the frontline officers to act on complaints or feedbacks at the earliest possible time. Freddie G. Lazaro, Public Relations Officer V, served as host and moderator. ■

Maguindanao Del Sur officials tour tobacco farms, NTA offices in Ilocos

A TEAM of officials from the provincial government of Maguindanao Del Sur province headed by its Provincial Legal Officer, Atty. Josefina D. Torrena, paid a courtesy call on NTA Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City on January 30 before they proceeded to Ilocos Sur and La Union for a three-day tobacco farm visit.

On behalf of Maguindanao Del Sur Governor Bai Mariam S. Mangudadatu, the officials expressed their gratitude to the tobacco agency for their support to the tobacco industry in the province with the release of their share, particularly for the municipalities of Pagalungan and Datu Montawal, from the tobacco excise tax as provided by Republic Act 8240.

Nelly G. Alba, Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer III who is based in Mindanao, accompanied the Maguindanao Del Sur officials in their benchmarking activities in the tobacco farm in Magsingal, Ilocos Sur. They also visited the office of the NTA Vigan Branch Office and paid a courtesy call on Ilocos Sur Governor Jeremias Singson.

The team visited the office of the NTA La Union the next day before they returned to Manila.

The benchmarking activity of the Maguindanao Del Sur officials to the tobacco farms and NTA Branch offices in Ilocos Sur and La Union is part of their initiatives in their bid for the expansion of tobacco production in the province. ■ (FGL)



NTA Officials headed by Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez are flanked by local officials from Maguindanao del Sur during their courtesy call on the Administrator before their tour in tobacco areas in Ilocos. (OAD)

Tobacco harmonized grading system seminars held in Ilocos, Abra

by *Andrea Marie C. Contillo*

ADDRESSING the farmers' concerns on Virginia tobacco leaf grading for the 2023 trading season, the Quality Assurance Division of the NTA Industrial Research Department (IRD) held a series of seminars on harmonized grading system in Ilocos provinces and Abra in the first quarter.

Participants were Tobacco Production and Regulations Officers (TPROs), agriculturists, researchers, and farmers and leaf graders from the tobacco trading companies in Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, and La Union.

NTA Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez lauded the effort of the IRD in spearheading the conduct of this seminar to address the concerns of the farmers on the proper grading of their tobacco in the buying stations during the trading season.

"This seminar on the international standard on the harmonized grading system of the Virginia tobacco is a continuing activity of the NTA. The approved grading system of the Virginia tobacco leaves is the basis of pricing on trading and as a reference by the extension workers, who assess the quality of the locally-produced tobacco," Administrator Sanchez said.

IRD Manager Myrna O. Lozano said the seminar aims to impart to the participants the principles and application of harmonized leaf grading system of Virginia tobacco leaves and to enhance the capabilities of those involved in grading and classification of tobacco in buying stations.

The seminar had two batches for the concerned technical personnel from the NTA Branches in Region 1 and Abra and Central Office departments, and five batches for tobacco farmer leaders.

Thirty-one participants from the NTA branch offices

in Candon, Vigan, and La Union attended the first batch of the four-day orientation seminars held in San Juan Tobacco Farmers Training Center in San Juan, Ilocos Sur on February 14- 17. Included in second batch of the seminar, held on February 28 to March 3, 2023, were 28 participants from the NTA branch offices in Abra and Ilocos Norte, Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD), Regulation Department (RD) and IRD.

Meanwhile, 107 farmer leaders in Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, and Abra participated in the one-day Orientation Seminar on the Harmonized Grading System of Virginia tobacco leaves on February 20-24.

Two of the resource speakers during the seminar were Engr. Warlie V. Oribello, Senior TPRO of NTA La Union, who lectured on tobacco production technology; and Engr. Alex L. Borje, Chief TPRO of RD, who discussed the tobacco grading rules and regulations.

Among the NTA officials present during the seminars, were NTA Director Teofilo R. Quintal, Special Assistant to the Administrator Benjamin V. Sarmiento, Management Consultant Minerva P. Mizal, acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay, and NTA Vigan Manager Engr. Noralyn I. Idica.

The leaf graders from the Universal Leaf Philippines Inc. (ULPI), Trans Manila Inc. (TMI), and Conleaf considered the approved Harmonized Leaf Grading System in their trading operations.

The implementation of the harmonized grading system for locally produced Virginia tobacco leaves and Burley-type tobacco started in 2018 through an NTA Memorandum Circular No. 1 Series of 2018 issued by then Administrator and CEO Robert L. Seares. ■



Clockwise: Lecturers from IRD Kathlyn Mae A. Tejano and Cyrus Raymond C. Olivenza; Farmers in San Juan, Ilocos Sur; NTA technicians in San Juan, Ilocos Sur; and Farmers in Rosales, Pangasinan. (NTA-IRD)



by Joey A. Pascual

THE Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD), in coordination with NTA Isabela, conducted a training on Beema Bamboo Production Technology, held at the NTA Isabela Training Building in Ilagan City on January 16.

This is to capacitate the coordinators of the project to have knowledge on the uses and cultural management practices of Beema Bamboo to be extended to the farmer beneficiaries of the project.

Participants were the Branch Project Coordinators of Beema Bamboo Production Project, a component of the Renewable Fuelwood Energy Farm Development Project of the agency.

Resource Speaker Bersan L. Lucero, the Bidding Representative of Joan Venturina Nursery, discussed the uses, cultural management, and impact of Beema bamboo on the environment.

Other resource speakers were Engr. Warlie Oribello, Supervising TPRO of NTA La Union, on the Package of Technology of Kawayan Tinik; and Evangeline C. Cabigan, FTSD Officer-in-Charge, on the Implementing Guidelines of Beema Bamboo Production Project.

Also present were acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay and NTA Isabela Branch Manager Joefrey T. Bautista. ■

Promotions, appointments at Internal Audit

NTA Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez administered the oath-taking of three personnel, two promotions and one appointment, of the Internal Audit Department (IAD) after the flag-raising rites at the Central Office on February 27.

Resty C. Cambe took his oath as Internal Auditor V, the Division Chief of the Operations Audit Division, two of the newly created divisions of IAD. Before his promotion, Cambe was the Accountant IV of the Finance Department. Rosalie P. Catura took her oath as Internal Auditor III, a promotion from her previous position as Internal Auditor II of the same Department.

Joining them in the oath-taking was Kriscia Mae M. Vidal who got her regular appointment as Internal Auditor I after working as Job Order staff of the Administrative Department then at IAD.

Two other IAD personnel also took their oath of office before Administrator Sanchez on February 13. They were Rochelle C. De Peralta, who was promoted from Human Resource and Management Officer II of the Administrative Department to Internal Auditor III of the Management Audit Division of IAD; and Marissa J. Alvero who was a Job Order staff of the NTA Governing

Board before her regular appointment as Internal Auditor I of IAD.

IAD, headed by Department Manager Dinah E. Pichay, is boosting up its manpower after its restructuring from Internal Audit Service to a Department which was approved by the NTA Governing Board in 2018. ■



(L-R) Rosalie P. Catura, Resty C. Cambe, Kriscia Mae M. Vidal, Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez, and IAD Manager Dinah E. Pichay (Andrea Marie C. Contillo)



NTA top officials with the Department and Branch Managers (Freddie G. Lazaro)

NTA marks National Women's Month

by Freddie G. Lazaro & Andrea Marie C. Contillo

Winners of National Women's Month contests

Videography Contest. The entry of NTA Abra, featuring Babylyn D. Pajela, a farmer of Barangay Dalit, Pilar, Abra, bagged first place in the contest. The winning entry, videographed and edited by Jemima C. Santiago and written by Catherine Dasalla, won P7,000. The entry of NTA La Union featuring farmer Jocelyn Marinas of Barangay Bigbiga, Sudipen, La Union was adjudged second place with P5,000 cash prize; and NTA Pangasinan featuring farmer Rolyn P. De Fiesta, third place with P3,000 cash prize.



Essay Writing Contest. Emily M. Abubo, Tobacco Production and Regulation Office I of NTA La Union, won First Prize with her entry entitled: "WE for Gender Equality and Inclusive Society" (see page 16). Other winners were John James B. Canosa, Project Evaluation Officer II of Corporate Planning Department, second place; and Roan G. Daproza, Agriculturist I of NTA Candon, third place. The winners received P5,000, P3,000 and P2,000 for the first, second and third place, respectively.

