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about the cover

On the only way to a farm in Mataragan, Malibcong, Abra. Rice researchers, extension workers, development communicators, and other stakeholders travail long, difficult, and sometimes dangerous trails just to produce and bring the best technologies to the most obscure fields – for their dedication to service and love for farmers outweigh all the risks and hardships. This issue presents their stories that might have been unnoticed but have brought change to the lives of farmers and their communities.

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Executive Director's Note

JOHN C. DE LEON

Pillars that make a strong institution

One of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations for 2030 is Peace, Justice, and "Strong Institutions".

Building a strong institution requires people who are burning with passion, hungry for change, and willing to give their best in the name of development.

"Institutional strength and government capacity depend largely on the civil servants that populate the offices ... and fields around the world." Patricia Paskov, analyst in the Impact Evaluation Unit of World Bank, emphasized in her article titled "To achieve sustainable development goals, let's get civil service right".

Abhijit Naskar, a famous Neuroscientist, young author, and advocate of global harmony and peace, also highlighted the importance of civil servants in his book "When Humans Unite: Making A World Without Borders". "On [their] shoulders lies the responsibility of humanity's present and future. If the armed forces are our last line of defense in any corner of the world, then [civil servants] are our first line of defense in every corner of the world. Injustice must ask [their] permission before entering the lives of the people. Civil servants are the first vanguards of the society."

In this line, building a culture where integrity, competency, and honesty are deeply ingrained is fundamental. The first executive director of DA-PhilRice shares in this issue of DA-PhilRice magazine how leadership influences workers and their attitude (page 12).

With the culture built decades ago, the dedication of civil servants in going the extra mile in serving the rice farmers and the nation has been proven time and again. This issue documents some of the many stories of devotion and perseverance in the rice industry in the name of nation-building.

Site-specific fertilizer recommendations eyed for less rice production cost

DA-PhilRice, through the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) Seed and Extension programs, is currently developing location-specific fertilizer recommendations to help local farmers optimize their resources amid high fertilizer costs.

"Farmers' resources have now become more limited because of high fertilizer costs. Meanwhile, current practices show that if farmers continue to apply fertilizers that are not appropriate to crop needs, their resources are wasted, and yields can be sacrificed. We want to help them address that," Dr. Flordeliza Bordey, DA-PhilRice RCEF Program Management Office head, explained.

Studies show that mineral nutrients are vital in boosting rice growth and development. However, some nutrients have limited availability in the soil and must be supplemented with fertilizer application.

Experts say that too little application would diminish yield, while an excessive application is costly and can lead to soil and water pollution. Thus, they emphasize the need to determine the amount of mineral nutrients available and lacking in the soil.

With this, the Institute has started conducting massive soil analysis of farmers' fields representing major soil types in RCEF target areas through the use of the Minus-One-Element Technique (MOET) kit. The project started in 2021 wet season and is expected to complete generating specific recommendations for 512 municipalities by end of 2023.

"We have processed the recommendations from the first batch of the MOET setups and are getting ready to cascade these to the target areas. We are collaborating with our partner-local government units (LGUs) to ensure that the recommendations reach the farmers, which they would hopefully adopt," Bordey noted.

MOET setups.

MOET is a diagnostic tool used to identify deficient macronutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium and micronutrients including sulfur, zinc, and copper in field conditions. Part of its results shows the right element, amount, and timing of fertilizer application needed by the crop for better yields.

"We would also like to encourage our partner-LGUs to help us not only in helping disseminate the fertilizer recommendations to farmers but also to implement programs that complement our advocacy on proper nutrient management like providing the required fertilizers," Bordey said.

The RCEF-Seed Program is a component of Republic Act 11203 or Rice Tariffication Law, which allots P10 billion funds every year for the rice farmers from the rice tariff earnings of the country. The program is a six-year government initiative to help farmers improve their competitiveness. The LGUs and lawmakers assist in its implementation. Mandated to help ensure a rice-secure Philippines, DA-PhilRice leads the RCEF-Seed Program. It is also the government's lead agency on rice research and development.

ASEAN event boosts Institute as e-commerce merchant

DA-PhilRice was introduced in an international market during a recent three-day online sale spearheaded by the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on E-commerce.

Chona Narvadez, our promotions supervisor, said that the "ASEAN online sale has strengthened the institute's reputation as a legitimate e-commerce merchant in the Philippines."

In the region-wide activity, DA-PhilRice, in its https://shopee.ph/DA-PhilRice_bdd platform, featured nutrient diagnostic tools, including the Leaf Color Chart (LCC) and reading materials on rice production.

User Kelly Cereali shared that LCC – a handy field instrument used to determine the rice plant's nitrogen requirement through its leaves-had helped her identify the plant's needs.

"I was worried about our rice plants, so I purchased and tried the LCC. I'm glad that it worked! It was also so easy to use. I recommend this to those engaged in rice production," she said in her 5-star review of the product.

The booklet on "PalayCheck System for Irrigated Lowland Rice" also received a 5-star rating from its buyers.

"This publication is a compelling reference material for agricultural extension workers, trainers, and farmer-leaders to facilitate and guide farmers in their crop management activities," a satisfied user commented. Participated in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, the online sale aimed to improve consumer trust in e-commerce, strengthen partnerships between stakeholders and businesses, and raise awareness of ASEAN identity and solidarity.

- JOSHUA P. MENDOZA

Rice farmers learn more ways to save

Practices and technologies that can help farmers save in rice production were showcased in the Lakbay Palay hosted by DA-PhilRice, Sept. 14-15.

With the theme, "Bukid Tipid Tips, Subukan!" the two-day event highlighted the use of certified seeds of recommended varieties, mechanized farming, and rice-based technologies such as Palayamanan – an integrated farming system, vertical tower garden, and drip-irrigated aerobic rice.

According to in-house experts, farmers can save a lot by practicing the alternate wetting and drying technology, using the combine harvester, and right fertilizer application. These practices yield an estimated per hectare savings of P7,000, P3,250, and P2,600, respectively.

Savings from using certified seeds, proper land levelling, using the drum seeder, and not applying pesticides also range from P380 to P1,960.

Around 600 farmers from Pangasinan, Zambales, Oriental Mindoro, Nueva Ecija, Bataan, Pampanga, Bulacan, and La Union attended the Lakbay Palay. The activity was also livestreamed in the DA-PhilRice fanpage: https://fb.watch/fyH4iReLlD/.

- JOSHUA P. MENDOZA

Participants in the fertilizer derby conducted by DA-PhilRice for four seasons showcased the performance of their products - biofertilizers and/or biostimulants - in rice production.

Balanced use of chemical and biofertilizers, stimulants trims costs, yields higher

To help farmers increase crop yields amidst the skyrocketing price of fertilizer in the global market, the Department of Agriculture (DA), through DA-PhilRice, is promoting the use of biofertilizers and biostimulants in combination with inorganic fertilizers.

In a fertilizer derby, organized by DA-PhilRice, results showed that the combinations of biofertilizers and/or biostimulants with inorganic fertilizers in the three-to-four seasons produced high yields while lowering the fertilizer cost per kilo of *palay* harvested.

"We need more production of scientifically tested biofertilizers as we are concerned that the Ukraine-Russia war will disable us from getting the much-needed urea our farmers are clamoring to obtain," said then Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar.

"Biofertilizer products, such as the ones used in the trials, are the technologies that we need in our campaign for balanced fertilization, the main focus of which is to enhance soil-based productivity, bringing about nutrient-building qualities of the soil for sustainability," he added.

In the DA-PhilRice trial, one combination resulted in 7tons/hectare (t/ha) produced at P7.77/kg. The cost amounted to P2,000/ha in addition to inorganic fertilizers. Another combination resulted in 6.73t/ha with costs of P8.18/kg while one combination yielded 6.35t/ha at P7.71/kg cost. All three products performed better during the dry season with an average yield of 7.91t/ha at P7.33 cost/kg and during the wet season with 5.22t/ha yield at P8.58/kg cost.

Participated in by mostly private companies, the derby aimed to determine the best nutrient management technology packages to achieve high yield with the least cost in an environmentally sound manner. The technology packages of most participants included a combination of inorganic fertilizers and other products such as biofertilizers and biostimulants, soil conditioners, and micro-elements for foliar applications.

The current cost of using biofertilizers/biostimulants ranges from P900 to P6,900/ha depending on the number of applications.

Dr. Leylani Juliano, one of the project leaders, cited that the first product's composition based on the analysis provided by the Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority included brassinosteroid, triacontanol, small concentrations of other elements such as iron, potassium oxide, copper, zinc, Vitamin B1, B2, B6, and has a liquid concentrate microbially synthesized from plant materials.

The second product is a mix of organic materials and root exudates or fluids, which the manufacturing company claimed can create healthy soil by increasing the presence of beneficial bacteria and fungi, and inhibiting the population of harmful microbes in the soil.

