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Philippine Rice Research Institute



innovating
education for rice farmers

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ABOUT THE COVER



Education or learning in RCEF farm schools is highly place-based or experiential. It leverages the power of place and time, and not just the power of technology, toward a personalized, authentic, and engaging learning. Groups of farmers learn right in their community about the high-yielding and cost-reducing technologies. They are better positioned to propose and effectively share solutions to their community-based field problems.



- 2001 Gawad Florendo Awardee
- 2006 Binhi Hall of Fame Awardee, "Agricultural Newsletter of the Year"
- 2009, 2018, 2019 Binhi Agri Magazine of the Year
- 2022 Outstanding Institution for Science Journalism
- 2022 Best Free Food Publications
- 2022 Binhi Hall of Fame Awardee, Best Agricultural Magazine

CONTENTS

NEWS

- 4 KOR, PH construct new facility
- 4 BPI helps Negros farmers
- 5 Public, private sectors partner to expand farmers' market
- 5 More provinces yield higher thru RCEF seeds
- 6 NRAM pushes for revival of bill on half-cup rice
- 6 Lawmakers support NRAM's BeRICEpossible
- 7 Remote-controlled machine for land prep developed
- 7 Ugnay Palay outlines strategies for rice industry

8 WHAT'S NEW IN RICE RESEARCH?

IRRI, PhilRice to work on low and ultra low-GI rice
New hybrid varieties

9 NEW KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

10 RICE ACROSS THE COUNTRY

- 14 Registered RCEF farm schools in the Philippines
- 17 How to apply as RCEF farm school

18 EXPERT'S CORNER

FEATURES

- 20 Personalized recommendations from the PalayCheck Cropping Calendar Matrix
- 22 Nurturing success: IYAAH's innovative approach
- 24 Bearers of good news
- 26 Challenge accepted

28 RISE WITH RICE: Indelible lessons practiced by heart

PARTNERS IN THE FIELD

- 30 Seeds of hope
- 31 Rekindling trust: Empowering farmers with RCEF
- 32 **VOX POP:** What are your recommendations to improve the RCEF farm schools?

34 **FOOD:** Sinabalo

34 **RICESCAPES**

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTE

JOHN C. DE LEON

Cultivating a lifelong learning culture among rice farmers

Amidst an ever-evolving agricultural landscape, the emphasis on learning culture for Filipino rice farmers is critical for farm school owners and their training management teams, as it enables them to embrace new technologies and practices effectively. With this, training complements the farmers' eight years of formal education and 32 years of farming experience (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). This shows that while our farmers have a wealth of practical experience, there is a gap in formal education that needs to be addressed.

The Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund Rice Extension Services Program (RCEF RESP) is transforming farmers from mere cultivators to lifelong learners with their consistent participation in rice production training activities. Agricultural extensionists, seed growers, rice specialists, farm school owners, and their training management teams are also trained and re-tooled. RCEF RESP also sets up farm demonstrations, conducts consultations, and provides information materials.

The design and delivery of training programs are tailored to the extensionists' and farmers' needs, taking into account their current knowledge, skills, and the challenges in their local context. The programs cover topics from the use of inbred certified seeds and modern farming techniques to financial management, agroentrepreneurship, and market access. Communication channels including traditional media and digital platforms are also used to disseminate information, promote best practices, and facilitate dialogue among farmers.

For five years now, a learning culture has been continually helping farmers update their knowledge and skills,

experiment with new methods, and learn from their successes and failures. This culture fosters a mindset of curiosity and openness, where farmers learning in a group are not afraid to ask questions, seek help, and share their knowledge with others.

How does the program cultivate this culture? It starts with providing access to quality education and training. This includes not only training of trainers courses but also field demonstrations and farmer-to-farmer exchanges. It also involves leveraging technology to deliver education in a way that is accessible, fun, and convenient for farmers.

The program creates an environment that supports learning. This involves recognizing and rewarding learning achievements, providing feedback and support, and fostering a sense of community among trainers, seed growers, and farmers. It also requires busting impediments to learning such as language barriers, time constraints, and lack of resources.

RCEF RESP also engages rice workers and farmers in the learning process. This entails not just teaching them new skills, but also listening to their needs, their challenges, and their ideas. It involves treating them not just as learners, but also as teachers, innovators, and leaders.

Sustaining a learning culture among our rice farmers is not just about improving their skills and knowledge. It is about empowering them to take control of their future, to make informed decisions, and to continuously innovate and improve. With a strong learning culture, we can look forward to a future of prosperity and growth. 🌱



KOR, PH construct new facility



Carlo G. Dacumos

Representatives from Korea and local agencies and corporations recently broke ground to start building a new rice seed processing facility and warehouse with cold storage at the PhilRice campus in Nueva Ecija.

“Then Secretary Manny Piñol’s visit to PhilRice then sparked the idea for an improved seed warehouse. After drafting and submitting a proposal, we presented it to various authorities, addressing the challenges faced by our Business

Development Division (BDD) in producing viable seeds,” narrated Fidela P. Bongat, head of BDD.

Bongat also mentioned that they explored the existing KOICA seed processing facility to enhance shelf-life. Adding another facility could expedite seed availability and aid in distributing carryover seeds to early planters.

Korea’s Global Agricultural Policy Institute (GAPI) declared commitment to work

closely with PhilRice and the National Food Authority (NFA) as partners to achieve the initiative’s desired outcomes.

“Our commitment to increasing the utilization rate of high-quality certified rice seeds, improving rice production, and enhancing food security in the Philippines remains strong, leaving no room for complacency,” emphasized Dr. Byung Ki Lee, GAPI project manager.

The Philippines initiated the Official Development Assistance (ODA) project in October 2019 and gained momentum in May 2023 with the signing of a Record of Discussions outlining mutual objectives.

Running until 2026, the joint project aims to enhance the rice supply chain’s efficiency and sustainability. It includes modern rice seed processing facilities, equipment provision, and advanced technology transfer.

“This event symbolizes kindness. We hope to pay it forward when we improve our rice agriculture. Remembering Korea’s kindness to the Philippines, we aim to do the same when we reach their economic level,” said Dr. John C. De Leon, PhilRice executive director.

Staff members from the DA-Field Operations Service, Regional Field Office 3, and Nature E&T Inc. witnessed the event, expressing gratitude and support while recognizing the facility and warehouse’s role in transforming rice production and distribution in Central Luzon. - **CHRISTINE MAE A. NICOLAS**

BPI Foundation helps Negros farmers

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. (middle), and officials from the Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) Foundation, including trustee Mary Catherine Elizabeth Santamaria (3rd from left), witnessed the grant of P5.2 million to farmers in San Carlos City, Negros Occidental, by the BPI Foundation. The funds allocated under the Rice Business Innovations System (RiceBIS) Program, will be utilized for procuring trucks, compact rice mill, threshers, certified seeds, and fertilizers. Laurel graced Ugnay Palay at PhilRice in Nueva Ecija (read full story on page 7).

- **ROCEL DYAN C. SILVA**



Carlo G. Dacumos

Government agencies and the private sector have united to eventually help widen the rice farmers' market during the wet season Lakbay Palay at PhilRice in Nueva Ecija, Sept. 27-28.

Witnessed by a thousand farmers, the alliance was formed through the launch of the "BIDA RiceBIS, Be the rice's best" movement, in which about 10 entities marked their pledges on a commitment wall. These include the Land Bank of the Philippines, Agricultural Training Institute, local government unit of Arayat in Pampanga, and Bamboo Development Inc. based in La Union.

Dr. Diadem B. Gonzales-Esmero, lead of the Rice Business Innovations System (RiceBIS) Community Program, said the movement aims to help organize farmers so they can directly sell their rice and rice-based products to the market, and earn a higher income.

The program's BIS acronym, Gonzales-Esmero said, encourages rice

Public, private sectors partner to expand farmers' market

stakeholders to take part in expanding the rice value chain.

She called on attendees to adopt the program's advocacy: Bilhin ang bigas ng Pilipinas (Buy local rice), Ibahagi sa iba ang RiceBIS (Share RiceBIS), at Suportahan ang ating mga magsasaka (Support our farmers).

"As we labor together diligently, our sector will become stronger, and the number of successful farmers will rise," she said.

The program has already established partnership with the Kiwanis International-PH Luzon and Bicol districts, which will involve procuring farmers' brown rice products for the organization's health programs for children. Zambales farmers have thus far sold 5 tons of their products to Kiwanis.

Merzci Bread and Pastries in Negros Occidental will also source their rice and rice-based products from RiceBIS communities while the Bank of the Philippine Islands Foundation will shoulder the transportation and delivery of products in select communities.

"[This program is promising because we need not depend on traders to buy our products. It's now our time to choose our market with better pricing]. Our income will definitely increase," said Silvestre Roxas of the Deepwell Sumulong Irrigators Association in Santa Rosa, Nueva Ecija.

Currently, the program supports 23 RiceBIS communities across the country. - **ROCEL DYAN C. SILVA**

More provinces yield higher thru RCEF seeds

From an average of only 3.5t/ha some 10 years ago, Aurora farmers are now harvesting 4.5-5t/ha. Their provincial agriculturist, Arnold Novicio, is thankful to RCEF.

The same is happening in Bohol: from 2.73t/ha in 2022 to 3.6t/ha in 2023, according to Lorebien Lagapa, provincial rice seed program coordinator. They take pride in certain farmers who have reached 8t/ha.

"With RCEF, high-quality certified seeds are being planted in areas that are beyond the reach of irrigation facilities. These inbred seeds have been tested to survive in rainfed areas, so that farmers get the maximum harvest by using the best-suited seeds to areas with sparse water," Lagapa said.

Aside from Aurora and Bohol, most of the 42 covered provinces of the RCEF Seed Program have also attained higher yields, the program's seasonal monitoring and evaluation survey showed.

Dr. Flordeliza H. Bordey, director of the RCEF Program Management Office at

PhilRice, said the yield increase is due to farmers' adoption of the certified seeds, which they received for at least seven cropping seasons.

Compared with the 2019 baseline yield, more provinces averaged higher than 5t/ha in the 2022 WS and 2023 DS.

Zamboanga Sibugay, Lanao del Norte, Davao de Oro, Davao Oriental, and Davao del Sur achieved such yield for both seasons; Kalinga, Quirino, Nueva Vizcaya, Bulacan, Zamboanga del Sur, Misamis Occidental, and Sarangani in the dry season only.

The 15 provinces that yielded 4-5t/ha in 2023 DS are Zambales, Aurora, Bulacan, Pampanga, Quezon, Laguna, Albay, Sorsogon, Negros Oriental, Misamis Oriental, Davao del Norte, South Cotabato, Agusan del Sur, Agusan del Norte, and Maguindanao.

For the 2022 WS, Kalinga, Quirino, Nueva Vizcaya, Zambales, Aurora, Bataan, Bulacan, Pampanga, Laguna, Negros Oriental, Zamboanga del Sur, Misamis Oriental, Misamis Occidental, Davao del Norte, Sarangani, South Cotabato, Agusan del Norte, and Maguindanao also reached the same yield.

Most of these provinces had been yielding 3t/ha and below up to 2019.

"The target provinces of the RCEF Seed Program are low and medium-yielding.

Given their environmental and socio-economic capacities, they can better adopt inbred certified seeds," Bordey said.

Among the high-yielding and location-specific varieties are NSIC Rc 216, Rc 222, Rc 402, and Rc 160. Based on studies, the use of certified seeds can increase yield by 10% or more.

Aklan and Samar remain as the only provinces under the 3t/ha and below mark during the DS.

"Their yields are affected by limited irrigation water as well as recurrent disease occurrences. Nevertheless, both provinces had respective promising yield increases of 0.65t/ha and 1.28t/ha relative to their baselines," Bordey said.