NTA Top management officials and employees led by Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez marked the celebration of the National Women's Month (NWM) coinciding with the 1st quarter convocation held at the central office in Quezon City on March 10.

Internal Audit Manager Dinah E. Pichay said this year's celebration of the Women's Month is extra special for the agency "because it is the first time in the history of the NTA that a woman will manage the agency's operations."

"The appointment of our first lady administrator is a manifestation of women's achievement and has broken stereotypes as she led the NTA that usually managed by a man," she added.

In her message, Administrator Sanchez cited the significant role of women in the nation-building. She commended the NTA personnel for continuously making the Women's Month celebration meaningful and exciting.

She enjoined everyone to observe respect in the workplace and treat each other the same way in treating the love ones.

Corporate Planning Manager and Gender and Development Focal Chair Fortuna C. Benosa presented the rationale of NWM's celebration and the accomplishments of the agency in advocating gender equality and inclusive society.

She said there is a need for a continuing review on the agency policy for which the gender program should integrate to give equal rights of both men and women even in the use of language.

"For our clients, we have a lot of programs and projects which women can participate, even in our regular projects like TCGS, CBAP, our livelihood trainings under the FOD, Tobacco Grower of the Year, Scholarship Program for Tobacco Farmers Dependents, Gulayan and Manukan, among others," she said.

Benosa said there is a need to disseminate to personnel the benefits of R.A. 9710 or the Magna

Farmers support tougher anti-agri smuggling bill in the Senate

by **Freddie G. Lazaro**

A 50,000-strong farmers group welcomed the filing of a Senate bill that seeks to toughen the existing anti-smuggling law by expanding its coverage and imposing stricter penalties.

In a statement, the Philippine Tobacco Growers Association (PTGA) said it supports Senate Bill No. 1812 because it would curb the massive smuggling of agricultural products that hurts the local farm sector and deprives the government of revenues.

The PTGA lauded Sen. Lito Lapid for filing SB 1812 that seeks to strengthen the existing law against the smuggling of agricultural products amid the rampant illegal importation of commodities like sugar, onions, and tobacco.

SB 1812 proposes amendments to RA 10845 or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016, along with the recently passed House Bill 3917.

It considers large-scale agricultural smuggling of tobacco, whether manufactured or unmanufactured, including finished products such as, cigarettes, or heated tobacco products, as an act of economic sabotage and a non-bailable offense.

Specifically, it seeks to revise Section 4 of RA 10845 by imposing the penalty of imprisonment of 30 to 40 years, and a fine of twice the fair value and the aggregate amount of the taxes, duties and other charges avoided by the smuggling of tobacco.

The current law only penalizes large-scale smuggling of sugar, corn, pork, poultry, garlic, onion, carrots, fish, and cruciferous vegetables in its raw state, or which have undergone the simple processes of preparation or preservation for the market, with a minimum amount of P1 million.

The farmer's group asked the Senate to act on Lapid's proposal and

expand the coverage of RA 10845 to include both raw and processed tobacco in the list of core agricultural products given protection against large-scale smuggling.

PTGA president Saturnino Distor said all agricultural industries should be equally protected as rampant smuggling continues to be a grave threat to the livelihood of local farmers and millions of dependents who rely on these industries for income and sustenance.

Distor lamented how smuggling renders local farm output uncompetitive, impedes the productivity of farmers and leads to higher costs of agricultural products to the detriment of consumers.

The unabated smuggling of tobacco is estimated to cost P50 billion to P100 billion in revenue losses for the government, according to the Bureau of Internal Revenue. ■

.....
Carta for Women, Expanded Maternity Law, Safe Spaces Act, among others.

The NWM celebration also marks a juncture in the advancement of women's rights as it launches a new recurring theme from this year to 2028: WE for gender equality and inclusive society.

The recurring theme will seek to tackle areas where the need for gender equality and inclusivity is pressing, emerging, and crucial. For 2023, the focus will be on "DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality," in line with the International Women's Day theme.

Other highlights of the 2023 First Quarter Convocation was the blessings of the new office space of the NTA Central Office on the 11th Floor of the Upper-Class Tower along Quezon Avenue corner Scout Reyes Street, Quezon City and the birthday celebrations of Administrator Sanchez. ■



New member of NTA board

FORMER NTA Ilocos Norte Manager Luzviminda U. Padayao took her oath as a new member of the NTA Governing Board, representing the tobacco farmers sector, on Monday at the DA Central Office, Quezon City.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. signed her appointment on March 8, 2023.

Department of Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban administered her oath-taking in the presence of her husband, Engr. Joseph Padayao, and son, Dr. John Lois U. Padayao.

Padayao rendered 43 years of exemplary service in the government. In 1979, she started as a Research Assistant at the Philippine Virginia Tobacco Administration (PVTA), now NTA. Before she became the Branch Manager of NTA Ilocos Norte, she was the Chief Agriculturist for three years.

President Marcos, Jr., the concurrent Agriculture Secretary, headed the NTA Governing Board as Chairperson, with Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez as Vice-Chairperson.

The new director attended her first Board Meeting, in a joint committee meeting, presided over by Administrator Sanchez held at the Central Office Board Room on March 22. ■ (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)

Who runs the NTA? Empowered Women!

by *Gay Anne B. Ronduen, FTSD*

THIS year's the National Woman's Month Celebration is anchored with a theme: "WE for gender equality and inclusive society." Where WE stand for Women and Everyone emphasizing women's role in pursuing gender equality. Gender equality means getting equal access to rights and opportunities regardless of gender. It is associated with the word "for," signifying the call to women and everyone to vote for, act for, and promote for equality and inclusivity in society. An inclusive society does not only denote gender responsive society but a society that overrides the discrimination between genders—a place where everyone has an important role to play.

The theme for this year is so fitting for NTA with the appointment of Administrator and CEO **Belinda S. Sanchez**, the first woman to lead the regulatory agency, where for 35 years had been run by men. President Ferdinand "Bong Bong" R. Marcos, Jr. didn't only see the potential of Administrator Sanchez as a promising leader but he also put into limelight the importance of gender quality.

Director **Luzviminda U. Padayao** was another empowered woman recently appointed as member of the NTA Governing Board. Prior to her position, Director Padayao served as the Branch Manager of NTA Ilocos Norte. She is also a successful businesswoman, a loving wife, a caring mother, and a God-fearing woman who

actively participates in worship and publicly declares that God is her Lord and Savior. Another former Branch Manager **Minerva P. Mizal**, of NTA Vigan, has returned to government service after her retirement. These two women were already accomplished leaders but they still have more to offer.

Seven of the department managers or officers-in-charge are empowered women. **Dinah E. Pichay** is the most senior of all the managers, currently the Department Manager III of the Internal Audit Department, and formerly designated as OIC of the Office of the Deputy Administrator for Support Services. Next to her is **Fortuna C. Benosa**, the manager of the Corporate Planning Department and currently the agency's GAD Focal Person.

The head of the Industrial Research Department, **Myrna O. Lozano**, is another empowered woman and topnotch researcher. She supervises both IRD offices in the Central Office in Quezon City and in Batac City. The woman who ensures the smooth flow of all administrative concerns is **Zenaida T. Arrojo**, the Manager of the Administrative Department. She has supervision of all the Administrative Officers of the eight branch offices.

Of the eight Branch Office managers, one is also an empowered woman, Engr. **Noralyn I. Idica**, who was a long-time and top performing extension worker and supervisor before her appointment.



Dedication & Resilience: The Inspiring Journey of a Civil Servant

by **Bryanne Marke William R. Simeon**
NTA Cagayan

Two women, known for their hard work and dedication, were designated OICs of their respective departments: **Evangeline C. Cabigan** of the Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD) and **Milagros C. Tiu** of the Finance Department. Cabigan oversees the Production Support Services Division (PSSD) and the Farm Technology Development Division, the two divisions comprising the FTSD. The PSSD is mandated in technology transfer and capacitating farmers and extension workers, while FTDD focuses on conducting research and protocol studies. Tiu, a long-time Chief of the Accounting Division is in control of the financial matters of the agency, the lifeblood of every organization.