The third product is a nanobiofertilizer, which contains nitrogen, phosphate, soluble potash, other materials such as algae, bacteria, fungi, sea kelp, mineral electrolytes, and humic & fulvic acids. Except for the first product, these products reduced the use of inorganic fertilizer by 25-50 percent.

Juliano elaborated that in most cases, various materials can be used as biostimulants/biofertilizers such as algae extracts, humic acids, enzymes, hormones, and plant growth-promoting microorganisms.

"Various researches show that natural biostimulants can enhance nutrition efficiency in plants and overall plant growth, as well as improve soil conditions to boost the growth of the rice plants," Juliano said.

Other combinations yielded 5.83 to 6.25t/ha with production costs of P7.79 to P8.08/kg of paddy produced in the three to four seasons of the derby. The derby's fifth season is ongoing.

"With the global price hike of fertilizers due to the ongoing Ukraine crisis, DA welcomes more options for fertilizers and other inputs to augment fertilizer availability while pushing for the balanced fertilization strategy," the former agri chief said.

Dar has been a long-time advocate of balanced fertilization, stressing that to attain the maximum potential of farmlands, a judicious combination of organic and inorganic inputs is necessary. - **MERVALYN O. TOMAS**

Digital rice info hub launched

To make high-quality seeds more accessible, the Department of Agriculture recently launched an information system that will hasten rice seed-related transactions and processes.

Jointly developed by DA-PhilRice and the Bureau of Plant Industry, the system includes production planning, field data collection, documentation, and geotagging; monitoring, inventory, and distribution of seed reserves; seed source-tracing; application and approval of accreditation and seed certifications; and report generation, among other modules and apps.

Through the new system, DA-PhilRice received its renewed certificate of accreditation as government inbred seed producer from the National Seed Quality Control Services.

This newly launched rice information system will bring a more efficient application and approval of accreditation for seed growers.

Dennis Franco M. Layug, director of DA's Information and Communications Technology Service, congratulated the implementers as the apps, he said, will expedite operations and enhance work efficiencies.

Meanwhile, Anthony B. Obligado of the Bureau of Agricultural Research, the agency that funds the project, said that the system does not only guide seed growers but also policymakers and implementers in crafting policies, planning, and implementation.

The system is expected to be fully deployed nationwide in 2023.

- CHARISMA LOVE B. GADO-GONZALES

Root plasticity variation suggests promising source of drought resistance

An award-winning collaborative study has found genetic variations correlated to root plasticity, a trait vital for drought resistance, from selected rice germplasm in the Philippines.

Root plasticity is the ability of the root system to change its architecture and maintain a plant's productivity by promoting growth and development, during the stresses brought about by changing soil conditions.

The study wrote that 17 single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) located in six chromosomes were identified from 119 traditional rice varieties (TRV) evaluated under well-watered and drought-induced field trials (line-source sprinkler system).

The SNPs are significantly correlated to root plasticity traits under soil moisture stress conditions. The researchers noted that one possible candidate gene associated with root plasticity under severe drought stress was found in Chromosome 2.

"Out of the germplasms tested under drought conditions, Baksalan Kawalwal showed the most promising results for root plasticity under fluctuating soil moisture," Dr. Jonathan Niones of DA-PhilRice, main investigator of the study, said.

Information on the genetic control of root plasticity from TRVs' will be useful for breeders in improving the rice biomass production and its adaptation under less favorable environments, according to Niones.

Titled "Genome-wide Association Mapping for the Identification of SNPs Controlling Lateral Root Plasticity in Selected Rice Germplasms of the Philippines," the study was conducted by researchers from DA-PhilRice, DA-Crop Biotechnology Center (DA-CBC), and UP Los Baños (UPLB).

It was awarded as one of the 2022 Outstanding Scientific Papers during the 44th Annual Scientific Meeting of the National Academy of Science and Technology.

Co-authors were Maria Corazon Cabral of DA-PhilRice's Genetic Resources Division, Dr. Roel Suralta, Dr. Nonawin Lucob-Agustin, and Antoinette Cruz of the DA-CBC, and Dr. Desiree Hautea and Patrick Louie Lipio of UPLB.

The paper was published in the Philippine Journal of Science and can be read here: https://philjournalsci.dost.gov.ph/publication. **- PRECIOUS MAE C. GABATO**

what's new in rice research ?

Nanotech R&D: hopes for agricultural productivity

Nanotechnology (nanotech) is revolutionizing farming, requiring a critical study on ultra-small-scale materials. "Nano" means "one billionth."

Nanotech can set the standards for fertilizers, pesticides, and other agri-supplies that contain agrochemicals. DA-PhilRice scientists and researchers are now navigating into nanotech by conducting a "fertilizer derby" experiment led by Dr. Leylani Juliano, chief science research specialist (SRS). A certain nano fertilizer is also being jointly developed with the Central Luzon State University (CLSU), with Dr. Marissa Romero, DA-PhilRice chief SRS leading. On the other hand, Dr. Jacqueline Bagunu, senior professor-researcher at the Pampanga State Agricultural University (PSAU), is likewise into deeply experimenting on the potentials of Zeolite Nanoparticles-infused botanical pesticides.

At the epicenter of rice research is "Fertilizer Derby: Masaganang Ani at Mataas na Kita Challenge," a project that supports the "Food-Secure Philippines" Program in making our farmers profitable. "This demonstration trial means that together, we want to evaluate the type of results that each participant (product) considers as reasonable and ultimately successful, under the conditions that currently exist in the local area or region," Juliano said.

"This initiative also aims to provide opportunities for all players in the rice sector to show what can be done to improve yield toward a rice-secure country and to evaluate fertilizers and related products registered for use in rice production by the Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority (FPA). The derby is at DA-PhilRice stations in Nueva Ecija, Isabela, Batac, Negros, Agusan, and Midsayap," Juliano added.

"We are now processing the nutrient management information of those who have completed the four seasons to determine the best package. At the end of 2022, we will have more participants who will complete 1-3 seasons of field evaluation with the information of their products analyzed," Juliano revealed.

"With the Fertilizer Derby project, we hope to package the best fertilizer products and nutrient management technologies for increased profitability and productivity," Juliano said with optimism.

Nano-molluscicides

Using nano-pesticides presents a great challenge for biodiversity and in achieving precision agriculture. Ongoing at PSAU since 2020 is the exploratory project on the potentials of Zeolite Nanoparticles-infused botanicals such as Balakat, Neem, and Makabuhay against Golden Kuhol in direct-seeded rice areas of Pampanga.

Bagunu describes this experiment as "an innovative strategy that encourages the use of safe and environment-friendly plant-based molluscicides."

PAMPANGA STATE AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

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> **The use of nano-molluscicides is a promising field. The project's outputs will greatly contribute to creating nature-based solutions to combat rice pests.**
>
> DR. JACQUELINE BAGUNU

"The use of nano-molluscicides is a promising field. The project's outputs will greatly contribute to creating nature-based solutions to combat rice pests," Bagunu said.

Nanotech perspectives

"The growing number of novel nanotechnology products in the country is surprisingly unsupported by low patent applications although the overall increase in funding shows a sheer number of potential nanotech R&D applications," Romero divulged.

DA-PhilRice and CLSU have conducted a joint research on nanosilica-structured biofertilizers, which were subjected to different field conditions to assess their effects on improving soil quality for agricultural purposes.

Is the potential of nano-enabled pesticides still a dream?

"Before any product could be released, a thorough research should be done on bioaccumulation in the food chain and their interactions with other environmental pollutants. Ecotoxicological research will determine the adverse effects of NPs on other organisms, including humans," Romero replied.

Romero believes nanotech has potentials to boost productivity by increasing plant nutrition, precision farming, water-use efficiency, crop protection against pests and diseases by devolving nano-enabled formulations, and environmental restoration of degraded sites by nano-bioremediation.

"The more innovative approach is replacing the use of conventional fertilizers with nanofertilizers to efficiently use essential nutrients," Romero qualified.

Rice across *the country*

COMPILED BY CHARISMA LOVE B. GADO-GONZALES


DA-PhilRice Agusan

PERLENE R. GUINDANG


DA-PhilRice Bicol

IELA O. MOSQUITE


DA-PhilRice Los Baños

Use of MOET increases Surigao farmer's harvest by 36%

The use of Minus-One-Element Technique (MOET), a farmer-friendly and quick soil analysis kit developed by DA-PhilRice, helped a farmer in Bislig City, Surigao del Sur increase his harvest from 35 to 55 cavans (62kg/cavan) using his 0.8-ha field.

Ryan F. Alvar attended the PalaySikatan, a technology demonstration farm established by DA-PhilRice Agusan under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund Seed Program.

With his new learnings, he started using MOET in his field for the 2022 dry season cropping. Based on the MOET app's recommendations, Alvar used two bags of ammonium phosphate (16-20-0) and one bag of complete (14-14-14) fertilizer, which helped him reap additional income.

