

PhilRice Magazine

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Philippine Rice Research Institute



To more
COMPETITIVE,
happy
RICE FARMING COMMUNITIES

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ABOUT THE COVER

The Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) is transforming the lives of its farmer-beneficiaries by boosting their productivity and competitiveness through its Seed, Mechanization, Extension, and Credit Programs. By providing inbred certified seeds, modernizing farms with advanced machinery, offering training for farmers and extension workers, and extending financial and communication support services, RCEF has led to tangible improvements in farm efficiency, yield quality, and cost savings and intangible change among farmers in areas where RCEF operates. Committed to sustaining this progress, RCEF continues to empower rice farmers to thrive amidst challenges, ensuring their further growth and success in the rice industry.

CONTENTS

NEWS

RCEF expands PalaySikatan 2.0	4
RCEF machines ease rice farming	4
RCEF RESP trains over 200k farmers	5
RCEF ERCA lends P4.7 billion	5

WHAT'S NEW IN RICE RESEARCH? Rice research innovations	6
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INFOGRAPHICS: Catalyst and challenges in the RCEF implementation	8
---	---

RCEF: a steady progress	10
-------------------------	----

12	Communicating RCEF, science-based rice info strategically
----	---

14	INFOGRAPHICS: What has RCEF accomplished?
----	--

16	PARTNERS IN THE FIELD: Beyond the grateful mission
----	---

NARRATIVES

18	Nurturing seeds of success
----	----------------------------

20	Mechanized successes
----	----------------------

22	Sufficient and stable
----	-----------------------

24	Molders of the noble
----	----------------------

26	More yield, lesser cost
----	-------------------------

27	VOXPOP: Beyond cost, yield
----	----------------------------

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Securing better rice communities

As the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) program starts its sixth year, it has achieved remarkable milestones in its program implementation areas in enhancing the competitiveness of Filipino rice farmers. Despite facing numerous challenges, RCEF has successfully equipped its farmer-beneficiaries with essential resources, training, and support to boost their productivity and economic standing.

At its core, RCEF is driven by a singular goal: to empower its farmer-beneficiaries to increase their yields and income, enabling them to compete in an increasingly globalized market. Through access to high-quality seeds, modern machinery, credit assistance, and specialized training, farmers have successfully adopted improved farming techniques and optimized their operations.

The results speak for themselves. Since the program's launch in 2019, average yields have significantly increased—from 3.63t/ha in the 2019 dry season to 4.36t in 2023; 3.69t in the wet season to 4.03t in 2023. These demonstrate the tangible benefits of RCEF, contributing to greater productivity and reinforcing the nation's rice security.

The numbers further highlight RCEF's impact: over 18.25 million bags of certified seeds have been distributed; 27,954 modern farm machines deployed; and 12,493 training sessions held, benefiting over 298,000 participants. Financial support has been equally robust, with over P4.7 billion in loans provided through the Development Bank of the Philippines and LandBank of the Philippines.

Through these efforts, the RCEF program is not only improving the livelihoods of farmer-beneficiaries; it's advancing the rice sector as a whole.

With this magazine, we invite you to explore the inspiring stories of transformation that RCEF has made possible. Learn more how Filipino farmers are embracing new opportunities and thriving in a competitive global market, all thanks to this impactful program. 🍌

NEWS

RCEF expands PalaySikatan 2.0

The RCEF Seed Program has expanded its technology demonstration project this wet season (WS), which aims to showcase recommended inbred varieties and modern farming technologies across selected areas in the country.

PalaySikatan 2.0 showcases rice fields covering 50ha/site in 25 locations nationwide each season.

This 2024 WS, the project is being carried out in Isabela, La Union, Ifugao, Aurora, Zambales, Bataan, Quezon, Laguna, Camarines Norte, Albay, Capiz, Leyte, Southern Leyte, Bohol, Agusan del Norte/Sur, Surigao del Sur, Zamboanga del Sur, Bukidnon, Davao de Oro, North and South Cotabato, and Maguindanao del Norte/Sur.

The RCEF Mechanization Program, spearheaded by Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech), has significantly bolstered rice farming productivity and income for its farmer-beneficiaries.

Through the program, eligible farmers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs) and local government units (LGUs) have been granted machinery and facilities worth billions of pesos.

To date, the component program distributed 27,954 units of various agricultural machinery and postharvest facilities, benefiting over 1 million farmers nationwide.