These 10 empowered women only show that men and women in the agency are given equal rights and opportunities.

And there are lots of them, all empowered women whose remarkable achievements prove that women can dominate the society. One of them is Dr. Aira Cassandra S. Castro, a graduate of the Mariano Marcos State University, who topped the Physician Licensure Examination (PLE) this year. She outscored the 1,573 PLE passers, including all MMSU graduates who took and passed the said board examination. And the woman behind the success of MMSU is Dr. Shirley C. Agrupis. With her leadership and dedication, the university has produced thousands of professionals, and continuously honing students to become the next leaders.

Many women worldwide are now making a name in their offices, countries, and society. As a woman, we have all the skills, rights, and opportunities to lead agencies, universities, and countries. This reminds of this famous quote from the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Malala Yousafzai, "If we want to achieve our goal, then let us empower ourselves with the weapon of knowledge and let us shield ourselves with unity and togetherness."

Women these days do not need to battle for gender equality and inclusion in society. They need to be empowered and show society that they are an essential part of the world. ■

A WOMAN devoted her life to public service, working tirelessly for 33 years as a civil servant. Her story is one of determination, hard work, and love for her family.

Her journey began at the Philippine Tobacco Research and Training Center (PTRTC) in Batac, Ilocos Norte. It was there that she met her future husband, Marlo Simeon. Little did she know that years later, she would be working in the same field with him, both committed to the growth and success of the tobacco industry in the country.

Before she found her place at the NTA, she faced a few setbacks. After being laid off from PTRTC, she attempted to work abroad but eventually returned to the Philippines to apply for a position at NTA. The interview was eventful, to say the least, an attempted coup d'état against the government happened while she was being interviewed. Despite the chaos, she remained determined and was eventually offered the job.

As a Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer I, she was responsible for ensuring the receptiveness of tobacco to the Package of Technology (POT) in tobacco production and the regulations set by the government to produce the highest quality tobacco. She wakes up as early as 3:00 a.m. to cook breakfast for her son, who was then studying in Tuguegarao, before traveling 40 to 50 kilometers to her tobacco farmers from their boarding house. She never wavered in her dedication to her work and her family.

She faced challenges along the way in the performance of her duties and responsibilities, including an accident that happened while she was pregnant with her son. Despite this, she persevered and continued to work hard to provide for her family. She lost her 14-year-old daughter to a tragic motor vehicle accident, and last July 2, 2021, her husband passed away.

Through thick and thin, she remained resilient, driven, and committed to her work. Her 33 years in service as a civil servant are a testament to her dedication and passion for public service.

This remarkable woman is my mother, **Edna Rebucal-Simeon**. Growing up, I witnessed firsthand the sacrifices she made to provide for our family. Her steadfast commitment to her work and her family was an inspiration to me and those around her. Despite the challenges she faced, she was determined to do what was right and to make a difference in the world.

As she enjoys her retirement and continues to care for her beloved grandchild, we are reminded of the profound impact that one person can have on the world. My mother, we honor you and the legacy you have created through your life's work, your commitment and dedication as a public servant are worth emulating. Thank you for being an inspiration to us all! ■



The author, Agriculturist I of NTA Cagayan, reads this piece during the retirement of his mother on January 31, 2023 held at the Branch Office in Tuguegarao City.

WE for Gender Equality and Inclusive Society

by *Emily M. Abubo, NTA La Union*

IN A WORLD which demands a fast-paced move for everything, there is one soul who stands particularly eloquent, powerful, and confident – JUANA, a woman who symbolizes the modern-day goddess of empowerment.

Looking back at history, women were confined to the four walls of the home, serving the household. In some societies in the world, women were suppressed to voice out their opinions, and they were not even allowed to vote. In patriarchal societies, women are second-rate citizens who are deemed insignificant, powerless and inferior. History could not specifically proclaim when and how women began to bring down the boundaries created by men. Women rose from the lowly status and slowly made their way out to be at par with and even outshine their male counterparts.

Gone are the days when women do not have a seat at the table, and even when they were given a seat they were accorded with inferior treatment due to their gender. The time when women had to rely on their father or husband to fulfill their desires is long behind us now. The Juana has proven that it is her right to be treated the same as the other gender.

That part of being a woman is not an easy character to play. Since Juana is endowed with strength, she can juggle multiple roles with utmost grace, emanating that of an empowered woman. Her wisdom, creativity and nurturing prowess cannot be underestimated, and she, who used to be treated as servant at home, came to see that life means more than merely serving in the household.

What then are the characters that Juana portrays?

LEADER. The far-reaching advantages of diversity and gender parity in leadership and decision-making are increasingly acknowledged in many domains, and women are potent change agents. The advancement of gender

justice and gender equality—as well as the advancement of economic, social, and political growth for all—requires the participation of women as leaders and decision-makers at all levels.

An empowered Juana brilliantly demonstrates the graceful combination of high level of intellectual capacities and dominant gentleness and kind-heartedness. Laws, rulings, and decisions are more likely to be inclusive, representative, and take into account multiple viewpoints when women are actively involved in and substantially recognized in leadership roles.

We have seen bold women who showcased the ability to lead and who changed the world: Sybil Ludington, 16, who rode horseback approximately 40 miles to alert 400 militia members of the approaching British army; Jane Addams, suffragist, settlement house founder, peace activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, who decided against getting married and having children in favor of dedicating her life to social change; Rosalind Franklin, who had the courage to return to England to direct a research team studying the structure of DNA during a period when women were not even permitted to eat in the cafeteria of her college; and the Philippine's very own Gabriela Silang, a female leader who is best known for her courage against the Spanish colonizers in the Ilocanos fight for independence. These are only a few among the very wide roster of women leaders who changed the world by taking a stand.

MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER. People often experience a lack of engagement at work or at home or occasionally feel like there are too much to do or that they are falling behind on their goals. So they seek the counsel from someone who has already overcome challenging trials to achieve their own goals. And most of the times, the motivational speakers they sought are women. Unlike in the the older days, women are now



The essay of Emily M. Abubo, Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer I of NTA La Union, won **First Prize** in the National Women's Month Essay Writing Contest 2023.

allowed to have a voice on varied issues, and they can give inspiring words and encouragement to those who listen to them.

One of the most well-known female public speakers is Oprah Winfrey, who has great influence to her millions of viewers to her talk show. She has devoted her life in helping millions of poor children and families from all walks of life. Iyanla Vanzant, a lawyer by profession, has established herself as a powerful female inspirational speaker, a life coach and spiritual guru. She has aided her listeners in developing self-awareness and bringing about positive change in their lives as well as the lives of others around them through her television appearances, talk show, and motivational speeches. Amy Purdy, one of the most successful Paralympic snowboarders in the world, has demonstrated to the world that anything is possible with determination and good motivation. She lost both of her legs to meningitis at the age of 19, and this did not stop her from becoming a fantastic female public speaker who travels the world and shares her story. And there is Beyonce Knowles, dubbed as the most popular female solo artist in the world, who speaks to audiences around the world as a motivational speaker for women, narrating her struggles and how she overcame adversities to get to where she is now.

EDUCATOR. With the most potent tool at their disposal—education—women have contributed to forming the society we live in today. A shift in perspective toward women during the 19th century led to more chances for women and girls to pursue education at all levels. They started to play significant roles in education in the 1800s. This opened the door for more women to enter the world of education at all levels, first as students and subsequently as teachers.

“If help and salvation are to come, they can only come from the children, for the children are makers of men.” This was a quote from Maria Tecla Artemesia Montessori, an Italian doctor and teacher best recognized for her research on scientific pedagogy and the Montessori educational philosophy, which bears her name. The Montessori Approach is a system of education for young children in which the primary goal is self-motivated learning by the children themselves; they are encouraged to move freely

through tailored instruction and physical activities, with a special emphasis on the training of the senses and the early development of reading and writing skills. Mary Jane McLeod Bethune, known as “The First Lady of The Struggle” due to her dedication to improve the lives of African Americans, has inspired people to give their time and money to help elevate an academic institution for African American girls that she started to be become to what is now known as Bethune-Cookman University.