- KRISTIANNE MARIE D. CLORIVEL

Bicol farmers in saline-affected areas are on track to resilience

Adaptation and mitigation initiatives for rice and rice-based production were demonstrated in more than 10ha in the barangays of Naga, Sogod, Bolo, and Baybay – in Tiwi, Albay, from May to June 2022. This was to help address the continuous threat brought about by climate change in the Bicol region, wherein 42% of agricultural lands are affected.

Saline-tolerant varieties, NSIC Rc 468 and Rc 470, were introduced to 25 farmer-cooperators and showcased in the techno-demo following the PalayCheck System. To enhance their knowledge and skills, a season-long rice production training for saline-affected areas was also conducted from May 10 to August 16, 2022. Farmer-cooperators were capacitated with proper management of rice under such stress during the 14 sessions.

- DENISE BIANCA Y. SADULLO

Quezon farmers to apply updated farming techniques

Forty-six farmers from three associations attended a training on inbred rice production and farm mechanization on August 30 to 31, 2022 at Brgy. Sta. Catalina Norte, Candelaria, Quezon.

The farmers from Prosperity Farmers, Women Economics for Improvement, and Pahilina Norte Irrigators Associations also enhanced their knowledge and skills on the modern production of high-quality rice seeds. Featured were the updated PalayCheck and Palayamanan Plus Systems, and decision-support tools such as the Minus-One-Element Technique, Leaf Color Chart, Rice Crop Manager, and alternate wetting and drying. The participants' skills in varietal selection, land preparation, machine operations, and nutrient, water, harvest, and post-harvest management were enhanced.

- CHRISTINE M. REYES

DA-PhilRice Isabela assures ample supply of RCEF seeds for next season

To ensure the availability of certified seeds for the next seasons of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) Seed and National Rice Programs (NRP), a consultation meeting with rice seed grower cooperatives (SGCs) of Cagayan Valley and the Cordillera Administrative Region was conducted on August 3, 2022. The meeting gathered necessary inputs in planning the distribution of registered seeds (RS) to accredited SGCs and to settle issues relative to supply, particularly on timely availability, volume, and variety.

The meeting was participated in by 11 SGCs, DA-RFO2, and heads of the Bureau of Plant Industry-National Seed Quality Control Services of Tabuk City, Kalinga; Tuguegarao City, Cagayan; and San Mateo, Isabela. After the presentations and discussions, it was resolved that RS would be distributed through cooperatives based on their target of minimizing the shortage of seeds for seed growers committed to RCEF or NRP.

Consultation meetings are conducted regularly by DA-PhilRice Isabela before the start of each season to refresh the seed cooperatives of their roles in the RCEF program and of their contribution to attaining a rice-secure Philippines. **- DIANA P. LIM**

DA-PhilRice Midsayap

Study: Filipinos prefer low-GI rice

The study, conducted by DA-PhilRice Central and Batac stations with Mariano Marcos State University, shows consumers' high awareness and acceptance of low- glycemic index (GI) rice. The results show that 87% of the respondents highly accept low-GI rice, with 76% even willing to buy it at a higher price.

Using survey data from 10 highly urbanized cities, the results show a low level of awareness in the majority of the respondents. The study only yielded high consumer acceptance and willingness to buy low-GI rice after its nutritional benefits are communicated. Thus, the researchers see the need to disseminate more information about rice GI, especially to schools and government institutions, to better help consumers choose healthier rice.

GI is a value assigned to foods based on how fast it increases blood glucose levels. As such, "low-GI rice like brown rice, is recommended for controlling blood sugar levels because it releases glucose in the body slowly after intake," scientist Riza Abilgos-Ramos explained.

- FRANZEL MONIQUE BONILLA

DA-PhilRice sub-station to rise in Aklan

The tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among DA-Regional Field Office (RFO) 6, DA-PhilRice, and Aklan State University (ASU) was signed on September 6, 2022, at ASU Campus, Banga, Aklan—where the sub-station will be established using the DA-RFO 6 building.

DA-PhilRice chose Aklan because it is the center of its other areas of coverage in Panay Island, Antique, and Capiz. According to Dr. Gerardo Estoy, Jr., DA-PhilRice Negros branch director and the lead proponent of the sub-station, establishing a Liaison Office in Banga will provide faster and safer movement for RCEF Operations, especially in terms of logistics, personnel, delivery of documentary requirements, and IEC materials for farmers.

The sub-station is expected to be occupied by the end of this year.

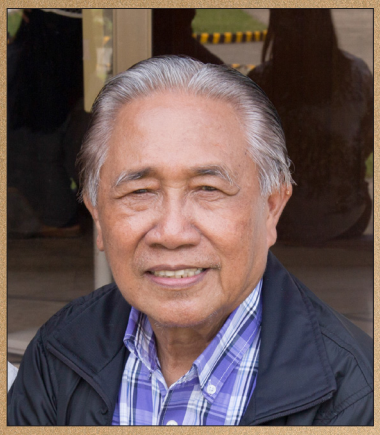
- VANESSA A. TINGSON

DA-PhilRice Midsayap turns over MP grain seeder to partners

After completing 32 demonstration trials implemented by DA-PhilRice Midsayap and its partner-agencies since 2017, the multipurpose (MP) grain seeder is now ready to be used by farmers through the Provincial Governments of South Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat, and the Tupi Research Outreach Station.

On August 24, 2022, MP seeder units were turned over by former DA-PhilRice Midsayap Director and current DA-Bureau of Agricultural Research OIC-Director Dr. Sailila Abdula to DA-12 OIC-Regional Executive Director Dennis Arpia and the said provincial governments.

The MP seeder will help reduce the production cost of rice, corn, and legumes. It can also increase the net income of farmers in rainfed areas by 20-30% and even in the water-scarce irrigated lowlands through mechanized dry direct seeding technology. The said technology decreases the risks of crop failure in rainfed areas and ensures crop establishment in case of delayed monsoon rains. It likewise addresses labor shortage during crop establishment. **- SYLVIA THERESE C. QUIRING**



> I am asking for your sacrifice as we build this institution... We are, in fact, making history. I guess the better part of the challenge is to look forward. We have to win a struggle that has always been there - to eradicate hunger and poverty.
>
> **DR. SANTIAGO OBIEN**

DA-PhilRice culture:

"An inch of time, an inch of gold"

CHARISMA LOVE B. GADO-GONZALES

Before the sun gets warmer energizing the earth, a throng of field workers in bicycles or motorcycles is already in the wide experimental farms of DA-PhilRice at 7 a.m. In the late afternoon, while the king of day scatters the amber, many researchers are still in the offices at 5 p.m., stretching the day a bit, not leaving unfinished work for tomorrow.

This is not an embracing of time that creates an unbalanced life. Rather it's a show of commitment to fulfilling the oath of a Filipino public servant: that is, to provide extra service in performing a duty.

How was the DA-PhilRice culture of giving the extra mile in serving the farmers and the nation formed even before the "Panunumpa ng Kawani ng Gobyerno" was released in 1995? Dr. Santiago R. Obien, now 87, the Institute's forerunner from December 1986 to July 2000, provides us with some narratives:

What was the DA-PhilRice culture you established then? Is that culture still visible after 36 years?

We were then in a formative year, so I let the staff perfectly deliver 70% of the output and have the 30% fail. We think while we work, and we are not correct at all times. In the third year of being with me, however, the staff must already be good and deliver the best output. That's why I also sent many of the staffers to graduate school.

Aside from being productive, the staff must, above all, be competent and honest. I discard competent but dishonest staffers. If researchers manufacture their data or admin workers give poor estimates, how can I make the right management decisions?

Competency and honesty emanate from leadership that does not collect. People change, their attitudes change, because of leadership. This work culture, I can proudly say, was embodied in everyone. And I am happy that I have witnessed in my lifetime the product of this culture. DA-PhilRice up to now receives awards recognizing the competency and honesty of the staff.

(In the book "SRO: Dare to Build", Nestor Martin, former DA-PhilRice accountant, attested that SRO is not corrupt. He refused all the commissions offered by contractors).

In one seminar-workshop in Laguna, you intoned:

"I am asking for your sacrifice as we build this institution... We are, in fact, making history. I guess the better part of the challenge is to look forward. We have to win a struggle that has always been there - to eradicate hunger and poverty.

What sacrifice were you exactly asking for?

During my time as director, salary was meager and facilities were scarce. There were more staffers than chairs. You had to wait for someone to go to the comfort room then steal your colleague's chair! Staff


KEESHA N. BORNALES

worked beyond the hours and used second-hand vehicles. Yet, excellence was demanded – and I asked them to live with it.

The people I worked with may view and interpret how we did things differently but I can now say that I have never been so blessed to have worked with people who are so dedicated, innovative, creative, intelligent, and selfless: from the deputy directors, researchers, down to the security guards, drivers, janitors, and the canteen staff who easily adapted to our ways and our work ethics. They may not have approved all of how I wanted things done but in the end, everybody cooperated and it was like one great wave and smaller ones joining in unison, lapping up research and institution-building history.