On the other hand, Laguna saw a decline in yield, from 5.27t/ha in 2019 DS to 4.60t/ha in 2023 DS as their farmers shifted to planting good eating-quality rice varieties that have higher value but yield lower.

"Micronutrient deficiencies in the soil were prevalent in several covered municipalities based on the massive conduct of crop response-based soil analysis through the Minus-One-Element Technique. We are currently cascading these results and site-specific fertilizer recommendations to concerned areas so that the deficiencies can be addressed," she explained. - **ANNA MARIE B. BERTO**



NRAM pushes for revival of bill on half-cup rice

As the country celebrated National Rice Awareness Month (NRAM) this November, the call for half-cup rice servings has garnered support from top legislators to sponsor a bill that was first filed in the Senate in 2013.

“Representatives Janette L. Garin, Keith Micah D.L. Tan, and Nicanor M. Briones have already submitted bills advocating the reinstatement of the half-cup rice bill,” said Dr. Hazel V. Antonio of PhilRice, lead of the NRAM celebration.

Based on 2015 data from the Food and Nutrition Research Institute, an individual wastes approximately 10g or 2 tablespoons of rice daily, amounting

to P7 billion annually, which could feed 2.5 million Filipinos for a year.

Antonio clarified that the half-cup rice servings are not mandatory. Hence, instead of limiting consumers, the policy would actually give them more freedom as it would allow them to order half cup and pay half, as well.

“The theme of NRAM is ‘Be RICEponsible’ until 2028. One of its messages is ‘kanin ay huwag sayangin’ or do not waste rice. We hope to promote ‘RICEponsible’ consumption by encouraging food establishments to make half-cup rice servings available,” Antonio said.

This initiative pushes deeper the country’s pledge to reduce food wastage by 50%, a commitment made with 196 nations in support of Target 16 under the Convention on Biological Diversity of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Meanwhile, Dr. Marissa V. Romero, a PhilRice food scientist, said that the half-cup bill could also help reduce the rice intake of consumers with diabetes or at

high risk of diabetes, a leading cause of death in the country due to its associated complications. She explained that excessive intake of white rice, especially those with high glycemic index, can lead to higher blood sugar and obesity, which is a major risk factor for non-communicable diseases.

“Consuming less rice or rice with low glycemic index is a promising approach to help diabetic patients, those with high blood sugar levels, or those who want to prevent it, due to its slow conversion from starch to glucose,” Romero said.

The celebration also extended its campaign to some 200 Grade 10 students during the 21st Ceremonial Rice Harvesting at Luneta Park’s Rice Garden where they experienced a day as farmers and learned about responsible rice consumption through the ABKD principles.

Since 2013, 46 local government units have passed ordinances on half-cup rice serving including towns in La Union, Aklan, and Bohol. - **CHRISTINE MAE A. NICOLAS**



Lawmakers support NRAM’s BeRICEponsible

Cynthia Villar, Raffy Tulfo, Bong Go, and JV Ejercito. This was further enriched by the presence of Reps. Mark Cojuangco, Wilbert Lee, and Joey Salceda, and Leocadio Sebastian, DA undersecretary for Rice Industry Development.

“We often overlook the significance of everyday things, and we hope that these kinds of exhibits make us look inward at how we consume and waste a precious commodity,” said Legarda.

Beyond the prominent figures in attendance, the event also drew the active engagement of Senate staff and employees. They were treated to a comprehensive presentation, guiding them through the rice journey from the field (*palay*) to harvest (*bigas*), and finally to our tables (*kanin*).

The exhibits showcased various aspects, including the DA-PhilRice Genebank, rice breeding processes, milling techniques utilizing portable and pedal-type Brown Rice machines, and the essence of the BeRICEponsible campaign.

Senator Pia S. Cayetano, impressed by the pedal-operated Brown Rice machine, expressed her interest in proposing to distribute it to small rice farm shareholders. This proposal received support from Legarda, who remarked, “Donating these machines to barangays would be truly beneficial, providing them with the means to produce Brown Rice.”

Dr. Hazel V. Antonio, the lead for NRAM celebrations, supported this initiative. She explained how the machine would be beneficial, stating, “The issue with Brown Rice is that it tends to become rancid (odorous) quickly. Allowing local rice shareholders to acquire this machine will assist them in milling Brown Rice and having it fresh whenever needed.”

Antonio said that the machine is capable of grinding one kilo of rice per hour.

Moreover, the exhibits shed light on the pivotal programs and initiatives of PhilRice, the MASAGANA Rice Industry Development Program, and the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

- **CHRISTINE MAE A. NICOLAS**

Solons have rallied behind the BeRICEponsible advocacy of the National Rice Awareness Month (NRAM) as they viewed the exhibit titled “PALAY. BIGAS. KANIN. ALAMIN” at the Senate building in Pasay City, Nov. 22.

Legislators solidified their commitment to the cause by endorsing the ABKD principles: (A) Adlay, mais, saba, atbp. ay ihalo sa kanin; (B) Brown Rice ay kainin; (K) Kanin ay huwag sayangin; at (D) Dapat bigas ng Pilipinas ang bilhin, which was symbolized through their signatures on the BeRICEponsible pledge wall.

The exhibit, co-hosted by DA-PhilRice and the office of Senator Loren Legarda, benefited from the participation of Senators Pia and Alan Peter Cayetano,

Making the nation rice-secure is never a child's play, but some agricultural inventions can be amusing while highly innovative.

A remote-controlled prototype agricultural machine called 'Auto Boat Tractor' is being developed at PhilRice that aims to reduce drudgery in land preparation and crop establishment.

According to Dr. Jasper G. Tallada, the chief developer, if we can reduce the overall manual labor requirement of farming, it would be most beneficial to our farmers since some 50% of rice production cost goes to labor.

The Tractor, powered by electronic actuators that enable its remote automation, can scale down the need for manual laborers to the least possible number. Ideally, one person can operate the machine.

The advancements in electro-mechanical technology have made remote and autonomous control of agricultural tractors a reality.

Boat tractors of the usual kind – the most recent innovation in power tillers – use idle clutch mechanisms or the joystick-like controls that give way to easier maneuvering in the headland areas. Replacing these with electronic actuators



Mark Joseph R. Zuñiga

Dr. Jasper G. Tallada, chief developer of the Auto Boat Tractor, operates the machine with a remote control.

Remote-controlled machine for land prep developed

will allow for remote automation with the operator positioned just nearby.

"China, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, and India have made the Boat Tractor popular due to its simple design and adaptability. PhilRice's development of the Tractor is a big step toward keeping up with the latest technology that is practical and advantageous to Filipino farmers' needs," Tallada added.

Given that the majority of local rice farmers are of old age, using the Auto Boat Tractor will attract the youth to agriculture because the machine will make land preparation and crop establishment akin to playing with remote-controlled toy cars.

The final prototype of the Boat Tractor is expected to be finished by the end of 2023. - **MARK JOSEPH R. ZUÑIGA**

The 35th National Rice Research for Development Conference (*Ugnay Palay*), showcased a comprehensive overview of the rice industry's present landscape and future trajectory.

The Nov. 29-Dec. 1 event, organized by PhilRice, served as a platform for appreciating achievements in rice R&D, fostering discussions among industry stakeholders, and unveiling strategies for the promotion of rice-based technologies.

With diverse themes encompassing climate change adaptation, farm-clustering, farmer-entrepreneurship, and digital transformation, the conference featured plenary sessions on the strategies 'MAtag,' 'SAmama,' 'GANado,' and 'NAPANAHON,' providing space and time for thought-provoking discourses.

USec. Leocadio S. Sebastian, Masagana Rice Industry Development Program lead, emphasized the importance of these strategies. "The dedication to collaboration, innovation, and the

Ugnay Palay outlines strategies for rice industry

adoption of modern technologies lays the groundwork for a future characterized by sustainability, resilience, and competitiveness in rice farming," he declared.

In a letter, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. reinforced the government's commitment to supporting sectors like rice, ensuring food availability and affordability.

"Also, in collaboration with pertinent law enforcement agencies, we will prioritize combating illegal activities related to agricultural produce. Let us continue to unite and work together towards building a more productive and progressive 'Bagong Pilipinas,'" the chief executive added.

Moreover, newly appointed Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has



PhilRice Photos

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

pledged to focus on reducing rice importation during the event.

"Our ultimate goal is to swiftly reduce rice imports for food security and efficiency," Laurel emphasized in his keynote address.

- **CHRISTINE MAE A. NICOLAS**



WHAT'S NEW IN RICE RESEARCH

► MARIEL M. ESPINOZA

IRRI, PhilRice to work on low and ultra low-GI rice

In a welcome step toward healthier eating, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) has set its sights on a strategic partnership with PhilRice to incorporate low and ultra-low glycemic index (GI) traits in local rice varieties.

In the 6th International Rice Congress in Manila in October 2023, scientists from IRRI revealed their discovered genes responsible for low and ultra-low GI in rice, which can be transferred to high-yielding popular rice varieties. Such kinds of rice will help slow down the spread of diabetes.

With the rising occurrences of diabetes globally, it is expected that the number of cases will rise to 47% in 2024 from the 537 million cases in 2021. The Philippine Statistics Authority attests that diabetes ranks fourth as the leading cause of death in the country as of February 2023.

“Consumption of high-GI foods can cause blood sugar levels to rapidly rise, stimulating the pancreas to release more insulin - and then quickly drop. This prompts the individual to crave more and eat too much. Sustaining this cycle could lead to weight gain and insulin resistance, which are major risk factors for obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases,” explained PhilRice’s Dr. Henry Corpuz. “Given that rice is our staple food, the development of low and ultra-low-GI rice can be one of the many solutions to curb the increasing incidence of type 2 diabetes and obesity in the country,” he added.

GI is used to classify carbohydrate-containing foods based on how slowly or quickly they are digested and elevate blood glucose levels in a span of two hours. The higher the value, the quicker the carbohydrates are digested and absorbed in the body.

According to Dr. Marissa V. Romero, PhilRice lead of the collaborative project

with IRRI, the ordinary white rice that we eat has a high GI. Rice varieties with a lower GI value take longer to digest allowing a slow and gradual release of glucose in the blood. “Therefore, low-GI rice is beneficial for rice consumers,

particularly those with type 2 diabetes, overweight/obese, while enjoying the staple food,” said Romero.

Through the DA-BAR-funded OneRicePH project, PhilRice and IRRI are working together to incorporate the low and ultra low-GI traits to local popular high-yielding varieties with resistance to pests and diseases and acceptable eating quality.

“To make these low-GI rice varieties more appealing to the consumers, we are also developing different functional food products including ready-to-eat rice, snacks, noodles, and baked goods,” said Evelyn H. Bandoniill, co-researcher of the on-going project.



Capacity enhancement on in-vitro GI determination

RiceChem Division

New hybrid varieties

The newest and improved public hybrid varieties Mestiso 99 (M99) and Mestiso 103 (M103) being popularized as M20+ and M19+, respectively, are available for distribution this 2024 dry season.

According to senior researcher Mel Anthony T. Talavera, these varieties are inspired from the first two-line hybrid rices developed by PhilRice and UPLB in 2009. These can be planted throughout the country regardless of season.

From susceptible reactions to bacterial leaf blight (BLB) and rice tungro virus, M99 now has intermediate reactions to these diseases. It is resistant to deadheart (yellow and white stem borers) and has premium milling recovery. M103 has high premium milling recovery and intermediate amylose content from 20.2% to 18.6%, which means it is softer and stickier when cooked.

“These varieties are highly sought-after by seed growers but the main concern is keeping their genetic purity,” Talavera said.