HEROINE. It cannot be denied that people knew Wonder Woman, Black Widow, Gamora and Darna as female superheroes in comics and movies. However, there are real-life heroines who went beyond terror and fearlessly fought battles for a greater cause. They were not clad in daring costumes but they were covered with the bravery, conviction, determination and courage as their gear and armor.

Florence Nightingale was a war-hero nurse, whose willpower paved the way for the first time that women had been officially allowed to serve in the British army during the Crimean war. Emmeline Pankhurst was a founding member of the Suffragettes, a group of women who worked hard to secure women's voting rights in the United Kingdom. Malala Yousafzai became the youngest person ever to win the Nobel Peace Prize for penning an anonymous diary on what it was like to live in northwest Pakistan during the rule of the extremists group Taliban. We also include our valiant women such as Melchora Aquino, Gabriela Silang, and Josefa Llanes Escoda, who made sure that not only men have the ability to become heroes.

PROFESSIONALS. Over the years, certain professions were male-dominated. Women nowadays have higher aspirations for their careers. They are no longer confined to traditionally female occupations like teaching or nursing. Women are now in the forefront of once male-dominated sectors like law, medicine, engineering and accounting. At this era, Juana is also a scientist, a pilot, and an astronaut!

HOMEMAKER. A homemaker is the one who manages a household especially as a spouse and parent. Being a homemaker is not only confined with the description of a woman washing clothes, cleaning the house, preparing food, assisting the husband, and

“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself; it is a precondition to attain the growth and development of the economy and the society as a whole.”

attending to the children’s need. It is more than working on these chores. Juana, on her role as a wife, is not inferior to the husband, but serves as his partner in everything – in decisions, in joy and sadness, in sickness and in health, in triumphs and downfalls. A wife always expects and prays for unwavering love that lasts forever. Another way a wife stands out in the family is for her sincerity, utmost care and unflinching love that nurture everyone at home.

MOTHER. Being a mother is a function that is exclusively given to women by God. No one plays the role of a mother better than a woman who bears child on her womb. For this role, Juana performs a wide range of roles in children's upbringing since she educates them in all areas of developmental growth: social, emotional, physical, cognitive and independence. God has given mothers a special gift of intuition that allows them to have a keen sense of what is best for their kids, what they are good at, how they may flourish in the future, and what gifts and abilities they should be cultivating to the fullest extent possible in order to live their lives according to God's design.

TRUTH be told, once Juana walks and glides, or draws a curve on her lips, even in her simple stance alone, her innate beauty will certainly seize people’s gaze. Her inner beauty radiates the brightest through the roles she constantly assume. More than the tasks specified earlier, there are those responsibilities that go even beyond expectations.

NTA is also notable for its Juanas who are successful leaders and top performing workers: Belinda S. Sanchez, the first lady Administrator and Chief Executive Officer of the agency;

Turn to page 20

ANNUAL PHYSICAL AND CHEMICAL EVALUATION OF PHILIPPINE AND IMPORTED TOBACCO LEAF (CY 2021-2022)

by *Cyrus Raymond C. Olivenza & Leonora P. Nudo*

Introduction

The conduct of physical and chemical evaluation of local and imported tobacco leaves is one of the core functions of the Quality Assurance Division of the Industrial Research Department. The activity aims to establish quality standards of tobacco leaf based on its physical and chemical characteristics and enhance the techno-physical facilities and reference materials for quality determination of tobacco leaf. The project led to the approval of the NTA Harmonized Grades System through Board Resolution No. 653-2017, dated 21 April 2017, and is currently in its 16th year of implementation.

The NTA Harmonized Grades Standard, Harmonized Grades for Locally Grown Leaf Tobacco (Virginia and Burley) Effective Trading Season 2018 and NTA Grading System for Cigar Filler, has been continually in force since its first year of implementation in all licensed tobacco buying stations and field canvassers through Memorandum Circular No. 001, series of 2018, dated 20 February 2018. The NTA Grading System for Cigar Filler is used as a basis in the evaluation and classification of Native tobacco according to leaf grade (high, medium, and low) and physical characteristics (length, degree of injury or damage, body, texture, and color).

This article highlights the processes involved in the implementation of the research project, analysis of CY 2021-2022 data, and recommendations of the division based on the gathered data.

Collection and Processing of Representative Tobacco Leaf Samples

Leaf samples of locally produced tobacco (Virginia, Burley, and Native) are procured at prevailing market prices from buying firms and selected farmers in the different tobacco-growing provinces. The Virginia Tobacco leaf samples are collected in Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Abra, and La Union. The Burley Tobacco and Native Tobacco (Cigar Filler) leaf samples are collected in Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Cagayan, and Isabela. The imported tobacco leaf samples are procured from the different tobacco manufacturers that use imported tobacco leaf for their manufactured cigarettes. All tobacco leaf samples are personally collected and documented to ensure that it will represent the needed requirements for leaf characterization and evaluation.

The procured tobacco leaf samples are labeled and stored for safekeeping in laboratory storage facilities. The samples are physically evaluated using the NTA Harmonized Grades Standard. A portion of the samples is also submitted to the Techno-Laboratory Services and Instrumentation Division

(TLSID) for chemical analysis. For CY 2021-2022, the chemical evaluation of tobacco leaf samples focused on the analysis of total alkaloids as nicotine and chloride content of locally produced and imported Virginia and Burley tobacco leaf samples. The nicotine and chloride contents among tobacco types and subtypes, across leaf positions, and from various sources are analyzed using the Cundiff-Markunas Method (AOAC Method 960.08) and Mohr Method, respectively.

The data generated are tabulated and processed to (1) make meaningful analyses on the current quality status of locally grown tobacco leaf per tobacco type and subtype, by province or country of origin, by farmer or company, and by crop year, (2) make historical comparisons, and (3) assess the chemical quality of local against imported tobacco leaf based on international quality standards. Results of the analyses are reported in the Annual After-Operations Report (AOR). The AOR serves as a reference material of the Agency and agency partners like tobacco farmers, trading centers, manufacturers, and researchers from the academe and other government agencies. The stakeholders are also provided with copies of the result of chemical analysis for their use and appreciation on the quality of their tobacco produce.

Evaluation of Tobacco Leaf Samples, CY 2021-2022

A. Summary of Physical Evaluation

A total of 292 tobacco leaf samples were collected from Regions 1, 2, and CAR: 163 Virginia, 87 Burley, and 42 Native/Cigar Filler samples. Compared with the previous crop year, the quality of tobacco declined from Choice

Table 1. Physical characteristics of local Virginia and Burley tobacco (neutral and topped/improved flavors), CY 2021-2022.

	Virginia		Burley	
	Neutral	Topped	Neutral	Topped
Most abundant among leaf groups	Leaf (36.47%)	Leaf (35.46%)	Cutters (36.05%)	Cutters (35.59%)
Ripe leaves	85.56%	84.13%	61.34%	66.60%
Body	Medium (46.84%)	Medium (50.08%)	Medium (46.88%)	Medium (47.70%)
Color	Lemon (54.19%)	Orange (63.12%)	Tan (64.66%)	Tan (55.32%)
Color intensity	Strong (37.33%)	Strong (48.75%)	Moderate (38.84%)	Deep (28.34%)
Leaf structure	Open (51.68%)	Open (59.59%)	Open (69.16%)	Open (67.65%)
Leaf quality	Good (24.48%)	Fine (33.18%) Good (14.24%)	Good (44.15%)	Choice (36.58%)
Leaf shine or finish	Oily (58.08%)	Oily (63.12%)	Clear (40.84%)	Clear (41.89%)
Mean length (in.)	16.17	21.76	21.40	
Mean width (in.)	6.44	8.01	9.53	



(Left photo, L-R) Romel E. Calautit of NTA Ilocos Norte, Mario D. Lagmay of ULPI, Cyrus Raymond C. Olivenza, and Dina B. Dela Reyna; Olivenza (middle photo) and Dela Reyna (right photo) check on leaf samples.

(40.80%) to *Good* (24.48%) for Neutral Flavored and from *Choice* (40.51%) to *Fine* (33.36%) for Topped tobacco for CY 2021-2022. The decline was caused by freak rains in January and February 2022 that damaged tobacco crops in fields and curing barns. Table 1 summarizes the physical characteristics of both neutral and topped/improved flavors of Philippine Virginia Tobacco and Philippine Burley Tobacco.