At work's end that usually was never earlier than 10 p.m., I reviewed what transpired during the day. Often, I asked myself whether I had been too hard on some people and the only answer I got was, nobody complained.

They say that you were strict and staff were antagonistic to you for being so. Despite this, you were able to build a dedicated, high-performing team, as shown by staff loyalty and awards received by the agency. What did it take to build this culture?

Sometimes, I scolded staff, not because I hated them, but because they did something wrong. They can't be around hating me. I say sorry. On many occasions, I have apologized publicly, teary-eyed. If there's something I need to redo, I should have been more gentle in saying things. But they stayed with me, and I'm grateful. Being a director is a lonely position, especially then that we're building an institution. I was in a hurry.

In my circle of temper, I held the dynamics of life – courting. I gave *pasalubong*, joined the staff in their activities, including Sunday gatherings. I joined the *Bukas Loob sa Diyos*, read the Bible even while on travel, which helped me manage my temper and cope with pressures. Gradually, staff started to disclose to me their personal problems. They did not hesitate to show me their feelings. They can cry in front of me and share with me their challenges.

All this shaped the culture of the organization. We shaped each other.

Other than mentoring managers and keeping staff on their toes, you were known for checking comfort rooms and demonstrating how to clean these areas. Why did you have to do this?

If the staff don't know, it's the leader who must teach them. I was the head; I should show, I should know. I showed them the standard. Cleanliness is important. Don't you know that an Olympics was delayed because toilets in the venue were not clean? The cleanliness of the comfort rooms can mirror the character of an institute; and the staff performing this has the most important job. I know this job because I was a janitor at the UP Los Baños during my college years.

(In the book "SRO: Dare to Build", one of his senior colleagues noted him visiting the experimental fields at 6:30 a.m. He was asked if he does not trust his project leaders. He said, "I trust them. But they may also like it this way, for me to visit their experiments. At least they are assured that they are in the right direction and that they are doing things right. We do things right together and we check on each other's work).

After three decades, what among Obien's methods should the leaders and the staff still follow?

A leader endures. A leader is not perfect, but we continue to improve in the process. A leader must listen to the staff; work together with them.

Leadership must also find ways to improve human resources. How can we enjoy *pinakbet* without rice? We can only enjoy this if the human resource is competent and honest in generating technologies and delivering extra-mile services to the rice farmers. We look at DA-PhilRice and the farmers as one entity. When we think of rice growers, we think of DA-PhilRice. Their productivity is also our productivity.

Above all, a leader must have character and honor to sustain an organizational culture that values the time for the rice farmers and regard their success as a reward equal to gold.

Producing rice seeds in pandemic times

Rice production is very vital regardless of major disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, especially because rice is a necessity. That is why despite hurdles, those who are tasked to increase rice production through hybrid rice persevere.

Before the pandemic, Dr. Fidel Ramos, senior science research specialist at DA-PhilRice Isabela, related that their three-hectare parental seed production area in Kayapa, Nueva Vizcaya was already difficult to reach when there is typhoon or heavy rainfall as mountain slopes erode. They usually leave their vehicle and use bikes to cross the closed road just to monitor and visit their area.

"With the pandemic, it is even harder as we have to do antigen tests every week to conduct the season-long training on hybrid rice seed production in Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, and Kalinga," he compared.

They also had to provide technical expertise on hybrid rice in Davao del Sur, Davao Oriental, and Quezon. However, they could not teach remedial measures or primordial sampling to seed growers online as these activities have to be conducted face-to-face if they are to be effective.

Searching for potential hybrid rice seed production areas in Luzon was the most challenging experience. Most of the public hybrid rice seeds, which could address their unavailability and inaccessibility in Luzon and the Visayas, come from Mindanao.

"We identified Buenavista, Quezon for hybrid rice seed production trials so we needed to cross Manila, which was on lockdown during that time. We dealt with provincial safety protocols in order to establish and monitor the trials. We knew that Covid cases in the provinces that we passed by were very high, but it didn't stop us from going to Buenavista. Good thing, it was worth the risk; the trials there were successful," Ramos is gratified.

The accessibility of the highlands of Nueva Vizcaya due to landslides during rainy months proved challenging in the parental production of PRUP TG102 under male-sterile environments, admitted researcher Jerry Batcagan also of Isabela.

"To monitor the crops and undertake maintenance activities, our staff frequently encountered landslides through a 5-hour motorcycle riding-in-tandem," he added.

To minimize the risk, they had three laborers assisting them in adverse climatic conditions and the prevailing

FIDEL M. RAMOS

JAYSON C. BERTO

> **To monitor the crops and undertake maintenance activities, our staff frequently encounter landslides during a 5-hour motorcycle riding-in-tandem**
>
> FIDEL RAMOS

pandemic. They also trained a farmer-cooperator to monitor and record air and water temperatures, in case their staffers were unable to visit the production site.

Down in DA-PhilRice Midsayap, North Cotabato, chief science research specialist Ommal Abdulkadil described the COVID-19 pandemic as "the most difficult time in bringing rice production technologies, especially the inbred certified seeds under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund Seed Program, to farmers in Regions 9, 12, and Bangsamoro."

Many challenges and side issues in these territories will continue to grow and become far less predictable as COVID-19 rears its ugly head. But despite this grim situation, the good news is that the pandemic has changed the work pattern, resolve, and commitment of our researchers and field staff – DA-PhilRice itself, as hybrid rice production and research continue with vigor and freshness.

feature

Overcoming challenges together

MERVALYN O. TOMAS

From private businesses to government centers, many individuals are working behind the limelight to make agriculture a vibrant industry for our farmers and the Filipino people despite numerous obstacles they have to hurdle along the way.

Joy in service

Serving farmers with joy and happiness: this is Maria Melba Wee's drive in maintaining her youthful exuberance as she continues to be in the public service.

A public servant in western Mindanao for three decades, Wee has experienced a myriad of challenges. Before she became the regional technical director for research, policy planning and regulatory, and integrated laboratories of the DA-Regional Field Office 9, she functioned as an information officer. In doing her job, she says 80% of her time is spent with farmers and only 20% is spent in the office.

She remembers her involvement years ago in the NextGen, a DA project implemented jointly with DA-PhilRice and International Rice Research Institute, which included introduction of new rice varieties to farmers.

"There were times when we had to walk around to reach the farmers because there were no available vehicles," Wee said. Seeds would at times arrive late, and her team had to explain to appease the disappointed farmers.

"We honestly tell the farmers our limitations. We let them verbalize their frustrations then we offered ways on how the situation could be made better. We eventually reached agreements with them," she shared.

Of her experiences, one of the most memorable was when she was seven-month-pregnant. She had to wake up at 3 a.m. and drive herself to a radio station for several days in a week because she anchored a farm program to promote DA's projects.

"Even when it's difficult, we don't stop being employees," she emphasized.

What motivates her to continue serving the farmers, she said, is when she learns that they use the technology introduced to them.

In her work in the rice industry, Maria Melba Wee always finds satisfaction when she witnesses farmers adopting technologies and reaping good harvests.

YVETTE T. AVELLANEDA

RICEBIS ARCHIVE

Farah Dysico (center), owner of Dysico Rice Mill and Trading, was tapped by the RiceBIS Program to help buy the rice produce of farmers in Nueva Ecija.

"Even if I don't receive appreciation for my work, as long as the work I do makes an impact on others' lives, that is enough for me," she said.

She emphasized that her greatest appreciation comes from God.

"We should be focused on the reason why we are in this job. Sometimes, we lose focus because of disappointments. We just need to continue to do what we do, and appreciate ourselves. We strive knowing that God will protect and guide us at the end of the day," she wrapped up.

their profits. Yet, they did not stop buying the *palay* produce of their smallholder-farmer provincemates.

The Dysico's started partnering with the Nueva Ecija Provincial Food Council in 2019 and the Rice Business Innovations System program of DA-PhilRice in 2020 to directly buy from rice farmers. Farah said she took part in this initiative because it is important to help stabilize *palay* prices.

"In doing this, we have to go to the farmers' fields to pick up their *palay*. It is easier for us if we buy from middlemen because they deliver the

> **Though what we're doing takes more effort without giving us additional profit; we even have to spend more for fuel to pick up farmers' harvests in far areas. But we just really want to help them.**
>
> FARAH DYSICO

Helping farmers amid adversities

Of the many challenges their business had to struggle with, the recent rises in fuel prices and labor costs specifically alarmed Farah and Ferdinand Dysico, owners of Dysico Rice Mill and Trading in San Jose City, Nueva Ecija. The steep fuel hikes increased the couple's business operation expenses, lowering *palay* to our facility at a similar price but we were more concerned with the welfare of the farmers and the community," she said.