RICE ACROSS THE COUNTRY

► COMPILED BY VANNEZA B. ISIDRO

Malusog Rice takes off in Dinagat Islands province

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. learned more about the Malusog Rice during its launching in the Sept. 29 “17th Kaadlawan nan Dinagat Islands,” where he visited the exhibit stall of the new rice variety.

As guest of honor, he distributed Bureau of Customs-seized rice of premium quality to help improve the local food supply and toured “Tabo sa Isla.”

Participants were fascinated by Malusog Rice’s color and its beta carotene content because according to them, this usually comes from vegetables.

Before visiting Dinagat Islands, the president graced the Caraga Region launch of the Department of Social Welfare and Development’s Walang

Gutom 2027: Food Stamp Program in Dapa, Siargao Island, Surigao del Norte.

Dr. Gerardo F. Estoy, Jr., DA-PhilRice Agusan branch director and area coordinator of Malusog Rice, led the briefing for 53 rice farmer-beneficiaries

willing to plant the Vitamin A-enriched rice in the 2024 dry season.

A farmer from Libjo, Dinagat Islands conveyed his excitement to plant Malusog Rice: “I am thrilled to be planting this rice in Dinagat. I am also pleased that its seeds can be replanted, unlike the hybrids.” Aside from the seed distribution, they also held a ceremonial feeding program and a budol battle or “Hab-haban sa Isla”, where Malusog Rice was featured. - MARELIE TANGOG



DA-PhilRice Agusan showcases Malusog Rice during the “17th Kaadlawan nan Dinagat Islands” through a briefing, an exhibit, and a feeding program.



Engr. Ricardo M. Oñate Jr., President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., and Gov. Nilo Demerey Jr. (from left).

Jose Gideon dela Torre, a recent graduate of the Uswag Durog Farmer School in Sibalom, Antique, has experienced remarkable results on his 1-ha farm. At 47 years old, he had believed that his farm could only yield 120 bags per season, but his post-graduation practices have proved otherwise.

The elimination of pesticides and manual labor, along with other changes in rice production, reduced dela Torre's production expenses by nearly 20%, and his harvest increased from 6.6t/ha to 8.2t/ha.

What's particularly striking is how quickly dela Torre put his newfound knowledge into action. The three-month training he received was immediately applied to his farm, resulting in tangible improvements. Among the valuable lessons, proper pest management stood out. Previously, he had indiscriminately sprayed his fields, unaware of the beneficial insects that were also affected. This revelation led to a significant reduction in production expenses.

Another game-changer for him was farm mechanization, particularly the use of a harvester and a 4-wheel-drive tractor, which not only expedited his farm operations but also reduced costs.

Mamerto Sabrine, Jr., at 56 years old, shared a similar transformation narrative after he participated in the RCEF Training at the same school. He detailed his long history in farming without progress, using the same methods season after season.



Training improves farmers' yield, reduces expenses

However, this training was a turning point.

The changes in his practice not only enhanced his yields but also lowered his expenses, from the previous P18,000-20,000 for his half-hectare of land to a more efficient budget.

Mamerto learned about proper pest and nutrient management, and efficient land preparation. The days of sowing seeds directly without leveling the field and applying random fertilizers were replaced by the knowledge he acquired from the training. Additionally, he discovered the benefits of planting

vegetables around the paddy to manage insects.

Both Mamerto and Gideon's success stories highlight the positive impact of RCEF training through the farmer field school. These incremental changes may appear small, but they mark the beginning of broader improvements. Today, there are thousands of graduates of Farmer Field School (FFS) in Western and Central Visayas, spanning 35 farm schools. With the growing demand for proper rice farming practices, more farm schools are emerging to equip farmers with the knowledge and skills they need.

- VANESSA A. TINGSON

New varieties for Region 2 and CAR identified



DA-PhilRice Isabela has conducted regional pre-workshops to review and help identify recommended varieties for RCEF and DA-National Rice Programs in northeastern Luzon by 2025 WS onwards.

Cordillera stakeholders prefer these varieties for dry season: NSIC Rc 506, 512, 508, 218, 514, 510, and 480; for the wet season are NSIC Rc 512, 514, 508, 218, 506, 160, and 480. Meanwhile, Region 2

partners have selected NSIC Rc 222, 480, 512, 216, 436, 402, and PSB Rc 18 for DS; and NSIC Rc 222, 480, 512, 402, 436, 508, and PSB Rc 18 for WS.

Dr. Andres L. Dela Cruz Jr., RCEF Isabela Coordinator, emphasized the importance of planning and selecting the varieties. "As we embark on producing higher seed classes starting this 2024, we need to identify our preferred varieties as early as now for us to have the right volume of certified seeds by 2025."

These recommendations he said essential for guiding farmers in selecting the most suitable rice varieties. - DIANA P. LIM

RICE ACROSS THE COUNTRY

DA-PhilRice Bicol is partnering with the DA-RFO 8 to mobilize all provincial and local government units (LGUs) in the implementation of the RCEF Seed Program and the Masagana Rice Industry Development Program. Aside from the target-setting, new guidelines and updates on seed delivery and distribution, and issues and concerns were discussed with City/Municipal Agriculturists and their respective rice program coordinators. This dry season 2024, 147,507 bags of inbred certified seeds will be distributed for free to more than 62,000 rice farmers from Eastern Visayas. On the other hand, the DA-RFO 8 is drumming up the interest of all LGUs in the execution of the MRIDP to help increase productivity through the adoption of technologies by clusters of organized farmer groups. - **MICHAEL L. SATUITO**

Region 8 LGUs mobilized for Masagana Rice Program



Need-based KSL sessions set for Regions 9 and 12



DA-PhilRice Midsayap has initiated two batches of knowledge-sharing and learning (KSL) sessions to address the information needs of Zamboanga Peninsula and SOCCSKSARGEN regions on pest and disease management. Included in the KSL sessions are a series of lectures and hands-on technology demonstrations. In collaboration with local partners such as the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist and Local Government Units, DA-PhilRice Midsayap has identified Manuel A. Roxas, Zamboanga del Norte, together with Pigcauayan, North Cotabato for the KSL sessions. - **KIMBIE A. PEDITAMANAN**

Rommel Ostique

Southern Tagalog conducts RCEF workshops

DA-PhilRice Los Baños has successfully completed a series of retooling and capacity-building workshops across the 10 provinces in CALABARZON and MIMAROPA regions in preparation for the 2024 dry season. Conducted from Aug. 22 to Sept. 28, the workshops presented targets and accomplishments of the RCEF Seed and Extension Programs; provided a comprehensive understanding of the National Rice Program implementing guidelines; and served as a platform to update the local government units on the Farmers and Fisherfolk Registry System/Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (FFRS/RSBSA) listings. - **CHRISTINE M. REYES**



Rhea Gracie Y. Malapascua

Carlos Navrasa, a farmer cooperador of PhilRice Batac, has increased his yield by planting NSIC Rc 462, a saline variety, in his field in Bauang, La Union.

For 20 years, Navrasa has been planting different varieties of inbred and hybrid rice, to no avail. By cultivating the variety in his 1,200m² area, his harvest increased from at most 0.3t to 0.7t at 32kg/bag.

He said low productivity has been his long-standing difficulty despite planting the inbred rice varieties provided by the local government unit. During high tides, saltwater intrudes his area.

"I had planted different varieties in this area, but growth was poor and yield was very low. Rc 462 grew well and produced many tillers, and it is a good source of seeds for the next planting. This is the best variety I've tried," Navrasa exclaimed.

NSIC Rc 462 will be further used in the 14-ha area managed by the local government of Bauang and the Branch Development Initiatives. - **CYNTHIAMAY O. LAPAT**

Bauang farmer finds saline varieties productive



Cynthiamay O. Lapat

Navrasa has an additional yield of 12 bags from planting NSIC Rc 462, a saline variety, in his 1200m².

Registered RCEF farm schools*

in the Philippines

SARAH JOY N. RUIZ

REGION-2 (Cagayan Valley)

- 4 B's Integrated School
- A. Tabangay Integrated Farm
- AC Pastor Integrated Farm
- A.R. Santiago Farm
- Abarabar-Santiago Ecofriendly Farms and Technical Institute Inc.
- AgriValley Integrated-Farm
- Althea's Integrated Farm – Isabela
- Aparri Polytechnic Institute
- Aquarich Integrated Farm
- Arboleda's Integrated Farm
- Brillo Integrated Training Center Inc.
- Caranguian Integrated FARM School
- CPM Integrated Farm
- Cumigad's Integrated Farm Institute Inc.
- DECEE-JULZ Farm and Garden
- DSY Integrated Farm
- EASE Integrated Farm
- Eduardo Tabuñar Integrated Farm
- Elmanes Tarayok Farm Management Services Inc.
- Estepa's Integrated Farm
- Esther's Integrated Farm
- Faraon Integrated Farm
- Fatima Farm School
- FDN Integrated Farm
- Gaffud Integrated Farm
- Grandeza Integrated Farm
- Ikay's Organic Farm
- Isabela Provincial Training Center
- Jesla Integrated Farm
- JICA's Agri-Integrated Farm and Learning Site
- JICAs Technical and Vocational Institute Inc.
- Lasam Institute of Technology
- Lopez Integrated Farm School
- LPJ3D's Integrated Farm School
- Lyckel Integrated Farm
- Malou Integrated Farm
- Mang Claro's Integrated Farm
- Mercedes Integrated Farm and Skills Development Center Inc.
- Navarro's Farm and Learning Site
- Nueva Vizcaya Polytechnic Institute
- Provincial Farm School and Agri-Tourism Center
- PUA Agri Tourism and Skills Development Center Inc.
- R and D Oliveros Institute of Technology and Agri-Tourism Corporation
- Rami's Agro Farm and Technical Training Center Inc
- Regional Training Center - II (Tuguegarao)
- Roberto Agri-tourism Ventures and Skills Development Institution Inc.
- Santiago Amos Credit and Development Cooperative
- Solano Integrated Agri-Tourism Center
- Stella's Integrated Farm
- Tam-an Agri-Tech Tourism and Training Center Inc.
- Technodemo Farm Training Center
- Telans Integrated Farms
- Tolentino's Integrated Farm School
- Willy's Integrated Farm Training Site
- Zion Integrated Farm

Cordillera

- Apita's Integrated Farm
- Baby-Angeline Integrated Farm
- Bacayan's Rice-Based Integrated Farm
- Bunoy's Integrated Farm
- Clemencia Rice-Based Integrated Farm
- DBM Agricultural Farm School
- Dumagay's Integrated Farm
- FPJ's Integrated Farm
- Green Valley Farm
- Healthy-Harvest Integrated Farm
- J&E Integrated Farm
- J and B Bayawon's Farming School
- Jacob's Farming School
- Kub-ao Farm
- Lobong Marcela Rice-based Integrated Farm
- Macadangdang's Farm
- Macario Argueza Integrated Farm
- Provincial Training Center - Ifugao
- Provincial Center Kalinga
- Roumeia Agri-Tourism and Training Center, Inc.
- Shavcer's Farm

REGION-1 (Ilocos)

- Abundance Agri-tourism and Training Center, Inc.
- Alaminos City Technical Vocational Institute and Assessment Center
- Barlo Technical Institute Training And Assessment Center, Inc.
- Building Lives for Better Future Philippines Foundation Inc.
- Cacbay Ecofarm Agribusiness Skills Training and Assessment Center Inc.
- Graystone Institute of the Philippines (Training & Assessment Center), Inc.
- Kasanayan Kabuhayan Kaunlaran Training Development Center (3K TDC) Inc.
- LG AGRITOURISM TVET AND ASSESSMENT CENTER, INC.
- Marcos Agro-Industrial School
- NSCC Agri-Tourism Farmville
- Our Farm Agribusiness Skills Training And Assessment Center (OFASTRAC) Inc.
- Pangasinan Technological Institute
- Provincial Training Center - Candon City
- Provincial Training Center - Pangasinan
- RB Agri-Tourism and Skills Development Center Inc.
- Reotutar Institute of Science, Arts, and Trades Inc.
- Rocapor's Farm Learning Site School for Practical Agriculture Inc.
- Sacred Heart Savings Cooperative