Agri-machinery highlights efforts to improve rice farming efficiency, reduce labor costs, and minimize postharvest losses, thereby increasing productivity and farmers' incomes.



Farmers in Bayawan City, Negros Oriental observe a riding-type mechanical transplanter during an RCEF PalaySikatan 2.0 demo, aimed at improving productivity and efficiency in rice farming nationwide.

GIRLIE A. CARREON

To enhance the project's implementation, RCEF is collaborating with the Rice Business Innovations System (RiceBIS) 2.0 Program to strengthen the agroenterprises of cooperatives and farmer associations.

Registered PalaySikatan 2.0 farmer-partners received financial support for additional agricultural inputs or rental of farm machinery at as much as P6,000/ha, depending on the size of their fields. They also benefitted

from free inbred certified seeds, technical assistance, training, and other provisions.

The project also demonstrated the use of smart agri-technologies, including Binhi e-Padala for easier seed distribution, PalayCheck App for managing farm activities and monitoring production costs, and PRIME Collect App for pest and disease management recommendations. Additionally, the Minus-One-Element Technique (MOET) tests were used for proper fertilization. - YOBHEL LOUISE P. BELTRAN AND CHRISTINE MAE A. NICOLAS

RCEF machines ease rice farming

The equipment included tractors, mechanical transplanters, rice seeders, combine harvesters, mechanical dryers, and rice mills, all designed to streamline the rice production process.

An impact assessment study by PHilMech in 2024 revealed that modern machinery usage reduced labor costs by P2/kg of rough rice, or approximately P9,000/ha.

With 14% coverage of the total rice area, this translated to annual savings of P2.66 billion for the rice-farming sector.

The program also increased the country's mechanization level, from 2.31hp/ha in 2010 to 2.68hp/ha in 2024.

This shift indicated a move toward more efficient and productive farming practices enhancing overall rice production.

Furthermore, the program's postharvest facilities played a crucial role in reducing postharvest losses, preventing damage to 31,841mt of rice annually, valued at P531 million.

Project implementers said that by minimizing these losses, the program ensured that more rice reached the market, supporting food security and increasing farmers' incomes.

The changes brought about by the RCEF Mechanization Program had widespread implications for Philippine agriculture, helping its beneficiaries to increase their productivity and profitability, reduce labor costs and postharvest losses, and move toward more sustainable and efficient agricultural practices.

- JOHN LLOYD P. MINA

GIO ANTONIO BARRIOGA



RCEF RESP trains over 200k farmers

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) trained over 200,000 rice farmers and their dependents nationwide in the past five years as part of the RCEF Rice Extension Services Program (RESP).

From 2019 to June 2024, 266,956 individuals have completed various

agriculture-related courses provided by TESDA under the RESP scholarship program. Central Luzon had the highest number of graduates with 32,477, Cagayan Valley with 31,201, and Davao Region with 31,101.

Trainers said that the RCEF RESP component has been instrumental in equipping farmers with modern farming techniques and agribusiness management skills.

TESDA's training courses include Farmer Field School (FFS) on

Production of High-Quality Inbred Rice and Seed Certification and Farm Mechanization, Rice Machinery Operations, Drying and Milling Plant Servicing NC III, Agro-entrepreneurship NC II, Pest and Nutrient Management, and Digital Agriculture.

Other implementers of RCEF RESP, such as PhilRice, PhilMech, and Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), also provide continuous training for trainers and resource speakers, and develop learning materials for them. -

ALMARIE E. MANALASTAS

The RCEF Expanded Rice Credit Assistance (RCEF ERCA) program had released over P4.7 billion in loans from 2019 to May 31, 2024, supporting 15,774 individual borrowers and 304 farmer cooperatives and associations (FCA), with 51,667 individual sub-borrowers within the FCAs (see p.15).

RCEF has allocated P10 billion annually since 2019 to support local farmers, with 10% or P1 billion dedicated to ERCA, split between LANDBANK and the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) at P500 million each per year.

DBP released P2.17 billion to 27 individual borrowers and 26 cooperatives with 29,927 sub-borrowers. LANDBANK provided P2.601 billion, supporting 15,747 individual

RCEF ERCA lends P4.7 billion

borrowers and 278 FCAs with 21,740 sub-borrowers.

ERCA loans have been made available to individual farmers registered in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA) and DA-accredited cooperatives with rice farmer members, provided they meet specific criteria including no outstanding loans and relevant technical training.