"What we're doing takes more effort without giving us additional profit; we even have to spend more for fuel to pick up farmers' harvests in far areas. We endeavor to do it because we really want to help them," the businesswoman confided.

She believes that their efforts can motivate farmers because without the *palay* traders and agents, they can sell their produce at a higher price.

"I believe that the whole community can benefit if our farmers earn more, especially because the major livelihood in our province is rice farming. If they have better purchasing power, businesses prosper and the whole community can be transformed," she explained.

She hopes that their sacrifices could help alleviate poverty among smallholder farmers who have less land to till. "Those who own 1-to-2-hectare farms find it harder to sell their produce because they harvest less. *Palay* traders and agents buy their produce for cheaper prices, and they don't have bargaining power. Since we are consolidating harvests from a group of farmers and we are direct buyers, we can afford to offer them higher prices," she said.

Farah is fully aware of the cheaper imported rice available in the market and the preferences of consumers for foreign rice. Many rice milling businesses are closing and local rice marketing seems to be losing its luster. But, Dysico Rice Mill and Trading is thriving through difficult times because they have gained the loyalty of their clients.

"In the end, despite the struggles to help improve the farmers' income, the benefits also come back to us," she concluded.

NUTRIDENSE'S FACEBOOK PAGE

#ChallengeAccepted:

Bringing more options to rice lovers

AURA SHAZNAY P. TUMULAK

Living a healthy life is a matter of choice. While some people choose to be healthy, others take on the bigger responsibility to help others live a healthy life.

In the rice industry, there are people who took on the challenge to bring healthier rice options to more Filipinos' tables.

Rice options to curb malnutrition

Upon learning that 3 of 10 children are malnourished and 7 of 10 women are iron-deficient, Racky Doctor found a way to use rice, the staple food of Filipinos, to help curb the rising cases of malnutrition. He advocated for the use of rice-based products through the company he started in 2013 - the Nutridense Food Manufacturing Corporation based in Sta. Barbara, Pangasinan.

He started by writing a letter of intent expressing his desire to be involved in the fight against malnutrition. The DOST-Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-FNRI) wasted no time in helping him adopt their technologies, which were the rice mongo blend and rice mongo curls, now branded as RIMO blend and RIMO curls.

But marketing the products was a bit more challenging. Racky began approaching other government agencies to introduce and promote them. However, he was turned down because aside from their being unfamiliar, there was the tedium of bureaucracy and the lack of a platform through which these offices could communicate and collaborate.

He continued to lobby for the RIMO products and as luck would have it, then Cabinet Secretary and Chair of the Inter-Agency Task Force, Karlo

NUTRIDENSE'S FACEBOOK PAGE

NUTRIDENSE'S FACEBOOK PAGE

> **The choice to offer brown rice at that price was not that easy. It was between making a huge margin or getting just enough to also help ordinary consumers afford healthier rice.**
>
> HAZEL ANTONIO

Nograles, brought government agencies together to work on a single platform, the Zero Hunger Task Force.

Zero Hunger distributed functions to government agencies, and DA-PhilRice was tapped to produce raw ingredients, well-milled rice, brown rice, and mungbeans, among other materials.

What particularly began with DOST-FNRI grew to last, and now, Nutridense has adapted 26 of the institute's technologies as weapons against malnutrition.

Doctor plans to expand Nutridense's range of products as most have been complementary foods.

Cheap and healthier rice for all

Making brown rice available was not the lone goal of the Bohol Rice Processing Complex (RPC) – it was also making it accessible to all to promote better health among consumers. Thus, unlike most RPCs, they sell brown rice for a price cheaper than white.

They have been strong advocates of the Be RICEponsible Campaign in promoting affordable brown rice way back in 2016, when they offered it for only P37/kg against around P80 in malls.

"The choice to offer brown rice at that price was not that easy. It was between making a huge margin or getting just enough to also help ordinary consumers afford healthier rice," recalled Dr. Hazel Antonio, director of the Be RICEponsible campaign in 2016.

Another challenge for them was sourcing the right paddy rice to use for their brown rice supply. They needed to ensure that they were offering premium-quality rice despite the low price, so they had to use first-class varieties that also commanded higher price.

"While it was hard to offer at that price even the white rice, Mr. Alvin Mante, the Manager of Bohol RPC then wanted to support the promotion of healthier rice so he worked closely with DA-PhilRice and National Food Authority (NFA) with little benefit to them. So to achieve the goal of P37, we had to support their marketing through the help of NFA retail stores," Antonio added.

The present manager, Marie Francis Cubal, also recognizes the importance of making brown rice and other unpolished pigmented rice more available and affordable to the public. Hence, despite the challenges brought about by the typhoon Odette to their operations, they continue to produce unpolished rice, though at a higher price given the inflation rates.

"People need to be healthier now more than ever, so we had to find ways to at least keep ourselves going even on a smaller scale because many depend on us for rice that is healthy and safe." Cubal said.

Keeping the passion for almost four generations

CHARISMA LOVE B. GADO-GONZALES

Orge's (L) technologies such as the upland microtiller had brought him to experience "killer" roads and bridges and nuances of culture.

"We're not here because it's an easy life. We're here to make lives easy."

This is the essence of serving the Filipino rice farmers, according to Dr. Santiago R. Obien, now 87, first DA-PhilRice director. A crux deeply ingrained that no insurgencies, vandalized fields, travel ordeals, and limited resources can interrupt.

Conflict passers-by

Reaching the marginalized farmers entails faith without neglecting self-preservation.

Datu Ali "Alex" Sumlay of DA-PhilRice Midsayap, development worker for 17 years, feared not returning home, which he left daily at 6:30 a.m., during his assignments in the fourth phase of the Japan International Cooperation Agency – Technical Cooperation Project and as agricultural promotion officer deployed in Maguindanao.

While handling the Farmer Field School (FFS), Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fighters had to escort him to the learning sites as most of the learners were combatants. He requested the participants not to bring firearms during the sessions to avoid distracting the facilitators and fellow farmers.

Sumlay had the scare of his life when they narrowly escaped a hijack attempt on their trip going to Lanao del Sur in 2007. Their truck was loaded with rice seeds, fertilizers, and FFS kits, among other forms of agricultural assistance.

"Thanks to the heavy rains, good maneuvering of our driver, and pure luck with the proximity of a Philippine Marines detachment, we were able to sidetrack the chase," he shook his head.

Susan Brena of CES, a postharvest physiology/seed technology expert for 27 years, also had to sleep with guns under her bed in one of her field works in a remote, mountainous area of Lanao del Sur during the Hybrid Rice Commercialization Program in 2003. They were instructed to teach a seed grower how to rogue his AxR seed production field. Instead, she and her team ended up roguing his field themselves. Due to distance, they stayed overnight in the cooperator's house whose cabinets were full of high-powered guns. Although quite frightening, his house was still the safest place to pass away the night as going out and looking for better accommodation could have meant getting stuck in the crossfire of an armed conflict. That night, she survived on a pack of crackers and a liter of mineral water.

Cliff hangers

To serve farmers also means blending with their way of life and trails.

Dr. Ricardo "Dong" Orge of CES, agricultural biosystems engineer for 30 years, remembered pretending to eat "tinolang aso (salted soup with dog meat)" with kuchay or garlic chives during the pilot-testing of the DA-PhilRice-developed microtiller in the highlands. His stomach churns out at the mere thought of eating dog meat, but he did not want to offend their host, a respected tribe member in Brgy. Bugnay, Tinglayan, Kalinga.

"I only ate kutchay, then put some of the leftover bones of my colleague on my plate," he giggled.

To reach the village, the multi-awarded engineer said they had to traverse a rough road with hairpin turns and steep cliffs for half a day. One false

JAYSON C. BERTO

Development workers traverse muddy roads to conduct a farmers' forum and educate youth on rice and climate change in Brgy. Rogongon, which is two hours away from Iligan City.

DA-PHILRICE PHOTOBANK

Reaching farmers in remote areas such as in the 5th class Guihulngan City is our top priority.

JAYSON C. BERTO

> **To reach them, I had to negotiate some terraces and had to walk hundreds of steps of earthen stairways up and down hills. One of the study sites for the microtiller was Mayoyao, which is more than 1500 meters above sea level.**
>
> BETHZAIDA CATUDAN

move in driving would mean being swept away to the Chico River. With a shortage of luck, the possibility of being caught in the firing line of warring tribes was also high.

"After hitting the dangerous highway, we had to cross a rotting bridge for three minutes. Every swayed step made me think of my comfort zone. I never looked down at the Chico River because it was like staring at death," Orge would rather forget.

The mountains also sized up Bethzaida "Tsibay" Catudan of DA-PhilRice Batac, agricultural economist for 21 years, during her days in Ifugao conducting surveys on manual milling and adopters of the microtiller. In these visits, she had to rely on her physical strength to get to the destination and to fight motion sickness for two hours.