REGION-3 (Central Luzon)

- Abuela Twin Creeks Agricultural Farm
- Academy for Technical Skills, Inc.
- Alex Paulo's Farm (Integrated-Diversified Farm)
- Almeo Family Farm Corp.
- AngelTolits Integrated Farm
- Angela's GGES Farm and Training Center Inc.
- ASKI Skills and Knowledge Institute, Inc. - Talavera
- Atanacio Farm
- Azbahaen Agri-Tourism and Training Center Inc.
- Balboa's Integrated Farm
- Bausa Integrated Farm and Training Center, Inc.
- Biscocho Integrated Organic (BIO) Farm and Training Center Inc.
- Bonagua Integrated Farm
- Brillita Agri-Tourism and Skills Development Center Inc.
- Bulacan Agricultural Training Center
- Castro Tomas Agri-tecture Farm School and Training Center
- Cornerstone Training and Learning Center
- D' Planners Training Center Inc.
- Diaz Agri Farm
- Duran Farm Agribusiness & Training Center Association, Inc.
- Eastfields Academy of St. James, Inc.
- Fabros Integrated Farm, Training and Assessment Center Inc.
- Felisidro Farm
- Geromo Farm School and Training Center, Inc.
- Gonzalo Puyat School of Arts and Trades
- Greenhaven Farm
- Hacienda Angelita Nature Farm Training And Assessment Center, Inc
- IGB's Training and Assessment Center
- JEDC Farm

REGION 4-A (Calabarzon)

- Adoress Farm Training and Assessment Center Incorporated
- Agrie's Integrated Farm
- Agriskwela Institute of the Philippines, Inc.
- APA Empire Landholdings Inc.
- Beegood Agricultural Learning Center
- Bondoc Peninsula Technological Institute
- Cortijo de Palsabangon Farm OPC.
- Curioso Farm
- D St. Isidore Farming School
- El Royale Farm School
- Encarnacion Farm
- FarmShare Prime
- FLOR and Daisy's Agricultural Farm
- Glinoga Integrated Farm
- Golden Leaf Farm
- GREENTHUMB Farming School
- Imperium Agriculture Training and Assessment Center
- Javier Integrated Farm
- Laly's Farmville
- Masaganang Bukid
- Mikastra Integrated Farm
- Myrtle's Agricultural Farm
- NS Villamor Farm Corporation
- Nylove Integrated Farm
- Ouan's Worth Farm and Family Resort Corp.
- Oyayi Farm and & Resort
- Quezon National Agricultural School
- Roqueza's Integrated Farm
- Skilled Farming School
- Sweet Nature Farms
- Sylvre Agri-Farm Training and Assessment Center, Inc.
- Terra Verde Ecofarm, Inc.
- Terrapedrito Farm
- TESDA Provincial Training Center - Paliparan
- TESDA-LLDA Provincial Training Center
- Uma Verde Econature Farm

REGION 5 (Bicol)

- Albay's Farmers' Bounty (AFB) Village
- Anelyn's Integrated FARM
- Bermudez Agricultural Farm
- Carmel Agri-Learning Farm, Inc.
- Catnafi Farming and Training Center
- Christian Farmers Training Center
- Coop Land Rice-Based Farm CamSur Multi Purpose Cooperative
- Darwel Agricultural Farm
- Denny's Integrated Farm
- Doña Barbara Integrated Farm
- E. R. Rapsing Agricultural Learning Center
- Ecolistic Agricultural Learning Center
- KAT-FARM (Kafarming Agri-Trading Farm)
- Ma-Da Bustamante Family Farm
- Magel Golden Integrated Farm
- Masbate Institute of Fisheries and Technology
- Mercedes Science Agricultural Farm
- Nesting Place Integrated Farm
- Ocbian Nature Farm
- PalaYamaNayon ni Tiyo Edgar
- Provincial Training Center - Albay (Malilipot)
- Provincial Training Center - Sorsogon
- Ragay Polytechnic Skills Institute
- RASTI Integrated FARM
- Regional Training Center - V (Pili)
- Ryden International Technological Institute (R.I.T.I.), Inc.
- Salvador Emiteria Agri Tourism Farm
- San Francisco Institute of Science and Technology
- Shell Training Farm-Bombon
- Sorsogon National Agricultural School (SNAS)
- V. Ala Palay Seed Grower and Distributor (Good Grass Park)

- Jose F. Rodriguez School of Technoogy and Entrepreneurship, Inc.
- Joyful Garden Farm Organic Farmers Association Inc.
- K-D Natures Farm
- Kababaihang Masigla ng Nueva Ecija (KMNE)
- Legaspi Agri Trading
- Linchoco Farm Agri-tourism Assessment and Training Center Inc.
- Myriad Farms Agri-Business Skills Training and Assessment Center, Inc.
- Nathaniel Vera Cruz Integrated Farm School Inc.
- New Gen Agrifarm Training Center
- Northwinds Fine Herd International Inc. - Integrated Diversified Farm
- Ohana Farmland Agri-Tourism Assessment and Training Center
- Provincial Training Center - Nueva Ecija (Palayan City)
- RCA School of Agronomy
- South-Dingalan Farm-Tech Integrated School
- SOWFA OFW Farmers Farm School
- St. Isidore 'the FARMER' Learning Center, Inc.
- Tarlac School of Arts and Trade, Inc.
- Team DAGUI Family Farm
- TGI Technical School, Inc.
- Tingtano Integrated Farm School, Inc.
- TPKIF Nature's Farm
- Transforming Peoples Knowledge and Initiative Learning Institute and Nature's Farm (TPKI LI Nature's Farm) Inc.
- Velman Institute of Technology Inc

REGION 4- (MIMAROPA)

- Adviento's Integrated Farm
- AgriGold Farm
- AGRITEKTURA Enterprises
- Agustin's Farming School
- Artemisium Integrated School
- ASEA Greens Farm
- Bonsay Farm
- Canuyog Farm
- Catly's Agricultural Learning Center
- CEMF Cloverleaf9 Learning Center
- Dalisay Learning Center
- DA - Regional Integrated Agricultural RESEARCH Center
- DJMV Farm
- Dungo's Farmville
- Farm.Fifty One Agricultural Learning Center
- Farmteach Inc.
- Feathers and Green Integrated Farm
- Gabutero Organic Farm Resort
- Geraldine's Agricultural Farm
- Hiraya Farm Resort
- Javenri Harvest Farm
- Lasquety Farm
- Lola's Healthy Farm - Villa Esperanza
- LongField Agricultural Learning Center
- Maculbo Ecofarm
- MAFTII Learning Center
- Mamburao Integrated Farm
- Maria Philiza Farm
- MARQCHA Agricultural Learning Center
- Mary Help of Christians School - Mindoro Inc.
- Mindoro Agri-Tourism Farm and Technological Institute Inc.
- Rada Eco Farm
- Rada Eco Farm Inc.
- Revitalizing Agri-Tourism Vocational Training Center Inc.
- Rizal Occidental Mindoro TESDA Training and Accreditation Center
- RLA Agricultural Learning Center
- Salgado Integrated Farm
- Super M School of Science and Technology (SMSST) Inc.
- TESDA Occidental Mindoro Provincial Training Center
- Victoria Nature Park
- Willandaise Integrated Farm

REGION 6 (Western-Visayas)

- ALFA Grande Ecofarm
- Arceta - Sol Agricultural Learning Center
- Bubbles Integrated Farm
- Centre for Agriskills and Livelihoods Inc.
- Chandys Integrated Farm
- Concepcion Carillo Agricultural Farm
- Crisel Integrated Farm
- Cruziseden Integrated Farm Training Center Inc.
- Ecommune Training Center Inc.
- Ephrathah Farms Corp.
- GLS Agricultural Integrated Farm
- Golden Harvest Farm
- JVS Integrated Farm
- Kapawa Integrated Farm
- Lapidez Agricultural Learning Center
- LEZO MPC Farm and Gardens
- MBA Forest Technical School Inc.
- Meliton Integrated Organic Farm School
- Oceanic Pearl Organic Farm School, Inc.
- Orchard Valley, Inc.
- Passi Trade School
- Payaw Diversified Crops Seives
- Provincial Training Center - Aklan (Kalibo)
- Provincial Training Center - Hamtic
- Provincial Training Center - Iloilo
- San Isidro Labrador Agricultural and Farm Field School Inc.
- The Others Garden
- Uswag Durog River Gems Farm
- Villa Maxselma Sustainable Organic Garden

Registered farm schools in the Philippines (continued)

REGION-7 (Central-Visayas)

- Balloca's Family Farm
- Cagri Complex-Learning Farm Rice-Based Farm City
- Agriculture Office – LGU Bayawan
- Canlaon Potatoes and Flowers Co. Integrated Diversified Farm
- Don Alberto's Farm Rice-Based Farm
- Gomentoc Valley Farm Rice-Based Farm
- iYAAH Eco Farm Integrated – Diversified Farm
- Joeltess Organic Farm Training Center
- Labonite Family Farm Rice – Based Farm
- Provincial Training Center - Bilar
- Provincial Training Center – Dumaguete
- Provincial Training Center - Pilar
- Teofela's Nature Farm Integrated-Diversified Farm

REGION-8 (Eastern-Visayas)

- AI Integrated Farm
- Alde Farm
- Althea's Integrated Farm (Leyte)
- Andrelys Farm
- Barangay Ilaya Kikoy Farmers Association (BIKFA)
- Baybay City Technical-Vocational Training Center
- Beautiful Hands Nature Farm
- Bendicar Farm Agri Eco Tourism
- Bibar's Farm
- Cabucgayan National School of Arts and Trades (CNSAT)
- Chandria Integrated Farm
- Chely Estolano Agricultural Farm
- Chery-agventures Inc.
- Ciprinisa Farm
- Colimargo Integrated Farm
- Conchita's Farm
- Cuatro Marias Rock Garden
- Fidel Cabale Integrated Farm
- Gayas Learning Site and Training Center Inc.
- Grace Jhoy Technical and Vocational School, Inc.
- Godoy Organic Land and Diversification Farm
- Greenhand Integrated Farm
- In Phase Eco Farm
- Jampol Integrated Farm
- Juanito Eco Farm and School for Practical Agriculture
- King Leon Integrated Farm
- La Granja Farmers and Agri-Ventures Association
- Ladrera's Integrated Farm
- Magata Integrated Farm
- Mike Pedroso Farm
- Millan Integrated Farm
- MUFDA Farm
- NECO Farm
- Nickjoy Integrated Farm
- Noy Enting Eco Farm
- Ormoc Rice Seed Growers Farm
- OSPA Foundation Inc.
- Papa Elyong Farm
- Pitahaya Farm
- Primona Holy Infant Academy Farm
- Quilantang Farm Products and Agricultural Service
- R & R Agricultural Farm
- Shigoto Agricultural Farm
- Softea Garden
- Ssm Integrated Farm
- St. Isidore School Farm
- Tempesto Rice Farm
- Villaconzoilo Farm School, Inc.

REGION-9 (Zamboanga-Peninsula)

- BAC JAZZ Farm Inc.
- Enrico Integrated Diversified Agri Eco Tourism farm, Technical Livelihood Training and Assessment Center, Inc.
- Farm C Harvest Community Farm School Inc.
- Glepa Rice Farm
- Kabasalan Agricultural Training and Assessment Center, Inc.
- Labangan Farmers First Consolidated •
- Multi-purpose Cooperative (LAFFICO MPC)
- Provincial Training Center - Zamboanga Sibugay
- Salam Natures Farm Training and Assessment Center
- Saniel Integrated Farm Technological Business School, Inc.
- Sibugay Technical Institute, Inc.
- Zamboanga Sibugay Polytechnic Institute (ZSPI)
- Zampen Farmers Institute and Convergence Center, Inc.