B. Summary of Chemical Evaluation

The suitability of tobacco to be used for production is dependent on its manufacturing capacity and smoking quality. Smoking quality depends on the chemical

Table 2. Chemical composition of local Virginia and Burley tobacco (neutral and topped/improved flavors) per leaf position, CY 2021-22.

Leaf Position	Virginia				Burley			
	Neutral		Topped		Neutral		Topped	
	Nicotine (%)	Chloride (%)	Nicotine (%)	Chloride (%)	Nicotine (%)	Chloride (%)	Nicotine (%)	Chloride (%)
Lugs (X)	1.25	0.64	2.59	0.28	2.73	0.85	2.32	0.62
Cutters (C)	1.23	0.69	2.52	0.41	2.42	1.13	3.46	0.59
Leaf (B)	1.01	0.62	2.62	0.33	3.42	1.45	4.30	0.61
Tips (T)	0.52	0.50	-	-	-	-	-	-
Average	1.04	0.65	2.56	0.34	2.86	1.14	3.36	0.61

VIRGINIA: Nicotine (%) is expressed per dry weight of sample. The favorable level of nicotine is 1.50%. The optimum chloride level is < 1.00%.

BURLEY: Nicotine (%) is expressed per dry weight of sample. The favorable level of nicotine is 3.00%. The optimum chloride level is < 1.00%.

composition of leaf material (CTRI, 2018). The stimulatory effect of tobacco products is attributed to its nicotine content, an important metric in the quality of tobacco leaf. The same is true with its chloride content. Chloride in leaf influences the combustibility of leaf. Thus, measuring these quantities will give a hint on the smoking experience to be expected of a tobacco leaf. Table 2 summarizes the chemical characteristics of both neutral and topped/improved flavors of Philippine Virginia Tobacco and Philippine Burley Tobacco.

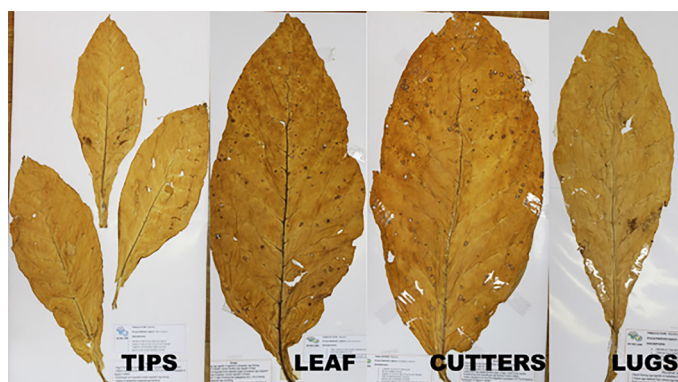
High nicotine level and satisfactory chloride content were evident in topped tobacco plant. A favorable level of average nicotine content was observed in Virginia and Burley topped/improved flavor tobacco. Leaf (B) contained the highest amount of nicotine among the leaf groups as the nicotine level of topped tobacco leaf increases per leaf position. The chloride content of tobacco leaves was at optimum level except in Burley Neutral tobacco.

The average chemical composition of locally produced Native tobacco for CY 2021-2022 was also determined. Among the leaf grades, BMF had the highest percentage of total alkaloids as nicotine. The chloride content for leaf groups were within acceptable level except for M1 (Table 3).

Table 3. Chemical composition of Native tobacco, CY 2021-2022

Batek High	5.22	0.78
Batek	3.74	0.79
Lizo Long	2.67	0.65
Lizo medium	2.82	0.90
Lizo Short	1.44	0.94
Morado	4.41	0.61
Cigar Filler High	1.03	0.70
Cigar Filler Low	0.97	0.64
Superior	3.48	0.48
M1	1.74	1.33
M2	1.94	0.43
L1	2.01	0.26
L2	1.47	0.46
CL	4.35	0.20
CM	5.34	0.12
CHF	5.94	0.18
BL	6.65	0.05
BMF	7.38	0.49
BHF	6.23	0.07
Mean	3.62	0.53

Values are expressed per dry weight of sample



Turn to next page

C. Summary of Chemical Evaluation for Imported Tobacco

Imported Tobacco Samples were collected from three manufacturing companies namely, La Suerte Cigar and Cigarette Factory, JT International (Philippines) (JTI Phil), and Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corp., Inc. (PMFTC). The samples collected were subjected to chemical analysis to determine their % Total Alkaloids as Nicotine and %Chloride. The result of the chemical analysis are shown in Table 4.

The country with the highest average %Nicotine for Virginia Tobacco came from Brazil with 3.53% while the lowest came from Indonesia and Bangladesh with 1.35%. For the average %Chloride, the highest average came from Indonesia with 1.52% while the lowest came from Tanzania with 0.27%.

For the Imported Burley Tobacco, the highest average %Nicotine came from China with 3.86% while the lowest were from Bangladesh with 1.12%. On the other hand, the highest average %Chloride can be seen on the samples from Philippines with 2.31% followed by Bangladesh with 1.74% while the lowest average came from Zambia with 0.30%.

For the Imported Oriental Tobacco, the highest average %Nicotine came from North Macedonia with 2.25% while the lowest came from China with 0.78%. For the average %Chloride, the highest average came from Indonesia with 2.15% while the lowest came from Turkey with 0.50%.

Table 4. Chemical Analysis of Imported Tobacco per Tobacco Type per Country of Origin.

Tobacco Type	Country of Origin	Average % Nicotine	Average % Chloride
Virginia Tobacco	Bangladesh	1.35	0.86
	Brazil	3.53	0.57
	China	2.79	0.46
	Indonesia	1.35	1.52
	Italy	2.13	0.44
	Philippines	2.12	0.98
	Serbia	1.86	0.67
	Spain	2.26	1.25
	Tanzania	2.23	0.27
Zimbabwe	2.77	0.34	
Burley Tobacco	Argentina	2.65	0.33
	Bangladesh	1.12	1.74
	China	3.86	0.33
	India	1.82	1.14
	Malawi	2.33	0.31
	Mozambique	1.2	0.53
	Philippines	2.57	2.31
	Thailand	1.98	1.14
	Uganda	3.6	0.41
	USA	2.97	0.5
	Zambia	2.01	0.3
	Oriental Tobacco	China	0.78
Greece		2.6	0.95
Indonesia		2.15	2.15
Lebanon		1.84	0.54
North Macedonia		2.25	0.84
Thailand		1.01	1.14
Turkey		1.49	0.50

Recommendation

Based on the data gathered, the IRD-Quality Assurance Division recommends the following:

1. A continuous annual physical and chemical evaluation of Philippine tobacco (Virginia and Burley) should be conducted to determine whether the locally-produced tobacco meets the international grade and classification standards and chemical composition requirement.

2. Tobacco farmers must strictly follow the Package of Technology (from use of recommended variety to proper curing method) recommended by the buyer firm and NTA.
3. Adopt curing practices that include the use of prescribed curing facilities and curing shed, careful handling of cured leaves to avoid injury and waste, and use of alternative fuel (e.g., coal briquette) in flue-cured Virginia.
4. Provide leaf grading and classifications training to tobacco farmers, extension workers, and stakeholders.■

WE for Gender Equality... from page 17

Minerva P. Mizal, Management Consultant; department managers Dinah E. Pichay (Internal Audit), Fortuna C. Benosa (Corporate Planning), Myrna O. Lozano (Industrial Research); and Noralyn I. Ilica, NTA Vigan Branch Manager; and all the women employees who all contribute towards the achievement of agency's goals and vision.

It is noteworthy that organizations and governments in the world have policies in place that help improve women's understanding of their potential in the areas of health, education, employment, and so forth. They have raised societal awareness and establish public attitudes supporting women's empowerment, and implemented laws and regulations that guarantee a safe and open environment for

women's participation and leadership.

Women's rights should be protected as well as women's organizations and movements be enabled and supported to achieve gender equality and an inclusive society. Gender equality is more than a goal in itself; it is a precondition to attain the growth and development of the economy and the society as a whole.