"To reach them, I had to negotiate some terraces and had to walk hundreds of steps of earthen stairways up and down hills. One of the study sites for the microtiller was Mayoyao, which is more than 1500 meters above sea level. Since the survey was conducted during a cold month, having no amenities for hot shower led me and my survey team into sometimes missing our baths. I also got to unload my meals during the trips," she narrated.

Meanwhile, CES' Evelyn "Belen" Bandonill's unforgettable story as a food researcher was when their microbus almost lost its balance due to the muddy slippery soil on the way to their workshop in Banaue.

"I was afraid and was already thinking our vehicle would slide off the cliff. Some of the staffers already got off the vehicle and pushed it away from the cliff. I was really praying hard that God would spare our lives and that we could still go home safely. Thank God, He allowed it!" she exclaimed.

Weather toughie

Faith, as solid as the cedar tree in the Bible – strong, durable, graceful, and spreading wide, is more than a survival means, an anchor providing a soft, comfortable pillow during uncertainties.

Traveling around the climate-challenged areas of DA-PhilRice Bicol, according to Branch Director Dr. Victoria "Vicky" Lapitan, is "challenging and a bit 'scary' due to our country's archipelagic nature. Her travels are usually by boat.

Once, on her way back to Albay, she was stranded for five days in Allen, Northern Samar due to big waves brought about by a strong typhoon. Although they stayed in a rural hotel, food became inaccessible so they consumed the *pasalubong* intended for their staff and family. They ate suman, moron, binagol, and pineapple to survive the cruel weather. They were lucky to have bought clothes and personal stuff before the typhoon intensified its wrath.

Newbie Shantel Anne Nicole Chavez of CES, agroenterprise development specialist for a little over a year, was also restless for almost two hours thinking of the heavy rains diminishing the quality of rice, which farmers will sell to a trader in San Jose City, Nueva Ecija. She is a co-implementer of the Rice Business Innovations System program.

"Although we're safe in the truck, I was worried that this consolidated harvest of the farmers in Batitang, Zaragoza, Nueva Ecija would get soaked and would not be sold at a good price. I can't let the farmers down. This is their first transaction of collective marketing. Only prayers then could help us," she said.

Social surmounters

In bringing new technologies to farmers, DA-PhilRice staffers are further weathered with challenges from the public and even colleagues.

Dr. Antonio "Tony" Alfonso who worked with DA-PhilRice for 25 years in various capacities, would never forget the day when the Golden Rice field trial in Pili, Camarines Sur was vandalized and destroyed by those opposing the technology.

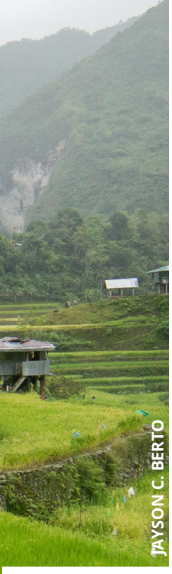
Long walks become a piece of cake knowing that this sacrifice will lead to farmers' improvement.

"On that fateful day in August 2013, I was attending an important meeting in Manila when the attack happened. I remember talking to my project researcher who was sobbing as she told me, '*Wala na Sir, sinira na nila*' (The site is gone, already ruined)," Alfonso said.

Fences were destroyed and the plants were trampled upon and uprooted. The incident was painful for him and the team, for all of their work were unceremoniously decimated by the violators.

"We worked hard and were meticulous in getting all the necessary approvals to establish the trial, and in making sure that we comply with country regulations and local government unit requirements. We knew that an attack was a possibility so we did extra work on community engagement and ensured safety measures at the site but the destruction was deliberate and the attackers were determined," the plant breeder recounted.

Rides toward the farmers' area may not be comfortable, but PhilRice staffers find reward in the rice grower's warm welcome.

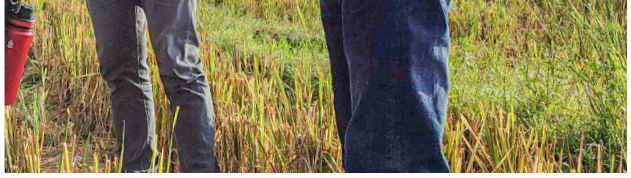

JAYSON C. BERTO


DA-PHILRICE BICOL


DA-PHILRICE PHOTOBANK

Susan Brena has braved insurgencies in the call of duty.


JAYSON C. BERTO



At the end of the day, being able to share the technologies and the impact they can make on the lives of farmers is the best reward government workers could receive.

There are challenges. Sleepless nights and tiring days are innumerable. But I'm happy here, especially when farmers I work with tell me that I inspire them.

SHANTEL ANNE NICOLE CHAVEZ

Reward reapers

Amidst these struggles, Alex, Susan, Dong, Tsibay, Belen, Vicky, Tony, and Shantel shared common sacrifices while performing their duties: being away from their families during field work, working beyond the hours, paying for some project expenses, and going out of their comfort zones, even into dangerous situations.

"There are challenges. Sleepless nights and tiring days are innumerable. But I'm happy here, especially when farmers I work with tell me that I inspire them. When I slackened for a while, they were texting me, asking me to come back. I'm happy 'cause the farmers in our sites appreciate and are happy with us. It gives fulfillment," Shantel said.

For Vicky, her heart was touched witnessing a farmer's joy way back in 2004.

"I brought a check as payment to one of the hybrid rice seed growers in Narra, Palawan. When I handed him the check, he called his three children and shouted excitedly, '*Makakakain na tayo sa Jollibee, may bayad na ang* DA-PhilRice (We can now treat ourselves at Jollibee with this DA-PhilRice payment).'

"It eases all the fatigue to see how we are affecting the lives of our farmers in a positive way," Vicky said.

These stories of staffers' braving challenges only show that the Institute and its partners are striving to bring their best for the farmers at all times and in all places – because DA-PhilRice does not only hope to be a conduit of technologies, but also a source of joy and hope for the farmers.

How deep is your love (for rice)?

INFOGRAPHICS: SARAH JOY N. RUIZ

We know you love rice, but how do you show it? Check the following criteria and know how deep your love for rice is. Be honest!

3 pts.

Cooks only the amount of rice that we can eat

3 pts.

Eats brown rice at least once a week

or twice a week

5 pts.

3 pts.

Cooks rice properly to prevent it from overcooking

3 pts.

Eats rice mixed with other staples at least once a week

or twice a week

5 pts.

3 pts.

Recycles leftover rice by frying it or making porridge (lugaw)

3 pts.

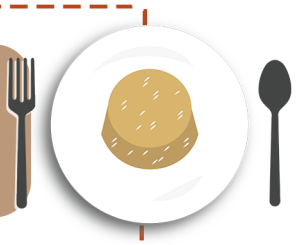
When eating out, orders half-cup of rice to avoid wastage or shares it with someone

3 pts.

Finishes every grain of rice on my plate

5 pts.

Influences others to eat brown rice and rice mixes for better health



3 pts.

Buys local rice

5 pts.

Encourages others to support our local farmers by buying local rice

3pts.

Encourages other consumers to not waste rice

NOTE: If you get 31 points or more, contact us and we will reward your commitment!

1 - 15 points

Oooops! you only like rice. This is a pretty shallow level to achieve. We hope you can deepen it by appreciating the efforts of our local farmers to put rice on our plates and by eating healthily. Try harder to be RICEponsible.

16-30 points

Your love is at a conditional commitment level. Your continuous actions to save and value rice will be a great help to our farmers and to achieve rice sufficiency for our country. Level it up further by influencing others to do the same!

Above 30 points

Congrats! You have an unconditional commitment for rice! You give so much care and gratitude. Thank you for your efforts to support the rice industry and its sustainability. You are indeed a RICEponsible role model!

Behind RCEF's high-quality seeds

ANNA MARIE B. BERTO

REUEL M. MARAMARA

Undertakings, no matter how similar they may seem, will always require new strategies and perseverance to succeed.

The Davao Multipurpose Seed Producers Cooperative (DAMSEPCO) and South Nueva Ecija Seed Growers Multipurpose Coop (South NESGMPC) are not new to government procurements. Since their establishment, providing seeds for public and private programs has been their bread and butter. So, when DA-PhilRice contracted them as partners in the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) - Seed Program, they said yes without hesitation.

However, when they were oriented about the program's system of operations, they realized the experience would not be the same. But they still decided to take on the challenge for the love of rice, farmers, and our country.

Strategizing

Leonardo Guinto, the chairperson of South NESGMPC, immediately convened his members to strategize. It has always been his principle to openly communicate with the group.

"RCEF has a unique process compared with the other programs we have participated in. For one, we needed to deliver to the local drop-off points. We do not have enough funds for trucking expenses then," Guinto, 67-year-old, said.

They planned their land-and-sea transport scheme because they were asked to supply seeds in other regions apart from Central Luzon, such as CALABARZON, Bicol, Western and Central Visayas, and Northern Mindanao.