REGION-10 (Northern-Mindanao)

- Abellanos Agricultural Learning Site
- Adlaw Diversified Agri-Farm Corp
- Alman God's Gift Foundation Inc.
- Anpa's Agricultural Learning Center
- Astergold Agricultural Learning Site
- Balay sa Hardin (Learning Site)
- Balmores Diversified Integrated Farm
- Bukidnon Agri-Nature with Agro-Therapeutic Garden
- (BANWAG) Agricultural Learning Center
- Country Farm (Learning Site)
- DJE'S Lowland RICE Farming
- DP Gold Farm (Modified Farm Field School)
- Engallado Nature Farms and Natural Food Products
- Grand Apex Integrated Farm
- Green Thumb Organic and Skills Training Center Inc.
- Green Thumb Rice Farm
- GT Agricultural Farm
- iFarm (Modified Farm Field School)
- Imelda Agricultural Learning Center
- Isza's Green Pasture Agricultural Learning Center
- Jabien Integrated Farm
- Jika Farm (Modified Farm Field School)
- JPL Farm (Modified Farm Field School)
- Kinoguitan National Agricultural School
- Lanao Norte National Agro-Industrial School
- LGU-Kibawe Agricultural Learning Site
- LRC Diversified Farm
- Luis-Sesay Farming School
- Luther and Azucena (LA) Integrated Farm
- Margeuries House of Goodies (Learning Site)
- Maricz Integrated Farm
- Mr. Dega Farm Learning Institute
- Nonoy's Kamalig at Hituan - Agricultural Learning Center
- OP Saarenas Integrated Farm
- Oroquieta Agro-Industrial School
- Payag N Daday Integrated Farm
- PBA Mindanao Technical Institute Inc.
- PBAR Agricultural Learning Center
- Provincial Training Center - Bukidnon (Valencia)
- Provincial Training Center - Misamis Occidental (Plaridel)
- Queensland Herbs and Tourism Farm (Learning Site)
- Red's Agricultural Farm
- Regional Training Center - Iligan
- Roger and Neneng Agricultural Learning Center
- SafeGcc Inc - Bread Life Family Farm Entrepreneurial School
- SiaKeAn's Integrated Farm
- SN Farm (Modified Farm Field School)
- Venida Farm (Modified Farm Field School)

REGION-11 (Davao)

- Adlawan Farms Corporation
- Arc Agri-Venture and Learning Hub
- Basilio's Agricultural Learning Site
- Carmelo de los Cientos Sr. National Trade School
- Davao National Agricultural School (DNAS)
- Deriada Agri Learning and Skills Enhancement Farm
- Deypalubos Agricultural Farm
- Dimpas Greentegrated Agri-Tourism Farm
- Don Bosco Training Center-Mati, Inc.
- F. Bernal Agricultural Integrated Farm
- JA Agricultural Learning Center
- Lawagon Cacao Farm
- MEA Natural Farm
- Regional Training Center-Davao/Korea Philippines Vocational Training Center
- Valiant Technical Institute and Assessment Center, Inc.

REGION-12 (SOCCSKSARGEN)

- Alcor Farm
- ANTS Academy of the South Incorporated
- Apostol's Techno-Demo Learning Farm, Inc.
- Casica Integrated Farm Institute Inc.
- Castromayor Integrated Farm School Incorporated
- Envirogreen Village Educational Foundation, Inc.
- Felicidad Orchard Training Center Inc.
- Feta Integrated Farm and Technical Institute Inc.
- Gabay-Bayawanon Integrated Farm School
- GBS III Agro Farms
- J'MESA's Farm
- JND Integrated Farm Institute Inc.
- Jomento Farm
- Lenkoy's Farm
- Nenita Farm Rice - Based Farm
- Noorul Eilm Academy Foundation Inc.
- OND Genesis Agricultural Farm
- Provincial Training Center - Lambayong
- TESDA Training Center - General Santos City
- Thelsan School Incorporated
- Umani Cabal Farm Inc.
- VMOTRILS Farm

Caraga

- Baucawe Diversified Farm
- Bbidai Farm
- Callano Farm School and Training Center Corporation
- Campos Agricultural Learning Center
- DAYO's Farm
- DCA Agri-Farm Training School
- Farmers Alternative for Self-Reliance Multi-Purpose Cooperative
- Foundation for the Development of Agusanons, Inc.
- Hillsvlew Farm Learning Center
- Jovenica's AgriTourism Park
- Just-Hiro Rice Based Agricultural Services
- M & N Patorgo Ventures, Inc.
- Mabakas Techno Demo Farm Inc.
- Mejares Fun Farm
- Montañez Agri Technology Inc.
- Municipal Agricultural Learning Center
- Nanay Nena's Farm
- Oribe's Agricultural Learning Center
- RHISAJ Farm
- SEGLO Integrated Farm
- St. Thomas Micro Farm Learning Center
- YPO Rosario Agro-Industrial Development Corporation

BARMM

- Al-Mani Farmers Marketing Cooperative
- Al-Rahman Farmers Multi-Purpose Cooperative
- Busikong Greenland Multi-Purpose Cooperative
- PGR Integrated Farm

* as of May 2023

How to apply AS RCEF FARM SCHOOL

WRITTEN BY: SARAH JOY N. RUIZ
and REUEL M. MARAMARA
INFOGRAPHICS BY: SJN RUIZ

Farm schools under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund Rice Extension Services Program (RCEF RESP) are first accredited by DA-Agricultural Training Institute (DA-ATI) as Learning Sites for Agriculture (LSA). LSAs can then apply as Farm Schools (FS) at the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

There are eleven steps to be an accredited LSA, and steps to become a RCEF farm school.

ORIENTATION

Once the DA-ATI recognizes the letter of intent and sees that the farmer applying is ready to take on the responsibilities, DA-ATI orients him about the roles of an accredited LSA.

FIELD VALIDATION

After clarifying what the farm components are, the DA-ATI will conduct an ocular inspection of the prospective LSA and assess it according to their LSA acceptance evaluation form.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

DA-ATI then works closely with the farmer-owner to prepare, evaluate, and approve the development plan that will qualify the farm as an LSA.

ISSUANCE OF LSA CERTIFICATE AND SIGNAGE

All done, the DA-ATI Central Office issues the LSA Certificate and the ATI LSA Signage, which will be displayed conspicuously on the farm to properly inform prospective trainees/learners. An accredited LSA may then apply as a Farm School at TESDA.

AUTHENTICITY CHECK AND SITE INSPECTION

TESDA then validates the submitted requirements and inspects the equipment, facilities, and books, among other things.

ISSUANCE OF CERTIFICATE OF TVET PROGRAM REGISTRATION/LETTER OF DENIAL

Depending on the results of site inspection, TESDA will issue a certificate of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program registration or a letter of denial. Once certification is acquired, the registered RCEF FS may now offer the programs as specified during the application and may access the RCEF scholarship fund.

STEP
01

IDENTIFICATION

To begin, a letter of intent, a recommendation, and an endorsement from eligible people such as farmers who already have an accredited LSA are to be submitted to the DA-ATI.

STEP
02

STEP
03

FARM PROFILE

Upon acceptance after the orientation, the prospective LSA is required to fill out the farm profile from where the operator will specify the aspects of the farm and what kind of information it can offer to possible trainees/learners.

STEP
04

STEP
05

ACCEPTANCE

Should the farm meet all the standards of the DA-ATI, the owner/s of the prospective LSA will be asked to sign an acceptance form, saying that they acknowledge the responsibilities of the accreditation and do their best to accomplish their role.

STEP
06

STEP
07

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

With an approved development plan, representatives of the DA-ATI and the farm owner sign the MOA for LSA establishment.

STEP
08

STEP
09

SUBMISSION OF REQUIRED DOCUMENTS TO TESDA

Under RCEF, TESDA-accredited Technology Institutions, LSA, Schools for Practical Agriculture, ATI's Extension Service Providers, Farm Business Schools, State/Private Universities and Colleges, and training providers such as DA-ATI Regional Training Centers, PhilRice, and PHilMech may register as RCEF FS. Once this status is achieved, applicants must submit to TESDA provincial offices an application letter, training program modules, credentials of the program trainers, and certification or proof of TESDA accreditation.

STEP
10

STEP
11



Lea dR. Abaoag

Head, Technology Management and Services Division, PhilRice



Revitalizing agriculture, empowering rice specialists

PhilRice is at the forefront of developing rice specialists to ensure that those giving information and providing assistance to farmers are technically equipped with science-based recommendations. A lot of those trained in the past have either retired, occupied higher positions, or transferred to other offices and agencies.

Under the RCEF Rice Extension Services Program, the Rice Specialists' Training Course (RSTC) was redesigned to respond to the need for rice trainers and specialists to support the program. The season-long RSTC was modified into three modules to develop the technical competence of the trainees specifically in diagnosing and managing field problems. Such competence is anchored on the concepts and principles of the PalayCheck System giving focus on the production of high-quality inbred rice and seeds, and farm mechanization. Picking up

from the lessons of the project IPaD that developed the AgRiDOCs, the redesigned RSTC includes transformational leadership (Module 1- Be Transformed) as the fundamental module. Its aim is to ignite the passion of the trainees and strengthen their mission to assist and help farmers to become competitive. To further enhance the trainee's competence in diagnosing field problems, the curriculum added visits to a farm with complex difficulties. With guidance from technical experts, the trainees analyze the rice plant and farmer's practices and make the necessary recommendations to the farmer tilling the field.

With the training of farmers under the scholarship program of RCEF, there was an urgent need for trainers who can be tapped by the farm schools for the conduct of the farmers' field schools nationwide. Thus, alongside the

improvement of the RSTC curriculum, PhilRice also led the development of the curriculum for the training of trainers (TOT). Focusing on the use and production of high-quality inbred rice as well as modern farming, the TOT on the production of high-quality inbred rice and seeds, and farm mechanization was introduced. This shorter course fast-tracked the development of trainers and field facilitators of farm schools. Just like the RSTC, mind-setting was included as the foundational module.

To start the massive training, we capacitated our key staff from the branch stations so that they too will be able to conduct the training simultaneously. In the first few batches, we noticed that more participants sent by farm schools to become trainers generally had no or limited agri-background. Thus, we incorporated more field exercises as



RCEF Rice Extension Services Program believes that the “best preparation for tomorrow is today” so it created training curricula that do not only enhance trainees’ knowledge but also help them transform into leaders of change.

Feedback from the trainers and farmers led us to deliver more intensive sessions on pest and nutrient management. Thus, we developed a course on these, which the farm schools can also offer under the RCEF scholarship program of TESDA.

well as case studies. We gave more time for the conduct of the agroecosystem analysis (AESA) and made sure that well-trained facilitators guide the discussions during the AESA presentation and final analysis. These are the areas where the trainees need to integrate all the management aspects when making recommendations. Various questions are often raised by the facilitators to ensure that the trainees understood the “whys” or principles behind the recommendations. We also emphasize the inclusion and conduct of the final analysis. This session will help the farmers learn and understand the strengths and weaknesses of their practices. Once properly facilitated, the farmers will be able to realize why one farmer got better yield than others and why it is important to follow the recommendations in the PalayCheck System.