JUANA, a pillar of strength, shines her brightest in all walks of life: as a leader, a motivational speaker, an educator, a heroine, a professional, a homemaker, a mother, and the list goes on. Amidst challenges, she remains a beacon - eloquent, powerful, confident and empowered. ■

Tobacco Dust: An efficient bio-toxicant for fish ponds

Text and Photos by **Freddie G. Lazaro**

DANILO C. Trongco, a member of the NTA Governing Board, affirmed that the TD Plus produced by the NTA Tobacco Dust Processing Plant (TDPP) is an efficient bio-toxicant cum *lablab* growth enhancer in the fishpond.

He said that tobacco dust is an excellent replacement for the highly toxic, cyanide-based chemicals in pond poisoning or sterilization of fishponds before fingerlings' stocking.

"The use of chemicals in pond poisoning is not safe to the environment because its toxicity will splash away through the outlets during pond washing that eventually harm the natural habitat of the water resources downstream," he said.

He announced this breakthrough in other uses of tobacco during the 56th Fishery Industry Forum at the J & V Hotel and Resort, Barangay Sevilla, San Fernando City, La Union on March 24.

He added that the absence of pesticide residues contributes to the marketability of tilapia and it ensures consumer safety, aside from being free from chemical residues.

Trongco is an outstanding freshwater inland fish farmer who owns a 2.8-hectare fishery farm in Barangay Nagtupacan, Lagangilang, Abra.

Tobacco dust is an organic and natural insecticide due to its nicotine content that decimates snails inhabiting



fishponds. As a molluscicide, it acts swiftly to protect fishes and their eggs from predatory snails and other creatures that exist in ponds.

He added that the tobacco dust would reduce water pollution and nurture the natural habitat in the bodies of water, and promote the growth of *lablab* or algae – a natural fish food, and a soil conditioner.

For now, the NTA TDPP has an available supply of 500 bags of TD

Plus ready for sale/distribution to the fish farmers.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Region 1 headed by Director Rosario Segundina P. Gaerlan initiated the Fisheries Industry Forum anchored with the theme, "Masaganang Pangisdaan Tungo sa Maunlad na ekonomiya."

The forum, participated by the local fisherfolks in La Union aims to re-direct the usual mindset of stakeholders as competitors and to encourage the main actors of the fishery industry to work as partners for harmonious working arrangements to increase productivity and income.

Senior Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer Christopher R. Supang, officer-in-charge of the NTA-TDPP, disclosed that at least 100 metric tons of tobacco wastes from Universal Leaf Philippines Inc. (ULPI) are in the process of TD Plus production. ■



Director Trongco gives NTA officials a tour of his one-hectare fish pond in Lagangilang, Abra.

IN HIS comparative trial sampling, Director Danilo C. Trongco said he raised 50,000 tilapia fingerlings with the use of TD Plus in his one-hectare fishpond and another 50,000 fingerlings in his other one-hectare fishpond with chemicals as water pollutant for pond poisoning.

He said that during the culture period, tilapia in fishponds treated with TD Plus took four months to grow before harvest. On the other hand, tilapia in fishponds treated with chemicals took 5.5 to grow before harvesting.

Both fishponds produced 11,250 kilograms of tilapia sold at P170 per kilo with a total gross sale of P1,912,500.

Trongco earned a 45 percent or P593,810 net income from the fishponds treated with TD Plus compared to the 25 percent or P389,025 net income from the fishponds treated with chemicals.

"I have a higher net income from fishponds treated with TD Plus due to my lesser production cost as compared to the cost of production in the chemically-treated fishponds during the trial sampling period," he said.

He spent less commercial feeds in the ponds treated with TD Plus due to the conversion of the tobacco dust as organic feeds for the growing tilapia within 20 days after stocking.

In the chemically treated fishponds, he used commercial feeds for feeding upon tilapia stocking.



TGY contestant for Native Batek Jose H. Corpuz (2nd from right) in Payocpoc Norte Weste, Balaosan, La Union.



TGY contestant for Native Cigar Melvin Maltizo (5th from left) in Unag Amulung, Cagayan.

Tobacco Growers of the Year

On-Farm Evaluation of National Level Contestants

by Rhonelle P. Sulicipan
Photos by Gay Anne B. Ronduen

The members of the TGY National Technical Committee (NTC) conducted on-farm evaluation of the contestants for the Tobacco Growers of the Year, national level for crop year 2022-2023. The contenders who were provincial winners of the same tobacco type/subtype for the last three years came from the eight NTA Branch Offices in Abra, Ilocos Norte, Vigan and Candon in Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Isabela and Cagayan.

NTC visited the 33 farmer-contestants on their farms from December 2022 to March this year. Breakdown of contestants per tobacco type/subtype is as follows: two for Virginia Neutral Flavor, 10 for Virginia Improved Flavor, two for Burley Neutral Flavor, 10 for Burley Improved Flavor; four for Native Batek-Chewing Tobacco, and five for Native Cigar Filler.

Fueled with energy and guided by fairness and commitment, NTC members, assisted by the Branch Offices, were able to evaluate tobacco farms in San Manuel in Tarlac; San Fabian, Laoac and Malasiqui in Pangasinan; Balaosan, Bacnotan, San Juan, Bauang and Sto. Tomas in La Union; Candon City (Brgy. Allangigan

II), San Esteban, and Galimuyod, and San Juan in Ilocos Sur; Pilar in Abra; Badoc, Pinili, Bacarra and Pasuquin in Ilocos Norte; Solana, Sto. Niño and Amulung in Cagayan; and Roxas, Quirino and Reina Mercedes in Isabela.

The on-farm evaluation was composed of two visitations on two stages of the crop: before first priming and after fourth priming. Using the criteria set, each contestant was evaluated as to technology adoption which includes on-farm technology, adherence to Good Agricultural Practices and absence of non-tobacco related materials in the field and in the work area and adherence to legislation on child labor, overall physical condition of the plants which includes crop stand, missing hills, off-types, disease incidence, insect damage, harvesting and curing technology, farm recording and innovativeness. The NTC scheduled its subsequent on-farm evaluations based on the results of the first evaluation.

The on-farm evaluation formed part of the overall results of the competition aside from production yield and leaf quality which is based on purchase invoice voucher and chemical analysis as other criteria. ■



TGY contestant for Native Cigar Mary Grace S. Bautista (2nd from left) in Santiago, Reina Mercedes, Isabela.



TGY contestant for Virginia Improved Flavor Lorante F. Antalan (rightmost) in Aglipay, Pinili, Ilocos Norte.

Tobacco monitoring point set at Ilocos Norte border

by *Divina D. Pagdilao*

NTA Ilocos Norte led the multi-sectoral launching of the tobacco monitoring point at the Ilocos Norte-Ilocos Sur Highway Boundary in Brgy. Sta Cruz, Badoc, Ilocos Norte on March 7.

Joining NTA in the launching were the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the local government units.

According to NTA Ilocos Norte officer-in-charge Engr. Randy I. Abella, the inspection of proper documents of tobacco transported out of the province will help in the documentation of all tobacco produced in Ilocos Norte, as it will also check licenses of tobacco buyers/haulers passing through the monitoring point.

The representatives of the participating sectors agree that the monitoring of the volume of production will ensure that the LGUs will get an equitable share from the tobacco excise tax under Republic Acts 7171 and 8240.

Ilocos Norte Vice-Governor Cecilia Araneta-Marcos commended NTA and the industry stakeholders for their efforts in safeguarding the province's tobacco production. Jonathan O. Torralba, Sanggunian Panlalawigan Chairman on Committee on Agriculture, cited the importance of the industry in the progress of our tobacco communities and the province as well.

NTA Ilocos Norte Chief Agriculturist Divina D. Pagdilao said that there was a notable increase of documented volume of tobacco production in the last three years of implementation of the tobacco monitoring point.

Saturnino A. Agatep, Acting Supervising TPRO, discussed the activities to be undertaken and the travel documents that need to be checked, when a tobacco hauler passes through the border.

Nestor C. Casela of the NTA Governing Board, said that the tax on tobacco is giving large benefits in the coffers of the different municipalities and the province, and that a huge amount of the excise tax goes to the Department of Health despite its campaign against tobacco.