The maximum loanable amount under the ERCA-RCEF program is up to 90% of the total project cost. For example, if it costs a farmer P55,000 to produce a hectare of rice, he can borrow up to P50,000/ha. Similarly, for purchasing a

hand tractor costing P140,000, a farmer can borrow up to P126,000, with the difference of P14,000 as their equity.

The interest rate for a farmer's loan for production or acquisition of machinery/equipment is fixed at 2% per annum.

Borrower cooperatives pay no interest, provided the effective pass-on rate to end-borrowers does not exceed 6% per annum.

For those not registered in the RSBSA, LANDBANK offers other programs such as the Sikat Saka Program and the Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund. - CHRISTINE MAE A. NICOLAS

Rice experts are accelerating research with innovative technologies addressing challenges in crop breeding, nutrient management, and fertilizer use. Tools such as soil analysis, DNA fingerprinting, and tailored fertilizer recommendations are transforming rice farming by optimizing resources, improving yields, and offering location-specific solutions to enhance rice production.

Ready-to-adopt MOET recommendations

Fertilizer mismanagement in rice farming often results in poor yields, high costs, and pest problems. Inadequate fertilizers limit rice growth, while excessive use can cause environmental pollution and pest infestations. PhilRice



RICE RESEARCH INNOVATIONS

NIKKA ESTRELLA G. TELEN AND CYREN JOHN A. ORAIS

is addressing these through a large-scale soil analysis project across 505 municipalities and cities nationwide using MOET, which identifies nutrient deficiencies by observing plant responses when essential elements are omitted sequentially.

MOET-based fertilizer recommendations are tailored to local soil textures, rice maturity, planting season, and target yields. This allows farmers to adopt more sustainable fertilizer strategies.

Project leader Rizal G. Corales emphasized that understanding soil texture is critical for effective nutrient management.

"Soil texture significantly influences soil-nutrient dynamics, which is one of the critical factors in nutrient management," he said.

Detailed recommendations will be anchored on rice maturity, establishment method, planting season (wet or dry), and target yields per hectare. The project aims to help farmers shift from inefficient practices to more precise nutrient management, cutting costs and improving productivity.

Information, education, and communication (IEC) materials, including MOET banners and easy-to-understand booklets, are being developed and distributed to 42 covered provinces under the RCEF Seed Program to help farmers apply the right amount of fertilizer at the right time. The IEC materials carry a useful guide on right EAT (Element, Amount, and Time) nutrient management, helping to reduce input costs and increase yields by determining and applying only the necessary fertilizers.

"The IEC materials that we are providing to the farmers are designed to be easily understood because of our limited personnel to explain and discuss to all farmers," Corales assured.

According to Corales, MOET provides ready-to-implement recommendations by pinpointing soil nutrient deficiencies through plant responses. This approach has shown improved yields in areas where it has been adopted, such as in PalaySikatan demonstration sites. "It's not only about achieving high yields but optimizing resource use as well," he added.

Despite obstacles related to acceptance, adoption, and financial capacity, the project provides farmers with a viable, cost-effective, yield-enhancing, and sustainable nutrient management strategy.

DNA fingerprinting

DNA fingerprinting is another game-changing technology for rice research. PhilRice geneticist and scientist Dr. Jonathan M. Niones and his team have profiled 185 rice varieties using this method, which helps identify true-to-type, high-quality varieties for farmers.

To expedite varietal development, profilers employ four different molecular platforms that hasten the identification of genetic variations and the development of improved rice varieties.

"With the help of DNA fingerprinting markers, we can shorten the breeding process by 15%, resulting in new rice varieties within six years. We also achieve high precision in breeding because we are confident in the genetic information we have," Niones explained.

DNA fingerprinting has revolutionized the study and management of rice varieties. "Unlike before, when we were unsure of the outcomes, we now have detailed information not only about the physical traits but the genetic makeup of the varieties," Niones said. This modern molecular approach is a critical tool for developing rice varieties that meet the specific needs of farmers and consumers.



Agro-specific profiling

Since 2021, PhilRice has been developing specific nutrient management recommendations for newly released irrigated lowland rice varieties via the Agro-specific Profiling for POT Development project.

This project determines the optimal nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium (NPK) levels for different rice varieties based on plant tissue analyses and field experiments. The project has provided NPK recommendations for 10 rice varieties from the 500 and 400 series, with more research underway for the NSIC 600 series.

Nutrient management specialist Ailon Oliver V. Capistrano stressed that specific fertilizer rates are crucial for achieving maximum yield while minimizing costs.