Feedback from the trainers and farmers led us to deliver more intensive sessions on pest and nutrient management. Thus, we developed a course on these, which the farm schools can also offer under the RCEF scholarship program of Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). At the same time, we assisted the Agricultural Training Institute in the development of the course on digital agriculture. In late 2022, we began offering the TOT on Pest and Nutrient Management. The five-day course focuses on the identification of rice pests and diseases, and their proper management. It also emphasizes the importance of proper nutrient management. Teaching the science behind these two management areas will help the farmers not only increase their yield but also to reduce their production cost.

Two more strategies were pilot-tested as we continue to improve how we can help the farm school trainers. First, we further improved the conduct of training by combining the two training of trainers courses: production of high-quality inbred rice seeds and farm mechanization, and the pest and nutrient management. Thus, instead of attending the two separate TOTs (as the first is a pre-requisite of the other), the participants need only to finish this longer course. The second strategy is to require the participants, especially those with limited agri/rice background, to complete the online course. Only those who pass the online course will be accepted in the combined course. This established the common understanding of the PalayCheck System and other basic principles so that when they come to the face-to-face sessions, it will be like a refresher only without consuming much time in discussions. 🌱



FEATURE

Personalized recommendations from the PalayCheck Cropping Calendar Matrix

► JOSHUA P. MENDOZA

Joe Harvey F. Alegado, 53, from San Narciso, grew up watching his father cultivating land that wasn't their own. Immersed in the farming landscape at a young age, he realized that farming was not an easy task. Hence, his motivation in educating rice farmers in Zambales and opening an RCEF farm school.

Alegado has trained about 300 rice farmers from San Marcelino, San Felipe, Cabangan, and San Narciso.

While other farm schools solely rely on the modules and materials in educating rice farmers, Alegado's Jose F. Rodriguez School of Technology and Entrepreneurship, Inc. has stepped up their game by creating the PalayCheck Cropping Calendar Matrix (PCCM) leading to an innovation that helped Zambales rice farmers achieve higher yield with lower cost.

"We on the ground have a significant role. We have to internalize the technology

that is made possible by the experts so that the efforts of the government won't be wasted and rather be put into reality," Alegado said.

PCCM

Derived from the PalayCheck System developed by PhilRice with its partners, the PCCM was developed as a comprehensive tool to help farmers plot their farming activities from Key Checks 1 to 9 based on their cropping calendar.

Farm school owner Joe Harvey Alegado, the innovative educator.



The PCCM helps the rice farmers visualize how to integrate the Key Checks in their cropping calendar thus simplifying and localizing them for more personalized recommendations.

Using the Binhing Palay App, the farmers could fill in the necessary information in accordance to the crop growth stages of their chosen variety.

After filling in, the farmers could now identify and plot the range of days a certain Key Check is applicable and the activities it encompasses.

Through his teaching innovations, Alegado and his students identified a recurring disease that has been infesting their crops – the bacterial leaf blight (BLB).

“Before, farmers sprayed chemicals in the hope of preventing the unidentified disease but through our farm school, they have learned to switch into a variety that has resistance to BLB,” Alegado said in delight.

Joe also highlighted how the PCCM made it easier for farmers to schedule the days of fertilizer application. Before, farmers in his area applied vast amounts of fertilizer without ascertaining when and what to apply. Now, the farmers only apply within the first 14 days after transplanting, during active tillering, and at the panicle initiation to booting stage.

Impact

Farm school scholar Jerry Padilla, 41, of San Felipe could attest to how the

PCCM had helped him manage his farm. He could now easily monitor his rice crops during the evolving growth stages providing them with the best interventions and practices needed until the harvesting stage.

“Before, I sought and followed instructions from the elderly who had experience in rice farming when it comes to fertilizer application. But now, I am sure when to apply and what kind of fertilizer to give to my rice crops,” Padilla maintained.

He also rejoiced that his yield increased significantly by 30% and is now saving up to P10,000 after attending the Field School and using the PCCM.

Similar to Padilla’s experience is Efen Reyes’ who was also once dependent on the old farming practices that cost him higher farming expenses than the yield itself.

Because of PCCM, Reyes now knows the needs of his crops, applying the right amount of fertilizer, resulting in increased yields with lower costs.

Challenges

The journey toward this success that helped some rice farmers in Zambales isn’t an easy route.

Joe Harvey F. Alegado recalled being belittled by the experienced farmers who attended his farm school during the first months that he offered the RCEF training course.

“It turns out Harvey will teach; we’re even better than him,” were some of the hurtful words he had to swallow.

But he felt no intimidation. Rather he snatched this as an opportunity to widen the perspectives of the farmers to embrace modernization in rice farming.

“We are here in this training so you would have a basis in every step we do in rice farming. If we do not know what we are doing, we’re just gambling on things that cost us money such as unnecessary application of chemicals that could eventually damage the environment,” he would explain to the farmers.

Hopes and dreams

Even though Joe’s father didn’t get the chance to witness and learn the PCCM, his father’s perseverance is still a huge investment in the farm school. The land he once cultivated as tenant is now his son’s property, tending and empowering the present and future generations of rice farmers.

He confided that one of their aspirations as a farm school was to see the younger generation gain the eagerness to manage their own farms using the PCCM.

“I already saw one batch where the majority of them are from the younger generation. They have the potential to be trainers. The way they articulated their thoughts after our discussion, I saw the future of Zambales rice farmers,” Joe figured out.

Going back to his roots, Joe knows that he inherited his talent in teaching from his late mother who was a piano teacher. He may not be teaching how to play any musical instrument that produces harmonies and rhythms, but in that moment he heard the youthful notes of the Zambales food producers.

A song that is unravelling slowly; music that is yet to be heard and relished. 🍌



Kiara Mae E. Parnyo

Robert B. Olaer, 55, owner of an RCEF farm school, IYAAH Eco Farm in Tugas, Candijay, Bohol, recognizes the significance of revolutionizing agriculture and empowering rice farmers. This drives him to incorporate techniques from fellow farmers in other provinces and utilize YouTube videos to enhance their extensive 3-hectare farm.

A gift of good seeds

Olaer received a bag containing 25 rice varieties from a permaculturist friend in Bukidnon. Seeking the perfect match for their soil, they planted these seeds, initiating a meticulous process to identify the most suitable variety.

“As a recent agriculture enthusiast, I’m eager to learn from other provinces and adapt their practices to our over 3-ha area, including the seeds I entrusted to Rene Inojales, our trainer, for experimenting,” he shared.

Among the varieties, one stood out showcasing exceptional results. Unfamiliar with its official name, the variety earned the moniker “red rice 92R” after yielding an impressive 3.5t from half-hectare.

“We’re reproducing this to share with others, offering a high-yield crop using

Nurturing success: IYAAH’s innovative approach

► CHRISTINE MAE A. NICOLAS

only organic fertilizers and great eating quality,” Inojales said.

Extra [virtual] discussions

Beyond seed experimentation, the farm school has revolutionized the education of its farmer-scholars through an unconventional means—YouTube. Eduardo Escaboza, the assistant administrator and trainer, recognizes the platform’s potential as an extra mentor for farmers.

The 46-year-old trainer shares YouTube channels and links to help nurture farmer-trainees’ agricultural knowledge,

allowing them to grow independently, even without daily in-person attendance at the farm school.

“It’s like having an extra mentor for farmers. We usually watch Agribusiness How It Works, Emmanuel Piñol, and PhilRice TV videos during breaks and free time, and farmers also view them at home,” Escaboza emphasized.

He promotes self-directed learning, enabling farmer-scholars to expand their understanding of agriculture. These learners have sharpened their knowledge and practical farming skills by utilizing YouTube as a valuable resource.



Farm school owner and trainers, along with farmer-scholars, are committed to advancing innovative agricultural education as a way of embracing progress.



As a recent agriculture enthusiast, I'm eager to learn from other provinces and adapt their practices to our over 3ha area, including the seeds I entrusted to our trainer, for experimenting.

- Robert B. Olaer



Escaboza's shared videos have become regular fixtures during breaks and free time, both at the farm and at home. This innovative approach ensures ongoing learning, supplementing traditional classes with real-world insights from successful farmers.

IYAAH's impact

Eutiqiano Auxtero Jr., a farmer-scholar with less than a year of farming experience, praises the educational innovation at IYAAH. While acknowledging the importance of hands-on fieldwork, he attests to the supplementary role of YouTube videos.

He explained, "There are YouTube video topics that we don't cover in our classes, mainly focusing on proven farmer practices. While I don't consider these as directly effective as our hands-on fieldwork, they do contribute to broadening our knowledge."

Having returned from working in Canada, Auxtero noticed a remarkable improvement in their farm's yield—from 5t to an impressive 8.3t.

Welfreda Tutor, another farmer-scholar, highlights the efficiency of the YouTube-driven approach. When faced with uncertainties from the videos, she notes

them down to discuss during classes or immediately in the group chat—a testament to the seamless integration of virtual and physical learning environments.

Since enrolling its inaugural batch in 2020, IYAAH Eco Farm has graduated 1,050 individuals in 42 batches. Their commitment to diversity, seed experiments, and innovative teaching approaches reflects a holistic approach to sustainable agriculture, ensuring the success of both the farm and its farmer-scholars. 🌱



FEATURE

“Spread the news,” PhilRice experts told Erlyn Fe M. Cosme when she was about to complete her Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund Rice Specialists Training Course (RCEF RSTC) in 2022.

After the season-long training, she and her fellow specialists were encouraged to help farmers become more competitive by teaching them the recommended practices and technologies. For Erlyn and her batchmates, Kryztof and Allan, the commission can never be forsaken.



Erlyn Fe M. Cosme, 39

**Herd and Plough Bukid
ni Tatay Farm School**

Botolan, Zambales

Erlyn is one of the first graduates of the RCEF Training of Trainers (RCEF TOT) in November 2019. Her learnings were deepened when she participated in the RSTC.

“My knowledge about modern rice technologies was reinforced through these courses. The lessons were very specific, well-explained, and technically sound. These gave me confidence to go out, and share what I learned with farmers,” she was excited.

Bearers of good news

► ANNA MARIE B. BERTO AND KIARA MAE E. PANYO

The trainer started reaching out to her fellow indigenous peoples (IPs) in Botolan and San Marcelino through the Bukid ni Tatay Farm School. She serves as one of the seven trainers here.

“I meet my fellow IPs halfway. I localize the lessons and speak in our own language. It is funny how we always start our conversations through insect pests. It is really one of their major concerns,” so that later, pest management became one of Erlyn’s favorite topics to teach.

Since her RSTC graduation, Erlyn had trained 12 batches and served as assessor of 10 more batches in other farm schools in Zambales. During her free time, she manages to go to farmers’ fields and serve them whatever season they are in.

Through all the batches she handled, she realized that the traditional practices of farmers are difficult to disprove because these are also fruits of their years of experience. Thus, she always finds ways to combine the modern technologies with their best practices. At the end of the day, Erlyn believes that the trainer and the farmer both learn from each other.



Kryztof Ray C. Carillo, 41

DC Integrated Farm School

Dao, Capiz

Also a graduate of the RCEF TOT in 2020, Kryztof is pulling every string to make his vision happen – to help farmers become proud of their profession, and be able to send their children to school.

"Joining the TOT was like having my bachelor's degree, and the RSTC was my master's. The lessons were so practical and scientific, and the technologies they taught us were proven on the ground. Compared with farmers, my knowledge on rice farming prior to training was lacking. Because of these training courses, I got the confidence to teach and to walk my talk," the farm school owner said.

A year after his RSTC course, 11 batches of farmer-scholars have been trained under Kryztof's supervision. He also handled topics on pest and nutrient management in other farm schools around Capiz.

Of all the topics he teaches about, he is very particular about pest management because he found that most farmers in their area practice what he calls "indiscriminate firing".

"Based on my conversations with them, they immediately spray pesticide whenever they see insects on their rice farms. They do not have proper diagnosis but they are quick to act. They even have a schedule for spraying! If only they had the proper knowledge, they could have saved around P2,000!," Kryztof estimated.