South NESGMPC, whose seeds were to be delivered to other regions, had to make advance payments to laborers and truckers, and wait for reimbursements. The good thing, according to Guinto, is that the DA-PhilRice processes payments quickly.

"We do not face major problems in processing payments with the Institute, as long as documents are complete, properly filled out, and well-organized," he explained.

Dennis Ybañez, the then newly installed manager of DAMSEPCO, said they also shared the same predicament.

"With RCEF, we were given a sure market, so we could not turn down this opportunity. However, the demand is gigantic. I often asked myself, '*can we really give what they're asking from us*?' The seed delivery process is also very systematic so it is different from our former engagements," the 31-year-old manager said.

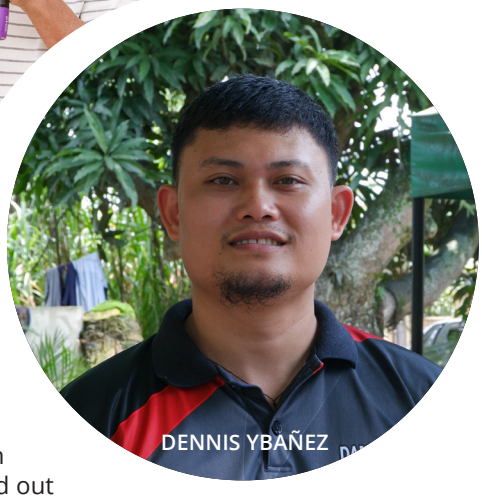
With only two trucks, they had to hire trucking services because the program contracted them to deliver seeds to Davao, Western Visayas, Caraga, SOCCSKSARGEN, and Northern Mindanao regions.

DAMSEPCO also struggled with the availability of registered seeds (RS). Without RS, it is difficult for seed growers to produce certified seeds.

"We met with the DA-PhilRice and the regional seed coordinators to find solutions to our concern. They thought it was more strategic if the major buyers of the RS produced by DA-PhilRice will be their partner-seed growers' cooperatives/associations in RCEF," Ybañez reported.

He was satisfied with how they were able to immediately resolve emerging concerns such as this, thanks to the active assistance of the RCEF Program Management Office (PMO) of DA-PhilRice.

LEONARDO GUINTO



DENNIS YBAÑEZ

"It is hard but we share the same goal with the program – to produce, deliver, and distribute high-quality seeds to the farmers. It is our social responsibility. We want to support our rice farmers, too," Ybañez pronounced. So far, they have not received any complaints on the seeds they produced, and he is proud of their feat.

Guinto's group also believed in this so they remain firm in ensuring that their members produce high-quality seeds. "We always aim to do better because the message is clear for us – the program should not be taken lightly. DA-PhilRice is very strict but we understand that it is crucial," he said.

They pledged to make sure that their seeds are true to the claim on the sacks.

The biggest challenge

Among all the challenges that both groups faced, one seemed to stand out and will most likely stay.

The RCEF seed sack has a resounding message - "*Dekalidad na binhing palay*" (high-quality rice seeds). It even has a checkmark to signify that the label is true.

According to Teodora Briones, head of the PMO Planning Division and main coordinator of the program's seed contracting with eligible seed coops/groups, DA-PhilRice holds on to the premise that farmers deserve the best. So, they see to it that the RCEF seeds are true to their claim, as their sacks blare.

This keeps Guinto and Ybañez on their toes.

The rewards of enduring

The story of both cooperatives does not end with challenges, thankfully. While staying as RCEF's partners, they endured with flying colors.

South NESGMPC and DAMSEPCO were recognized as outstanding partners of RCEF Seed during the program's Midyear Review in August 2021, and Annual Review in February 2022, respectively.

Receiving recognitions from seed buyers was a first for both groups so they rejoiced with it.

More than that, they also achieved different forms of success. South NESGMPC felt secure to have a sure market in RCEF Seed Program and receive faster payments. Guinto also said its members took pride in their increased incomes.

Meanwhile, DAMSEPCO was able to buy a wing van and a solar dryer, while many of its members now troop to the Coop in 4-wheel vehicles.

"They only rode bicycles before," Ybañez spilled the beans.

> **DA-PhilRice holds on to the premise that farmers deserve the best. So, they see to it that the RCEF seeds are true to their claim, as their sacks blare.**
>
> TEODORA BRIONES

Continued persistence

The RCEF Seed Program continues to innovate so that farmers could experience better service. While these are fast-paced changes, South NESGMPC and DAMSEPCO vow to keep up. For Ybañez, the key is to stay diligent, strategic, and loyal to the partnership. For Guinto, service should always be the foundation.

"If we are to graduate from this program," Guinto enunciated, "we want to be summa cum laude. Looking at rice fields now is rewarding. Crops grow uniformly, and it's a beautiful sight to behold. But beyond that, we are striving to do our best because we like to contribute to the betterment of the lives of the Filipino farmers, for them to acquire increased incomes, and for them to be able to send their children to school."

Due to unpassable roads, a PhilRice team, together with DA-CAR staff, marches to reach a project site in Tanudan, Kalinga.

JOSE MARI Z. NOMBRERE

PhilRice team hikes for two hours to reach a barangay in Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental.

CARLO G. DACUMOS

Muddy roads in Basilan made it challenging for the Technical Cooperation Project team to reach their site in 2016.

Potpourri

CARLO G. DACUMOS

Leaving tracks behind
with drops of blood and sweat
– a sacrifice's kind

For progress, nothing can derail
that the next generation will trail.


JAYSON C. BERTO


JAYSON C. BERTO

To reach a remote area in Abra, the Infomediary Project team braves the narrow unpaved trail for 3 hours.


JAYSON C. BERTO

The 3-hour hike to reach Mataragan, Malibcong in Abra includes hurdling a narrow hanging bridge.


CARLO G. DACUMOS

After a day-long journey, the DA-PhilRice team feasts on rice and fish, a few kilometers away from Patikul, Sulu.


JAYSON C. BERTO

The Infomediary team rides the *skylab* (local term) to reach their project site in Marilog, Davao City.

JAYSON C. BERTO

Fervent start, fulfilling service, strong finish

MERVALYN O. TOMAS

Fulfillment in service. This is one of the driving forces for many youngsters to start a career in the government. While many start with this motivation, only a few stay and finish strong.

For Architect Renato Bajit and Dr. Caesar Joventino M. Tado, starting to work with DA-PhilRice in 1987 and 1997, respectively, was a "rare opportunity to serve the [Filipino] people."

From scratch

As Bajit looks back, being one of the pioneers was somehow daunting. The facilities alone in the first DA-PhilRice office in Los Baños, Laguna were not ideal.

"Dr. Santiago Obien, the executive director at that time, occupied an obscure office with an old swivel chair and a borrowed table. The rest of us shared an office with one long table and rickety wooden chairs. There was one good swivel chair and a ceiling fan that slightly cooled us off," he recalled. When the office moved to Nueva Ecija in 1989, that situation did not change much.

As an architect, making this situation better became his mission. While fulfilling other functions assigned to him every now and then, he led the construction of buildings and many of the facilities in DA-PhilRice and its branch stations.

> **I took the brunt of preparing the places and building the facilities from scratch, so that our staff is provided the best place to work and stay. It was really tough.**
>
> RENATO B. BAJIT

"I took the brunt of preparing the places and building the facilities from scratch, so that our staff is provided the best place to work and stay. It was really tough," he reminisced.

For Tado, acquiring facilities was also one of his memorable challenges. "I remember May 15, 1999, when I was head of Rice Engineering and Mechanization Division (REMD), DA-PhilRice was implementing the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) - Technical Cooperation Project 2. At 8:15 a.m., Director Obien instructed me to prepare a proposal for possible JICA funding," he recounted.

The deadline for the proposal's submission to JICA was on the same day. Tado dropped all his other activities, requested colleagues to help him on the cost estimate of the building and to draw the floor plan while he worked on the substance of the proposal. After working on the computer non-stop and skipping lunch, he completed the full-bound proposal at 5 p.m. that day. The product is the current two-storey building housing the offices of REMD today.

He also remembers his first stint as manager of DA-PhilRice Agusan in January 2004 when the station did not have access to the main highway. He led negotiations with the owners of the adjacent lot, but they refused. With his persistence and relationship-building skills, the owners finally agreed to sell the lot.

For Bajit, the 2021-inaugurated Crop Biotechnology Center (CBC) is his best contribution and a legacy he'd leave with the Institute.

"The plenary hall was not an item in that project, but I had always wished to have a bigger place to convene our ever-increasing attendees in big gatherings. With a wish for blessing, I drew the plenary hall next to the CBC. It was disapproved because the funding source only allowed one building. So I presented a revised plan where the two buildings were connected with a functional "bridge." Looking from

Dr. Tado during one of his fieldworks.

the sky, it is "one" building, so it was approved," Bajit delightfully recounted.