The PNP, represented by PCol. Julius C. Suriben, Provincial Director, and PMaj. Joseph H. Tayaban, Municipal Police Chief of Badoc, committed their support with their personnel to complement the NTA Ilocos Norte staff in manning the monitoring point.

Branch Operations staff and PNP Officers will man the monitoring point 24 hours (2 shifts) while staff from the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPAG), Sustainable Development Center (SDC), and the Municipal Agriculturist Office (MAO) will be on duty at 12-hour dayshift, seven days in a week.

A monitoring team composed of senior staff from the implementing agencies/sectors occasionally conduct inspection and scrutiny of the accomplishment and prepared a periodic report for submission to the Office of the Governor.

Also present in the launching were Atty. Juan Alfonso Augustus Jose, Chief of Staff of the Governor; Luzviminda L. Ortal, SDC officer-in-charge; Engr. Ma. Teresa L. Bacnat, of OPAG; Jennice S. Gorospe, Municipal Administrator of LGU Badoc; Badoc SB Member Mary Pauline M. Lacuesta; Municipal Agriculturists Reynante Cayme and Philip Galang, of Badoc and Pinili, respectively. ■



NTA Ilocos Norte OIC Engr. Randy I. Abella, PMaj. Joseph H. Tayaban, PCol. Julius C. Suriben, Ilocos Norte Vice Gov. Cecilia Araneta-Marcos, SPM Jonathan O. Torralba, and Atty. Juan Alfonso Augustus Jose. (photo: Gem Denise Z. Ventura)



NTA Candon, NTA Kadiwa pay courtesy call on Narvacan official

NTA Vigan Manager and designated NTA Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita Project Manager Noralyn I. Idica and Candon OIC Manager Adonis D. Lazo and their staff paid a courtesy call on local officials of Narvacan, Ilocos Sur on January 11.

Mayor Pablito Sanidad, Vice Mayor Carlos Valera, Councilor Joven Ampo Jr, and Municipal Administrator Pablo F. Sanidad II welcomed the new set of project management team of Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita project.

Idica discussed with the local officials the concerns of tobacco farmers and the rehabilitation plan for the AgriPinoy facility that heavily damaged by flash floods and earthquakes in the past years.

Lazo presented the new staff composition of the team covering the towns of Narvacan and Nagbukel.

Once rehabilitated, Lazo said the NTA AgriPinoy Project will revive the hog industry benefitting the farmers in Narvacan and its adjacent towns. The project will also help generate jobs and additional income for the residents.

Lazo also discussed with the municipal mayor the schedule of the distribution of farm inputs from the Quick Response Fund downloaded by DA-RFU1 to NTA and other support assistance to the farmers. ■ (Andrea Marie C. Contillo)

Candon City resumes Tobacco Festival



CANDON City successfully resumed the celebration of the Tobacco Festival after its pause during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The festival was held from March 18 to 28, with a variety of activities ranging from trade exhibits, sports events, and the Miss Tobacco Philippines Pageant that highlights the celebrations.

NTA co-sponsored the pageant, with a total of 15 participants from different tobacco-producing provinces represented by the eight provincial branches.

In her message during the coronation night on March 25, NTA

Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez lauded the City Government of Candon for the resumption of the festival as a way of advocating the growth of the industry, not only in Candon, but to all tobacco-growing provinces.

She said that the activities would boost awareness about the importance of tobacco to the economy and the promotion of the local tourism industry.

NTA also sponsored the competition for the longest-cured Virginia tobacco leaf among locals and Tobacco Quiz.

The festival highlights the city's

Text and Photos by Freddie G. Lazaro

achievement as the country's largest producer of the Virginia-type tobacco and to celebrate bountiful harvests. Candon City is home to around 1,500 tobacco farmers, according to Mayor Eric Singson. "It is really agriculture," said Singson. He added that the crop was the main livelihood for many farmers in the region. ■



(L-R) Keena Austin Madamba, Miss Philippine Tobacco Insitute; Erika Klein Liguden, Miss Tobacco Philippines 2023; and Jechris Rael Cusipag, Miss National Tobacco Administration.

Miss Tobacco Philippines 2023

MISS NTA La Union Erika Klein Liguden became the first-ever Miss Tobacco Philippines when she clinched the top prize during the coronation night held at the newly-constructed Candon City Arena on March 25.

Liguden, a fourth-year BS Radiologic Technology student of Lorma Colleges and a resident of Paringao, Bauang, La Union, bested 14 other candidates.

The two other winners of major awards were Miss NTA Cagayan Jechris Rael Cusipag as Miss National Tobacco Administration, and Miss NTA Ilocos Norte Keena Austin



Madamba, as Miss Philippine Tobacco Institute. Madamba also won Best in Costume and Best in Swimsuit.

Other minor awards and their winners were Miss NTA Vigan Austrie Sanchez, Miss Photogenic and Best in Gown; Miss NTA Candon Heidie Haber, Miss Friendship; and Miss NTA

Vigan Lorelei Alquiza, Best in Talent.

The pageant, jointly sponsored by Candon City, NTA and the Philippine Tobacco Institute (PTI) had a total of 15 participants from different tobacco-producing provinces represented by the eight provincial branches.

The pageant, then dubbed as Miss Virginia Tobacco until 2019 was only for Virginia-producing provinces, limiting the competition to Ilocos Provinces and Abra. It was renamed to Miss Tobacco Philippines to include provinces producing Burley and Native type, thus opening the entries from Isabela and Cagayan. ■

Longest Flue-cured Tobacco, Tobacco Quiz



(1st photo, L-R) Candon City Vice-Mayor Kristelle G. Singson, NTA Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez, Evelyn Valdez, Rep. Kristine Singson-Meehan, City Councilors George Valdez and Godofredo Abrero (2nd photo, L-R). Administrator Sanchez, Jan Vincent Agricola, and Rep. Singson-Meehan.

TOBACCO growers from Candon City, participated in the Longest Flue-Cured Virginia Tobacco contest, held on March 25 at the Multi-Purpose Hall, City Hall compound in Candon City.

The entry of Evelyn Valdez of Barangay Parioc 2nd bested 76 other entries in the Topped Tobacco Category. Other winners in the category were the entries of George Valdez Jr also of Barangay Parioc 2nd, Second Place; and Ruben Molina of Barangay Allangigan 1, Third Place.

In the Neutral Tobacco Category, the entries of tobacco growers from Barangay Talugtug won the top prizes: Alex Pagaduan, First Place; Melchor Pagaduan, Second Place; and

Jojo Pagaduan, Third Place.

Students from the Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College (ISPSC) dominated the top prizes in the Tobacco Quiz, participated by 44 students from Candon City. They were Jan Vincent Agricola, First Place; Zcynel C. Romero, Second Place; Ma. Fe Solance R. Duque, Third Place.

Acting Deputy Administrator for Operations Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay was the overall chairperson of the Board of Judges in the longest flue-cured tobacco contests, with NTA Isabela Manager Jeoffrey T. Bautista, Vice Chair; and NTA Pangasinan Manager Engr. Roger T. Madriaga, NTA Cagayan Manager Gilbert A.

Taguiam, and NTA Ilocos Norte OIC Engr. Randy I. Abella, as members for the Topped category; and with NTA Vigan Manager Engr. Noralyn I. Idica, Vice Chair; and NTA Abra OIC Romeo Y. Paculdo and NTA Candon OIC Adonis D. Lazo as members for the Neutral category.

Internal Audit Manager Dinah E. Pichay chaired the Tobacco Quiz with NTA Management Consultant Minerva P. Mizal as Vice Chair, and former Deputy Administrator for Operations Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana, former NTA Candon Manager Estrella G. De Peralta, and Farm Technology and Services Department OIC Evangeline C. Cabigan as members. ■



Miss NTA Vigan **Austrie Sanchez** tries on tobacco sticking during the visit of Miss Tobacco Philippines candidates to topped Virginia tobacco farms and curing barns in Barangay Parioc Segundo, Candon City on March 4, as part of their immersion in the tobacco industry before the coronation night. The contestants clad in their working clothes tried on various activities in tobacco production such as topping, harvesting, sticking, hanging, and unloading of tobacco from the curing barn.