On nutrient management, he also noticed that farmers were not easily adopting the recommendations because of financial limitations.

This led him to push for more active engagement with farmers, even beyond the farm school.

They established several demo farms in Capiz, alongside other farm schools. Accordingly, two barangays can witness one demo farm.

They also provide and deliver free chicken dung to their trainees, and they sell cheaper fertilizers that can be paid by the farmer-trainees after harvest.

He assigned three personnel to monitor their trainees' rice fields, and called them one month after training to check their progress in terms of the PalayCheck Key Checks.

They likewise established a Messenger group chat to connect with their trainees, and conduct site visitation for those who send concerns to them.

While doing all these services, Kryztof never forgot the action plan he prepared prior to their graduation in the RSTC.

"I am part of the private sector and I believe that this engagement with the government can fill in the gap that is needed to fully help the rice farmers. I organized the Panay Integrated Farmer-Trainers Association, joined by LGU technicians, and RSTC and TOT graduates in the island. We collaborate, help update each other on new knowledge, and complement activities like the demo farms. By doing so, we can achieve more impact, more visibility on the ground, so that our farmers can feel we are with them," Kryztof shared.

Allan M. Arnoco, 64

JIKA Farm

Lala, Lanao del Norte

Like Erlyn, Allan aka "*Kuya Bong*" is also one of the first finishers of the RCEF TOT. He is highly respected and sought after by the rice farmers in Lanao del Norte for his expertise and passion in the field.

Driven by his compassion and commitment in improving the practices of his fellow rice farmers, he continued to broaden and hone his skills and knowledge by attending various rice-related training courses while managing and being one of the trainers in his farm school.

"I understand the struggles and hardships in the life of rice farmers, hence I want all of us (farmers) to succeed. As a trainer,

it is very important that I also walk my talk and practice what I preach. I always emphasize the importance of following all the Key checks, not just some of them, because in order to achieve high yield and quality harvest, no Key check should be neglected," he admonished.

Apart from teaching the PalayCheck System in his training, he also shares his best farming practices to his students and fellow farmers for them to emulate. As a strategy to keep the students fully engaged in the training, he does not only give out lectures and on-site demonstrations but also serves free breakfast, snacks, and coffee on the side!

The results of his shared practices are also evident in his field convincing the farmers to apply his demonstrations.

"Land preparation is a vital process for the rice plant to achieve its optimum quality. That's why I share my practice of allotting more than the ideal one month for the land to rest. The small sacrifice of time and giving more rest to the land achieves higher yield and undeniably a more quality harvest," he beams.

He also pointed to the importance of taking care of the seedlings and discouraging throwing them in the paddies during planting because it causes stress and damage to the young plants. Also, "*Bunot ngayon, tanim ngayon*," is his motto.

Four years after his TOT course, he has trained 27 batches (almost 500 farmers in total) in his farm school and even gets invited as a resource speaker in the other farm schools in the whole expanse of Lanao.

Up to this day, the senior citizen never stops learning. He is still driven in re-learning and replacing some of their farming practices with new and recommended ones. Steered by grit and passion, he continues in his journey to make his fellow farmers' lives easier. 🍌





Challenge accepted

(Retelling stories of farm school owners overcoming hurdles)

► HANAH HAZEL MAVI B. MANALO

The role of farm schools as a venue of extension services of the RCEF Program to help boost the rice farmers' competitiveness hoists a big challenge for school owners.

Abner of the Javier Integrated Farm in Laguna and two other gentlemen relate their stories as owners of farm schools.

Together with more than 400 RCEF farm schools nationwide, their farms are where the Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and other relevant training activities are conducted.



Abner M. Javier

Javier Integrated Farm

Calauan, Laguna

It all started with conducting training as an act of community service. The DA and private sector groups conducted several training activities in his farm, which was not a learning site at that time.

"My goal is to help rice farmers. I did not expect to have my farm as a learning site," Javier said.

In 2018, his farm was accredited as a learning site by Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) and as a farm school by Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in 2019.

From 2019, his school has produced about 300 FFS graduates.

He admitted that his farm school is not yet well-equipped with facilities. He recognized that it is his responsibility as owner to provide facilities, especially that farm schools are being paid for this kind of training activity. It is his priority to improve his farm school. He believes that good trainers in such schools should be complemented with complete and good facilities to provide the best learning experience to rice farmers.





Engr. Constantino N. Panes, Jr.

*Technical Education and Skills
Development Authority Regional Training
Center-Korea Philippines Vocational
Center*

Davao City

Since 2021, the center has trained more than 70 farmers through the FFS on Production of High-Quality Inbred Rice and Seed Certification, and 100 learners on Rice Machinery Operations (RMO).

Despite its limitations on favorable rice areas for technology demonstration purposes and on rice farm machinery and equipment, the training center still delivered what was expected of them.

According to Panes, they inked a memorandum of agreement with a farmer-cooperator in Davao del Sur so they could use his farm for the conduct of FFS and RMO, and with a farmers' cooperative/association for the use of rice farm machines.

Jeric F. Bilita, a trainer, effortlessly shared some of the learnings of their trainees. "Some of our farmers are no longer spraying insecticides. They can now distinguish pests from helpful organisms in the rice field."



Lyndon F. Basilio

Basilio's Agricultural Learning Site

Davao del Sur

Basilio almost gave up on processing his papers for the accreditation of his learning site as a farm school. He hoped that his farmer-trainees would not also give up and get tired of attending FFS in his farm school.

"I don't put too much pressure on them. It is still up to them if they want to learn but I will do my part," Basilio said.

To encourage his farmer-trainees to stay and enjoy learning with them, he regularly

meets with his trainers to discuss the needs of their farmer-trainees and think of ways to address them. They learned that they needed to focus on nutrient management so they put more emphasis on this topic during their training.

He provided samples of these nutrient management technologies such as biofertilizers, which they could try in a portion of their farms to compare their own practices with the recommendations from FFS. He granted their request to also teach them how to produce fermented fruit juice after seeing the good results.

He has produced 225 FFS graduates since his farm was admitted by TESDA in 2021. 🌾

Some of our farmers are no longer spraying insecticides. They can now distinguish pests from helpful organisms in the rice field.



RISE *with* RICE

Indelible lessons practiced by heart

► CHRISTINA A. FREDILES AND MARIEL M. ESPINOZA

To educate farmers about the latest rice technologies is an achievement in itself, but to put their learnings into practice is more than just an accomplishment – it's one of the ultimate goals of any institution.

Through the Farmer Field School (FFS) under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) program, the pursuit of increased productivity and income for farmers has accelerated. There are 484 farm schools established across the country to offer training on high-quality inbred rice and seed certification, and farm mechanization.

Farmer-scholar from Mindanao

Dominador S. Veniegas, 46, from Matanao, Davao del Sur, has been farming for 20 years. He has attended more than 10 rice

training courses, but it was the RCEF-FFS Training on rice production in 2021 that enabled him to put into practice what he learned. For Mang Dominador, his knowledge of pest management increased his income through savings and higher *palay* selling prices. "I used to spray insecticides twice a week, which amounted to 4 liters, costing P2,800, and an additional P1,000 for labor," he said.

He was initially hesitant to follow the recommendations on pest management because he wrongly believed that all insects in the field were pests. He was unaware that beneficial organisms could help protect his rice plants. It was only during the FFS training that he learned about the benefits of conserving useful organisms by observing and recording his field's environmental information. Besides the savings from not buying

insecticides, Mang Dominador was able to sell his produce at P56 per kilo, instead of the usual P23 per kilo, as long as it passed the "no pesticide" test. Apart from his substantial savings and increased income, he is proud to say that his learned practices benefitted not only himself but also human health and the environment. "We all know the health hazards of pesticides to our bodies and the greenhouse gases they produce, which are harmful to both humans and plants," he re-echoed in Filipino.

For land preparation, Mang Dominador ensured that his land was well-puddled. This practice, he said, helped him manage water and farm machinery more efficiently. He used a 4-wheel tractor, a floating tiller, and handtractor to level his rice field. He added that using machinery helped him save money and time in operations. He recalled that he used to spend P1,400 on land preparation, including food for farm laborers. Additionally, instead of using 12 bags of fertilizers, he now uses only 8 bags. He has learned that fertilizer application should be based on the needs of the plants, not the desires and caprices of the farmers. He is now aware that most pest infestations and lodging are caused by excessive fertilizer application.

When asked what convinced him to follow the recommendations of the FFS training, he said that the participatory



Dominador S. Veniegas



Ronilyn D. Panganonong



Danilo M. Noval

trials or technology demonstrations incorporated into the curriculum helped him trust the learnings implanted in them. He hopes his fellow 'barangay' would also experience the training he has gone through. With all the learnings and application in the field of Mang Dominador, his yield has jacked up from 80 sacks (5.2t) to 120 sacks (7.8t) per hectare. His income has an increase of P50,000. "This would not have been possible without the free FFS training that I have acquired and put into practice," he confided.

Farmer-scholar from Visayas

As a consequence of her FFS training, Ronilyn D. Panganonong, 44 years old, from Balete, Aklan, was able to buy a motorcycle and build her house while supporting her son's college education. Ronilyn belongs to the first batch of RCEF FFS at Villa Maxselma Sustainable Organic Garden in 2019.

On her half-hectare farm, together with the farms beside hers, she confirmed that they were practicing synchronous planting. She discovered throughout the training that doing so prevents pests and diseases from swarming a single field, while conserving water. Ronilyn added that with this training, she was introduced to the walk-behind transplanter and found

it interesting and useful. Through her associations, they were granted machinery from PHilMech, including the said transplanter, which they are now using.

"I also tried using the Minus-One-Element-Technique Kit. This technology guides me in identifying what nutrient is deficient. We were then using 3 ½ bags of fertilizer, believing that more fertilizer meant a healthier crop. However, after the training, we are now using only 2 ½ bags without compromising yield," she said.

My production cost also decreased from about P15,000 to P8,000 because we practiced farm technologies learned. Through labor cost-reducing mechanization, by adopting land preparation techniques, applying the right element and amount of fertilizer, using certified seeds, and having knowledge on how to properly manage pests and diseases, my harvest from the half-hectare jumped from 35 cavans (1.3t) to 49 cavans (1.86t) of rice.

Farmer-scholar from Luzon

Former OFW Danilo M. Noval, 60, from Maria Aurora, Aurora, is also a graduate of FFS at Azbahaen Farm School in 2020. He says techniques on land preparation and synchronous planting are the two most important technologies he learned

from the training and applies these on his field.

Mang Danilo practices the "21 days before planting" technique to ensure that his field is well-leveled. The first harrowing is done 7 days after plowing, initial leveling after 14 days, and final leveling after 21 days. "I have observed that with this practice, the growth and maturity of plants are uniform, and there is a lesser incidence of weeds," the senior citizen said.

He added that synchronous planting has helped their community escape from severe attacks by pests. He has learned from the training that such an approach avoids overlapping incidences of insect pests and diseases. "With synchronous planting, crops are harvested almost simultaneously. This means there is no food source for insect pests to survive on and multiply," Mang Danilo is convinced.

The technologies he learned from the FFS have helped increase his yield from 70 sacks/ha (3.6t) to 95 sacks/ha (4.9t).

For the three scholars - Dominador, Ronilyn, and Danilo - their learnings from FFS will forever stay in their minds and be practiced by heart in the field. After all, these technologies have helped them increase their yields and income while reducing their farming costs. 🌱



“Problems and challenges are not an excuse to stop working and helping others; they serve as an inspiration to move forward until we reach that goal that we longed for,” declared Nerio A. Quisto, 67, chairperson of the Bohol Farmers Multipurpose Cooperative (BOFAMCO).