"We have been studying the rates for three years. We started with the 500 series, followed by the 400 series, and our latest, the 600 series," he explained.

The project's three core components—Nutrient Omission Plot Technique (NOPT), Yield Potential (YP), and Nutrient-Pest Interaction (NPI)

experiments—are essential for determining effective fertilizer rates.

These packages of technologies (POT) cover the entire crop production cycle, from planting to harvest. Capistrano noted that the PalayCheck System, a guide to achieving key rice production targets, is essentially a POT.

"In those different management areas (PalayCheck System), the recommendations to achieve all the Key Checks are already a POT since they cover the entire crop production process. We are more focused on the nutrient management part. Other divisions handle other management areas," he said.

This system serves as a training platform for farmers and extension workers, helping them identify areas for improvement in crop care, particularly in nutrient management.

PhilRice experts continue to refine POTs to help farmers adopt the best management practices.

As these technologies advance, they are expected to drive positive transformations in farming communities, allowing farmers to optimize their resources and achieve sustainable yields. 🍌

CATALYST & CHALLENGES IN THE RCEF IMPLEMENTATION

► Mariel M. Espinoza

The RCEF programs under the Rice Tariffication Law aim to fortify the sustainability and competitiveness of Filipino rice farmers by improving their skills and productivity.

Successful implementation requires the convergence efforts of key institutions: **DA-Agricultural Training Institute (ATI)**, **DA-PhilRice**, **Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)**, **DA-Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech)**, **LandBank**, and **Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP)**. The journey faces both enablers and challenges in achieving rice security for the country.



SEEDS

The Seed Program led by DA-PhilRice aims to increase the adoption of high-quality seeds and integrated crop management by promoting and distributing certified seeds, strengthening local seed production, and supporting variety development.

ENABLERS

Establishment of the DA-PhilRice RCEF Program Management Office (RCEF-PMO) to set the beat of the program's operations.

Reassignment of experts in various fields to manage the PMO's daily operations, which strengthened accountability and contributed to the success of the program.

Activation of the RCEF Seed Technical Working Group in reviewing and recommending policy changes, and proposing strategies to strengthen program implementation.

Convergence with public offices, agencies, and private organizations to build a network that promotes joint accountability.

Implementation of Rules and Regulations and Guidelines to achieve program objectives efficiently.



Digital Innovations for Seed & Extension



Rice Seed Monitoring System (RSMS) that streamlines planning, field operations finance, accounting, data monitoring, and reporting workflows.

Linking the RSMS to the Bureau of Plant Industry-National Seed Quality Control Services' Rice Seed Information System (RSIS) to collect information on certified seeds that passed field inspection and laboratory standards.

Development of RCEF Extension module that had both online and face-to-face modalities in response to the pandemic restrictions.

RCEF Interventions Monitoring System that centralizes data from all RCEF program components.



Use of Social Media Platforms to hasten the delivery of training courses and distribution of Information, Education and Communication materials.



Development of Training Management Information System to fast-track regular processes and routine tasks.



CHALLENGES



Massive updating of the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture/Masterlists of beneficiaries was needed during the early days of the RCEF rollout so farmers had to present proof of registration.



The global outbreak of coronavirus in early 2020 slowed down the operations of both the Seed and Extension Programs.



Extreme climate and weather events (typhoons, El Niño, drought, etc) and pest and disease occurrences affected seed yield and certified seeds supply.



MECHANIZATION

The PHilMech-run program aims to boost farmers' productivity, profitability, and global competitiveness by providing rice production and postharvest machinery through farmer cooperatives and associations (FCAs).

ENABLERS



RCEF Mechanization FCA Models serve as conduits of knowledge and skills to farmer-led organizations, sharing best practices and experiences on rice mechanization.



Media partners help enhance information dissemination of RCEF programs and concerns.



RCEF Mechanization Implementing Units to focus on field operations and extension support to program beneficiaries.



Partnerships with Agricultural Field Offices expedite support and services to FCAs in their areas.

CHALLENGES

Data harmonization among implementing units to create a comparable view of impact on program beneficiaries.

Low commitment of beneficiaries to participate in extension support activities.



EXTENSION

Collaborative effort of ATI, PhilRice, PHilMech, and TESDA; focused on

designing and delivering training programs, enterprise development, and communication support services.

ENABLERS

ATI Regional Training Centers serve as local workforce for training, strategic communications, farm schools and Learning Site for Agriculture establishment, and other RCEF-related activities.