NEWS BRIEFS



Laoac, Pangasinan. Tobacco farmers of Laoac, Pangasinan received P25,000 in cash (per hectare), 4 bags of sulfate (per hectare), and water pumps from the municipality's 2019 share of excise tax, at the Municipal Ground, Poblacion, Laoac, Pangasinan on January 31. Laoac Mayor Ricardo D. Balderas, together with the members of the Sangguniang Bayan, distributed the assistance to tobacco growers. Assisting in the distribution of farm inputs were personnel from the Municipal Agriculture Office headed by Pedro B. Velasco. Staff from NTA Pangasinan, Israel C. Ramos (Agriculturist II), Marlon G. Facun (TPRO I) and Manuel M. Delfin (TPRO I) witnessed the distribution. (Text: Ann Desiree N. Gacayan; Photo: Manuel Delfin, Jr.)

Tuguegarao City. The city government of Tuguegarao City headed by Mayor Maila Ting Que led the groundbreaking of the Cooperative Multi-Purpose Building at Barangay Gosi Norte. The P2.99 million construction cost was sourced from the city's share of the tobacco excise tax, under Republic Act 8240, for production year 2019. Mayor Ting-Que said that with partnership with NTA Cagayan, the LGU will look for ways to give more assistance to the local tobacco farmers, and strengthen the tobacco industry. According to NTA Cagayan Manager Gilbert A. Taguiam, the city government is expected to receive P3.5-million from the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) as the LGU's share from tobacco excise tax for production year 2020. The Tobacco Producers Cooperative of Tuguegarao City, headed by Gosi Norte Barangay Chair Gloria Exclamador thanked the city government for the new infrastructure. Also present in the groundbreaking were the city councilors, staff from the City Engineer's Office and the Office of the City Agriculturist, and NTA Cagayan Acting Chief of Operations Alicia Malab. (Photo: Elimario Batang Jr.)



Vigan City. The NTA Vigan joined the Vigan City's Fiesta Viva Vigan Grand Parade in celebration of the anniversary of the cityhood of Vigan and the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, the city's patron saint, on January 25. The parade route passed through the center of the historic city where thousands have joined in attendance from different sectors: city officials and employees, Liga ng mga Barangay, State Universities and Colleges, Provincial Government of Ilocos Sur, national government agencies and corporations, associations and cooperatives, and private companies. (Photo: John Paul J. Casela)



Candon City. Internal auditors from the NTA Central Office, Resty Cambe, Rosalie Catura and Kriscia M. Vidal joined the NTA Candon in the assessment of the Beef Cattle Production Assistance Project (BCPAP) in the Branch Office on March 17. Among the beneficiaries visited were Emelita Bermudez of Brgy. Lubing and Jayroldan Torcuato of Brgy. Bessang in Burgos, Ilocos Sur. The internal auditors were assisted by NTA Candon officer-in-charge Adonis D. Lazo, Project Coordinator Oliva C. Galdones, and Area Supervisors Helen Teodora D. Pena and Marcella P. Pulgar, and Area 1 Team Leader Leonardo C. Escobar and assisting extension worker Annabelle Dasalla. (Photo: Oliva Galdones)



FTSD Researchers are effective 'teachers,' too

by Rhonelle P. Sulicipan



The CBNHS-SHS students after receiving their Certificate of Completion from FTSD OIC Evangeline C. Cabigan and PDO IV Ma. Mercedes M. Ayco (seated 3rd and 2nd from left, respectively) together with the FTSD Teachers. (Right Photos: MMSU OJT Students having their hands-on activities on quality tobacco production technology. (Photos: Kenneth Russell L. Tanaval & Jennifer A. Manglal-lan)

If you think that the Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD) researchers are only expert in research, you have no idea about their hidden prowess! FTSD researchers are effective “teachers,” too!

For the past years before the COVID-19 pandemic, the educational institutions in the community had been tapping NTA as their partner in their students’ holistic development, whether on-the-job training for college students or work immersion for senior high school students.

During the first quarter of 2023, 14 senior high school students under Agri-Fisheries strand from the City of Batac National High School (CBNHS) were accommodated for their work immersion from February 13-24. This was followed by the accommodation of the eight fourth year students of BS Agriculture, Major in Agronomy from the Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU) in Batac City for their on-the-job training. It consisted of two batches with 15 days per batch, which ran from January 30 to March 9.

Upon discussion of the NTA history, mandate, vision, mission, priority programs and projects, and the PowerPoint presentation of the different research projects being conducted by FTSD, the researchers taught the learners about the cultural practices on tobacco growing from seed sowing, pricking bed preparation, selecting and pricking healthy tobacco seedlings, fertilizer application, off-barring and hilling-up, furrow irrigation, furnace construction and installation of curing barn insulators. They were also taught how to conduct plant evaluation and how to identify the different characteristics of the different tobacco types. These activities provided them a better understanding of the jobs in the department.



The culminating activity of both groups highlighted with the awarding of Certificate of Completion by FTSD OIC Evangeline C. Cabigan and Project Development Officer IV Ma. Mercedes M. Ayco witnessed by the FTSD ‘Teachers’ namely: Prescilla A. Nisperos, Community Development Officer III; Engr. Kenneth Russel L. Tanaval, Science Research Specialist (SRS) II; Christine E. Oclaray, SRS II; Jennifer A. Manglal-lan, SRS II; and Research Assistant Raymart P. Guzman.

The students were so thankful to NTA for all the lessons they have gained from the FTSD Teachers.

Jerville Jake M. Cabansag, SHS department head of CBNHS, and the students were so thankful to NTA for all the lessons they have gained from the FTSD Teachers. Mr. Cabansag was impressed by how their students were able to develop confidence as they showed improvement in expressing themselves.

Now, anyone who says the FTSD researchers are only researchers? They are definitely effective teachers, too. With all the commitment and dedication to their work, they will continue to be of service not only to the tobacco farmers, but also to the development of a stronger nation by molding the younger generation. ■

NTA visits ULPI tobacco contract-growing farms in Ilocos



NTA top management officials headed by Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez, along with former Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar, had a two-day tour of tobacco farms under the tobacco contract growing system program of the Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. (ULPI) in Balaoan, La Union, and Narvacan, Ilocos Sur on February 20-21.

In a briefing before the tour, ULPI President Winston P. Uy presented their newest digital online application called as Farm Location and Management Execution (FLAME) App, which is now utilized by their technicians in monitoring the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and tobacco production of their farmers.

The FLAME App has the Farm Location and Management Applications (FLMA), an interactive mobile-based software specially designed to provide real-time information to the farmers and ULPI Personnel.

The ULPI presented to the NTA officials the different tobacco types being processed in its plan in Agoo, La Union ready for distribution to the cigarette manufacturing companies here and abroad.

Mr. Uy showcased the air-cured Native Cigar Broadleaf tobacco that has great potential for production in the country because it has a higher buying price than the other type of native tobacco. (FGL)



(L-R) Former Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar, ULPI President Winston Uy, and Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez (Freddie G. Lazaro)



[#DAInternalBudgetHearing](#). NTA Administrator and CEO Belinda S. Sanchez (3rd from left) pose with other DA officials and heads of agencies after the presentation of the proposed agency's plan and budget during the Fiscal Year 2024 Internal Budget Hearing initiated by the Department of Agriculture held on March 13- 17 at Hacienda Gracia Resort and Hotel in Lubao, Pampanga. Assisted by NTA Corporate Planning Manager Fortuna C. Benosa, Administrator Sanchez discussed in detail the continuing agency's programs and projects under "Tier 1" funded by the 2023 approved General Appropriations Act (GAA) that includes the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS) and Curing Barn Assistance Projects (CBAPs). The internal budget hearing was part of the annual planning and budgeting cycle for government agencies. Among the participants of the hearing were the DA Executive Committee (EXECOM), composed of Undersecretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and MANCOM, which includes bureau/service directors, heads of attached agencies, and corporations with their respective planning and budget officers. (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)

TRANSFER OF OFFICE

THE NTA Central Office has moved to a new office at the 11th floor of The Upper Class Tower Block S-139, Quezon Ave. corner Scout Reyes St., Barangay Paligsahan, Quezon City. We look forward to seeing and serving you at our new office address.