The Coop started as a small group of farmers in 2003.

“Before, we mostly relied on using good seeds or sometimes we had to travel to different provinces to buy seeds, to think that we don’t always have a good or high yield. It always feels like we’ve lost in a game we bet on,” sighed Terencio R. Palma, one of the trained seed growers.

As a group, they had a rough start; they dipped to the lowest point where they almost stopped as one.

One string of hope is the only thing that holds them together.

With only a few members, they applied for training on how to produce seeds, and in 2006, they finally started operating as accredited rice seed growers.

Nerio believes that the seed growers made their way to revitalize their organization.

Starting over again

With the hope of continuing what they had started, they devised their own ways and strategies as budding seed producers.

Even so, it was still a roller-coaster ride.

“Before we engaged in RCEF, we solely relied on different programs from the DA regional and the provincial office of Bohol for buffer and excess stocks. We ourselves sought contact with LGUs and coordinated with them,” Nerio said.

Finally, they started as a contracted CS producer/supplier for RCEF. Their first commitment was to produce and supply seeds for their province.

For their first season, they committed 12,155 bags to RCEF. This was 45% of the

Seeds of hope

► YOBHEL LOUISSE P. BELTRAN

requirement of Bohol. Next season, they managed to increase by 75% with 30,029 bags.

Overcoming hurdles

BOFAMCO goes through a lot of challenges as they still must cover their past loans for them to acquire new and improved facilities.

“We have requested financial support and when they grant that request, we will focus on providing what our seed growers need,” Nerio anticipates.

Aside from this, they also experienced one of the most unexpected events that derailed how they operated as a group.

During the Christmas holidays 2021, typhoon Odette swept through the area leaving behind a trail of destroyed homes and damaged farms and facilities. BOFAMCO members were not spared from this tragedy, their farm areas were devastated including their seed processing facilities.

Despite the setback, they did not stop producing seeds. Rather, they came up with strategies on how they could continuously operate as seed growers.

“When the typhoon hit our province, we were worried about how we’d be able to stand up on our own when we almost had nothing left. But, instead of giving up, we decided to start all over. We had limited assets, but it was better than doing nothing,” Nerio continued.

Today, they feel more at ease having the RCEF Seed Program patronizing their high-quality seeds.

“We are truly grateful for RCEF because we were able to sell our seeds at P38/kg. It is higher than supplying commercially for only P30/kg,” Nerio compared.

With 71 active seed growers, BOFAMCO now operates as one of the contracted seed growers’ cooperatives of DA-PhilRice. It produces 80,000 bags covering 100% of the Bohol seed requirement of more than 40,000 bags, let alone Region 8 for the past two seasons. 🌱



Standing as one, BOFAMCO focuses on strengthening the seed growers to continuously produce and supply high-quality seeds.

Perceiving the Department of Agriculture (DA) adversely can be a daunting hurdle. That's why when the RCEF program was introduced in Polillo, Quezon, local personnel made a concerted effort to rekindle farmers' trust in the agricultural services it offered.

But like other Municipal Agriculture Offices (MAO) implementing RCEF, Polillo faced initial challenges and operational complexities.

Milagros A. Lalaguna, the 63-year-old municipal agriculturist, had a dream of breaking the farmers free from the relentless cycle of hardship and skepticism, igniting their hope for better yields.

"Farmers usually relied on rice seeds of co-farmers, often sourcing them from the mainland. Some turned to a practice known colloquially as '*magsasapalay*', where they borrowed money and later repaid it with their harvest," she recounted.

For Lalaguna, it's not about helping them just once; her commitment takes root in ensuring sustained support.

"Beyond updating the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture farmer database, we proactively collaborated with each community by establishing farmers' associations. It deepened our understanding of the local context and enhanced the ability to provide meaningful assistance," she explained.

She affirmed that it was the agriculture office's own initiative.

"Our efficiency has improved significantly through direct communication with the associations' officers, creating more opportunities to access government programs," she added.

The birth pains

RCEF seed distribution was a challenging roller-coaster ride, entailing delayed



Agri-technologist Christopher A. Astejada fosters unity and hope among Polillo rice farmers through strategic dialogue, highlighting the importance of forming cohesive associations.

Rekindling trust: empowering farmers with RCEF

► MINARD F. PAGADUAN

meals, managing chaotic farmer queues, adapting to the documentation process, providing comprehensive explanations, and overcoming various challenges.

Eventually, they slowly coped and turned the challenge into fulfilling a special task, and received positive feedback from the farmers.

Over time, their persistent sacrifices bore fruit, yielding the desired results.

The unwavering commitment to RCEF activities, efficient coordination, and providing extra support to farmers contributed to the agriculture office receiving a special citation in the medium category from the RCEF Seed Program for three consecutive seasons.

"They actively got involved in the program, combined with a strategic process, ensuring a streamlined and hassle-free approach," stated Adrienne Tandang, RCEF provincial coordinator.

In turn, the RCEF program created a common ground, rekindling their

mutual trust and strengthening their collaboration.

Now, the MAO is an open and welcoming space for the farmers, and beyond any accolades, the greatest reward lies in witnessing the tangible improvement in farmers' lives.

"They have certified seeds available on the island, with just a few farmers turning to loan sharks for assistance. They were able to renovate their homes and provide their children with a college education," Lalaguna shared with delight.

"Farmers are now harvesting 4.5-5t/ha, up from 2-2.5t/ha," added Christopher A. Astejada, an agricultural technologist.

"We bridge the gap and deliver government services to farmers, ensuring they don't miss out on opportunities. We are firmly committed to carrying forward the work we initiated, with the coming years holding the promise of further progress even after the program," Lalaguna vowed. 🌱



VOX Pop

► FREDIERICK M. SALUDEZ

What are your recommendations to improve the RCEF farm schools?



Allan M. Arnoco

Lala, Lanao Del Norte

JKA Farm

Teach the use of organic fertilizers like fermented plant juice, fermented fruit juice, and the like. Practical hands-on activities are more effective, and the use of modern technology as a guide in farming such as the "Binhing Palay app," "E-damuhan," and "Rice Doctor" should be encouraged. Entrepreneurship should also be taught to help them understand how to increase their earnings from their rice fields. We refer to this innovation as the "I do, you do, and we do technique".



Margorie D. Coliao

Hinunangan, Southern Leyte

**Colimargo
Integrated Farm**

More intensive training for farmers using machines. Training on how to determine the appropriate varieties, especially in areas not covered by existing programs and for less privileged individuals. Teaching how to make and use natural or organic fertilizers to avoid excessive use of commercial fertilizers. Continuously conduct training to reach farmers in remote areas.



Fe Sombise

Biliran, Biliran

Softea Garden

I hope that trainees will have insurance and receive a personal protective equipment allowance.



Floro Bernal

Monte Vista, Davao De Oro

F. Bernal Agricultural Integrated Farm

To enhance the quality of farmer training, we would like to propose the distribution of Minus-One-Element-Technique Kits to individual rice farmers at no cost as an additional intervention of the RCEF Program. This will improve their nutrient management practices.



Eutiqiano Auxtero, Jr

Candijay, Bohol

IYAAH Eco Farm

It's good to teach every farmer-scholar like me about the modern technology and machinery that we can use. However, not all machinery is available, so it's also beneficial to increase the equipment to save more and improve farming.



Rodelito Balloca

Ubay, Bohol

Balloca's Family Farm

Currently, what most participants are requesting are free IEC (information, education, and communication) materials for each one, particularly the "PalayCheck System," which has already been proven to help improve their rice fields.



Food



Sinabalo

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups *malagkit* rice
- 1 1/4 cups coconut milk, thick
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 pieces fresh green bamboo tube
- Banana leaves

PROCEDURE:

- Wash and drain *malagkit* rice and soak overnight.
- Add coconut milk and salt.
- Cook until *malagkit* is half-cooked.
- Continuously stir the mixture to prevent sticking at the bottom of the container.
- Divide the mixture into two equal parts and wrap each in banana leaves.
- Carefully insert the banana wrap inside the freshly cut bamboo tube.
- Place the bamboo tube over hot charcoal to broil.
- Rotate the bamboo tube slowly for even cooking until it gets burned.

***Makes eight servings.**

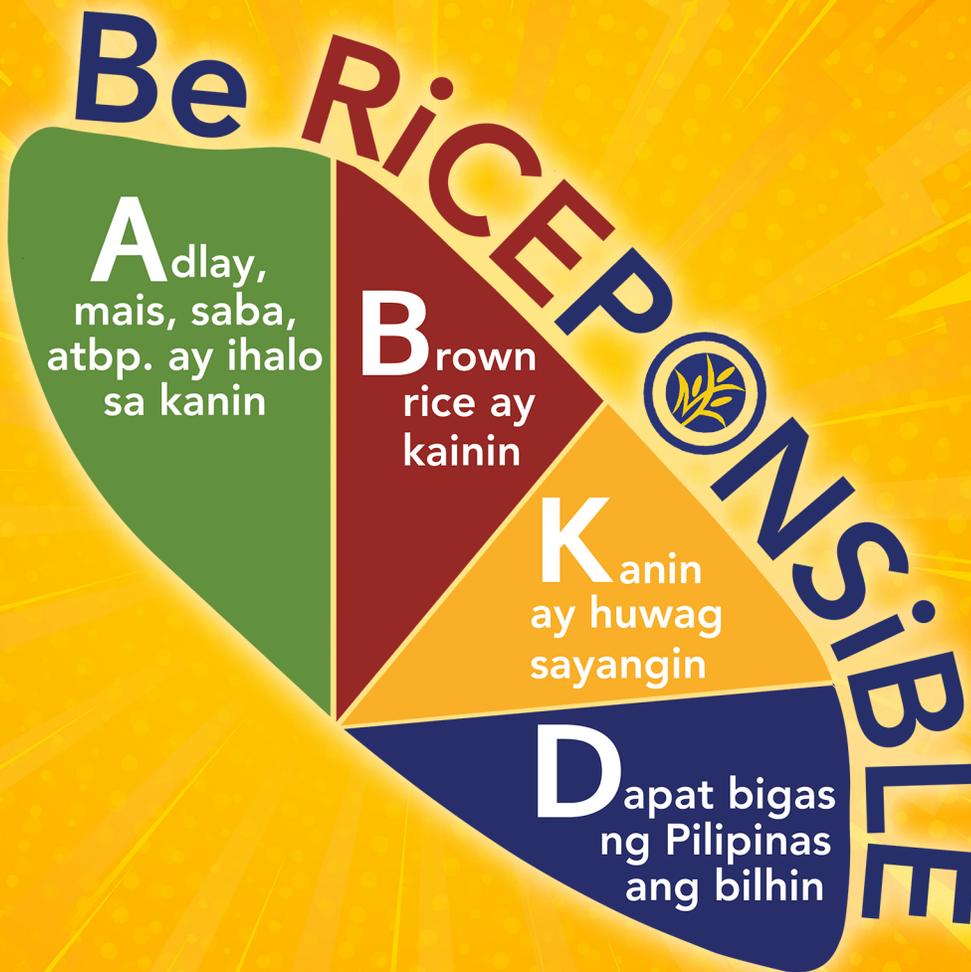


An aerial photograph of a vibrant green rice field. The field is divided into sections by narrow paths. In the center-left, a small cluster of buildings with a prominent red roof is nestled among palm trees and other tropical vegetation. A winding path or stream cuts through the field. The surrounding area is filled with dense, lush green trees and foliage, creating a rich, textured landscape.

Ricescapes

► CARLO G. DACUMOS

Harmony in Green: In this vibrant rice fields, modern farming meets tradition. Nestled along a lush landscape, a house stands as a haven of knowledge with farmers embracing new technologies and cultivating a sustainable future.



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