Farm schools were partners in teaching program beneficiaries especially during the pandemic.

Farmers Information and Technology (FITS) centers and kiosks in LGUs function as one-stop shops that support trainings conducted in the community.



Digital Agriculture Course under the Digital Farmers Program (DFP) was offered to promote digital literacy and prepare for immediate future; Pest and Nutrient Management Course to address the most needed information of farmers.

Implementing agencies converged; ATI, PHilMech, and TESDA, and farm schools work as partners in the rollout of communication interventions.



TESDA operating units and partner institutions, industries & stakeholders manage scholarship allocation & distribution, Farm Schools' training program registration, training delivery, and social marketing and advocacy.

Media partners help promote activities and programs.

CHALLENGES

Budget release not aligned with the participants' cropping calendar, hence knowledge gained could not be applied immediately.

Procurement of materials has increased in training, LSA and FITS center establishment and enhancement, and other RCEF-related activities.

Poor collaboration among implementing agencies affecting the performance of each agency.

Poor training participation and attendance and unstable internet connectivity in some areas.

TESDA's funds are solely for conducting training; training standards development or social marketing and advocacy are not financed.

Overlapping commitments and recruitment of participants and limited venues for training.



CREDIT

This component provides a direct lending program with low interest rates and minimal collateral requirements for rice farmers and cooperatives, jointly managed by LandBank and the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP).

ENABLERS



Partnership with DA, Cooperative Development Authority, and LGUs to conduct agri development forums.



Establishment of market linkages in convergence with other government agencies and private enterprises.



Creation of a DBP unit to manage national government-funded lending programs.

CHALLENGES

Traditional loan assessment process leading to delayed approval.

Credit funds expire quarterly and revert to the Bureau of Treasury if unreleased within the quarter.

High default rate among individual farmers.

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there are several rectangular rice fields, some of which are flooded with water, reflecting the sky. The fields are interspersed with small clusters of houses and trees. In the background, a larger village or town is visible, with many more houses and buildings. The overall scene is a typical rural setting in a developing country.

RCEF: A STEADY PROGRESS

CHARISMA LOVE B. GADO-GONZALES

"It might seem that only the end of everything could bring a sense of equality."

A farmer shared this somber reflection on social media a year after the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) was enacted on February 14, 2019. RTL was heckled with widespread skepticism and apprehension; the doomsayers drowning out the sparkling sound of optimism.

Yet, despite the fears, steady progress has been made, and the RTL's Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) has played a crucial role in transforming farming communities in areas where RCEF is implemented. The RCEF, which supports farmers with seeds, extension services, machines, and loans, aims to help them compete with the influx of cheaper imported rice. But how effective has it been? Are Filipino farmers now better equipped to face the global market?

Data assert that the country's *palay* production increased at a faster rate since RCEF implementation, complementing other government rice programs.

From 2019 to 2023, *palay* production across the 42 RCEF provinces grew by 7% due to the expansion in area planted and enriched yield performance. Prior to RCEF support from 2015 to 2019, the growth in these provinces was a miserable 2%.

In provinces receiving partial support from the Seed Program, along with full extension, mechanization, and credit services, production also shot up by 6.74% in 2019 to 2023, equivalent to an additional 717,135 metric tons.

From 2019 to 2023, analysis also clarified that yield of RCEF seed beneficiaries in the dry season (DS) climbed from 3.63t/ha (2019) to 4.36t/ha (2023). In the wet season (WS),

it also went up from 3.69t/ha (2019) to 4.03t/ha (2023).

With bigger yields and savings from RCEF interventions, farmers from 42 provinces managed to reduce their cost of producing *palay*: from P15.42/kg of *palay* in the DS and P15.34/kg in the WS in 2019, to P13.84 and P14.92, respectively in 2023.

Rice-farming households also earned higher net income including returns to own land, labor, capital, and seeds by 107% in the DS and 74% increase in the WS.

The use of certified seeds in 42 target provinces grew remarkably with adoption rates reaching 83% in the 2021 WS and 82% in the 2022 DS, up from just 40-45% in the 42 target areas in 2019.

To keep up with advances in modern farming, rice growers underwent



extensive training, particularly excelling in areas such as seed quality, farm machinery, land preparation, water/pest/nutrient management, and post-harvest practices. This training led to substantial adoption of improved farming practices, with 83% of rice specialists surveyed in 2022 applying their new knowledge, and more than 50% of graduates coming from farm schools.