Toughing it out

In doing their jobs, both men had to face other challenging situations. One memorable experience for Tado was during his assignment at DA-PhilRice Midsayap. "To attend the flag ceremony, a colleague and I took a 2:45 a.m. bus trip from Davao to Cotabato City, Monday in March 2003. That time, there was a prolonged military operation against the MILF in Liguasan Marsh. Upon reaching a certain place in Pikit, North Cotabato, we suddenly heard loud gunshots. Rebels manned the checkpoint on the road to Cotabato City less than 100 meters ahead of us. Another bus from Cotabato arrived first at the checkpoint, so they were the ones held hostage. One bus passenger (an army master sergeant) was shot and killed by the rebels, and the other passengers were herded to a school building beside the road.

And for us, we endured about three hours of continuous gunfire between the rebels and the rescuing military, taking cover behind everything that we could find. Military reinforcements from Cotabato City with their armored equipment finally arrived, and the rebels retreated, leaving the hostages inside the classroom. At around 9 a.m., we made it to the station, missing the flag ceremony but relieving our colleagues that we were fine," Tado related.

Bajit also recalled the rough and bumpy roads in the early 1990s.

"We didn't have comfortable rides. In Mindanao, accompanied by a Midsayap driver, I had to brave the rains, dark and eerie nights, and rough roads to reach DA-PhilRice Agusan. Once, we were caught up in heavy rain at 10 p.m. We only had two packs of noodles and eggs for food. We braved knocking on a stranger's house. It was scary, but when they sensed that we were "good guys," they let us in and cooked for us," he said.

Fulfilling indeed!

That time, Bajit thought, "This is the life I chose in exchange for the riches in China."

He remembered the earlier years when his friends referred him to their offices abroad. "Without applying, I got irresistible offers with five times my current salary plus other benefits," he recounted.

But looking at the fruits of his labor now and the fact that he has been a present father to his kids through the years, he has no regrets.

"With 37 years of serving our people, I have found fulfillment by joining the government through DA-PhilRice," he acknowledged.

For Tado, his experiences in his 25 years of service taught him the importance of sincerity, humility, persuasiveness, maintaining good relationships, not allowing oneself to be affected by what others say, and a lot of prayers.

Indeed, what is more fulfilling than serving the farmers and the rice industry despite difficulties and being able to learn from all these experiences?

Arch. Rene Bajit, one of the first eight employees of DA-PhilRice, led the construction of its buildings and facilities.

CARLO G. DACUMOS

CEO Third Domingo:

Living a farming destiny

THIRD DOMINGO'S FACEBOOK ACCOUNT

Domingo is now enjoying bountiful harvests from his 10-ha farm as he continues to learn how to make it produce even more.

To Third Domingo, farming was a childhood dream. Coming from a family of teachers and farmers, he now savors the different kind of happiness that agriculture offers, that is despite being a sought-after creative writer for big brands.

Now that he has built his own advertising company called IXM, he set off to his dream of being a farmer.

Farming: Returning to his roots

"When the sun sets, you stop working in the fields. In advertising, you keep working...In farming, it's physically demanding, but mentally refreshing. You can turn it off. In advertising, it's the opposite: your brain is always churning," this advertising company Chief Executive Officer (CEO) quipped.

Domingo bought his 10-hectare farm in Capas, Tarlac in 2019. He allotted five hectares for rice and the rest for vegetables and fruits. He sought the help of a group of farm hands from the Aeta community to assist him while running his company in Manila.

Challenging start

His farming challenges were enormous at first. He and his helpers had to take care of a kilometer-long river traversing his land where his farm hands cultivate rice, mangoes, coffee, mulberries, and vegetables.

In particular, he discovered rice planting was so complicated that it required so many things like soil preparation and investing in fertilizers, which he failed to do in his first try. "If your soil is not level, it would waste an ungodly amount of fresh water because water would drain on one side," Domingo noted.

As he recalls, neighboring farmers laughed at him when he first harvested 30 cavans per hectare (cav/ha). "Hey, go back to advertising!" they taunted him. Unperturbed, he vowed to do better next harvesting season. He researched modern ways of farming from books and the internet, and watched tutorial videos from YouTube.

All the farmers in the area were astounded when they saw two large container trucks pulled over at his farm to haul his 110cav/ha harvest as he tried for the second time, making him the talk of the town.

"Farming is a very purposeful way of life. You rediscover new insights about life, which make you humble, and learn how to contend with the power of nature on a daily basis and harness that power as well," Third Domingo, said with finality.

Rice-based desserts for you

MINARD F. PAGADUAN

Who would have thought that rice as a staple food may not only be for the main course but also good for desserts? Let's take a look and unleash our creativity in cooking desserts that would win hearts and those kids at heart.

Rice Nougat

PROCEDURE:

1. Cream softened margarine. Gradually add sugar and eggs. Mix thoroughly.
2. Combine condensed milk with water. Alternately add rice flour and milk mixture. Blend until smooth. Stir in cheese, peanuts, and flavorings.
3. Pour into molders and steam for 20 min or until cooked.
4. Remove from molders. Knead mixture using plastic food wrap until smooth. Mold and cut into the desired size.
5. Arrange molded nougat on cookie sheets and bake at 150°C for 20 min.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1½ cup glutinous rice flour
- 1½ cup plain rice flour
- 1½ cup white sugar
- 2 pc eggs
- 100 mL condensed milk
- 84 g margarine
- ¾ cup water
- ¼ bar grated cheese
- 125 g chopped nuts

*Makes 124 pc

Brownies

PROCEDURE:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and line a 6x6x2" pan with wax paper.
2. Melt margarine in a double boiler. Add unsweetened chocolate, sugar, and vanilla. Mix thoroughly and cool.
3. Pour and blend the melted mixture into beaten eggs.
4. Combine rice flour, baking powder, and salt. Gradually add to the chocolate mixture.
5. Pour into the baking pan. Top with chopped nuts and bake for 25 min.
6. Take the pan out of the oven when almost done. Brush the top with Karo syrup and bake again to dry.
7. Cool slightly and slice into squares.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1½ cup rice flour
- 60 g unsweetened chocolate
- 2 cups brown sugar
- 6 pc eggs
- 1 cup margarine
- ½ cup chopped nuts
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 tsp vanilla
- ½ cup Karo syrup
- ¼ tsp baking powder

Source: Rice-based Food Products recipes

https://www.DA-PhilRice.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/rice-based-food-products-recipes.pdf

VOX POP

Why do you love rice farmers and rice?

How do you show your love for them?

COMPILED BY
CHRISTINA A. FREDILES

Cheryl M. Dela Victoria

DA-7 Information Officer II, Mandaue City, Cebu

Frankly, my day is not complete without eating rice, "haw-ang ang tiyan" (hollow stomach), so I make sure that there is plenty of rice in every meal. Rice fuels my body to keep myself energetic throughout the day. As a way to show my deepest gratitude to the rice farmers who produce my rice, I make sure and even taught my family to consume all the rice they put on their plate such that "walay mumho nga nabilin sa plato" (no grain is left on the plate). Also, when cooking, I make sure that nothing is wasted when putting cups of rice into the casserole or when washing them, and I make sure that the rice doesn't get scorched or burned. I also make leftover rice into fried rice.

Jordan Ilustre

Station manager, DWAY Nueva Ecija

Rice farmers produce our staple food. They are the unsung heroes, and I believe they are underrated as to their contribution. I hope the government will focus more on agriculture and the plight of our rice farmers. "*Tangkilikin natin ang produktong atin lalo na ang mga* produce *ng* local farmers *natin*."

Honeylett Celino

Team Leader, Concentrix

I love rice because it's tasty and nutritious and it goes well with most Filipino dishes. With the right amount, it can sustain my healthy diet. That is why I have much respect for rice farmers. To show my love or appreciation, I make sure to buy only locally produced rice and consume it responsibly.

BJ Sulit

Overseas Filipino Worker, Malaysia

Rice is one of the oldest crops humankind has been processing, dating all the way back to the Chinese empire and the Ancient Mayans. That alone makes me appreciate both the producer and the product. The best I can do to express my affection for them is to NOT WASTE RICE. Prepare only what I can eat and, in other circumstances, prepare it well, especially when making fried rice or other more complex dishes like the paella. Simply by doing so, I am showing respect to the farmers and the food they have worked hard for.

Mayka Lucas

Government employee and mother, Quezon City

Rice farming is one noble yet underrated profession. The hard toil of our rice farmers to feed this nation is more than enough reason to love what they do, to love them. Until now, I still carry on the tenets of being "riceponsible" to show my appreciation for rice and our rice farmers – save rice, buy and eat local, and thank rice farmers.

Sundin ang Right **E-A-T**: Right **Element** o uri, **Amount** o dami, at **Timing** o tiyempo ng paglalagay ng organiko at inorganikong pataba upang makatipid sa abono, maipakita ang pagkalinga sa kalikasan, at maalagaan nang mabuti ang palay.

ABONONG SWAK!

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