The RCEF midyear evaluation in April-June 2023 by the International Rice Research Institute highlighted that using combine harvesters led to big savings in labor costs. Labor use dropped from 72-68 person-days/ha for non-users to 37-39 person-days/ha for combine harvester users.

This engendered lower labor costs by P7,574/ha in the 2021 WS and P5,145/ha in the 2022 DS. Not only that, production costs were lower for

combine users, with costs at P12.39/kg in the 2021 WS compared with P16.01/kg for manual harvesters.

Farmers who availed of credit bought slightly more seeds and had higher yields than those who did not. For example, in the 2021 WS, credit users harvested 3.97t/ha compared with 3.86t/ha for non-users. In the 2022 DS, credit users had production costs of P13.72/kg and net returns of P23,331/ha, as against P14.11/kg and P21,099/ha for non-users.

However, the midyear evaluation also noted that beneficiaries of training, combine harvesters, and credit were not limited to RCEF interventions alone. Recipients of these services from other providers were included to expand the sample size. Only certified seed users were exclusively RCEF beneficiaries.

Today in the social media pages, farmers are now thanking the implementers showing off the provisions they received from the RCEF program components. They are clicking selfies with the bags of seeds, flexing their training activities, and riding on their machines.

Although progress takes time, the positive impact of the RCEF program components are undeniable. RCEF farmer-beneficiaries, once burdened with uncertainty and inequity, are now savoring the benefits of modernized practices and support systems. The journey continues. 🍌



Providing greater access to RCEF-related and science-based rice information to millions of RCEF farmer-beneficiaries with diverse needs is one of the challenges that the 6-year RCEF Program has hurdled.

RCEF implementing agencies such as PhilRice, which leads the RCEF Extension Communication, together with Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), and Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) have made their communication interventions more strategic to open up this information inaccessibility.

According to Hanah Hazel Mavi B. Manalo, senior science research specialist of PhilRice's Development Communication Division, the RCEF Extension Communication follows a framework that ensures communication is more strategic by delivering the right message to the right farmers through the right channels at the right time toward a desirable effect while reflecting on farmers' feedback to improve communication interventions.

Manalo also said, "The developed messages focused on farmers' information needs, which were mostly related to field problems. The channels used were a combination of various platforms. The timing of message delivery was scheduled in anticipation of the farmers' cropping calendar."

COMMUNICATING RCEF, SCIENCE-BASED RICE INFO STRATEGICALLY

Adopting the multichannel communication (MCC) approach

Jayvee P. Masilang, media production specialist II of ATI's Information Services Division, says that as RCEF caters to a larger audience with different communication channel preferences, it adopts an MCC strategy that includes information, education, and communication (IEC) materials development and distribution, and knowledge-sharing and learning activities.

According to Jett Molech G. Subaba, supervising science research specialist of PHilMech's Applied Communication Division, the MCC strategy allows farmers the freedom to choose their preferred communication method for

a more convenient experience; expand the program's reach and engage the farmers who may not be active in certain communication platforms; ensure that the program's message stands out despite the presence of other issues through message repetition across different platforms; and to create more opportunities for the farmers to interact with the program and lead them closer to technology adoption.

Deploying communication champions in the field

Lorenzo H. Lopez Jr., project development officer of PhilRice's RCEF Field Operations and Monitoring Division, believes that identifying communication champions, like the RCEF provincial coordinators, makes the promotion of RCEF program services



Conducted in areas with lesser farmers trained and no farm schools, TeknoGabay and need-based KSL activities satisfy specific information needs of the rice farmers.



Lorenzo H. Lopez Jr. of PhilRice discusses the services of the program during the seed distribution kick-off ceremony and program briefing.

and activities such as seed distribution and technology demonstrations more strategic.

These champions are deployed in the field for accessibility. Lopez said these people conduct a regular series of face-to-face dialogues on seed target planning, guidelines/protocols, updates, and new memorandums with various rice stakeholders, such as the DA-Regional Field Office, rice focal persons, regional seed coordinators, municipal and provincial agriculturists, report officers, seed growers, and farmers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs). After several dialogues, farmer-

beneficiaries learned about the finalized seed distribution schedules through postings on the RCEF Seed Program Facebook page and through door-to-door visits or SMS sent by barangay officials.

Subaba and Masilang, focals of the RCEF Extension Strategic Communication, said by making communication interventions more strategic, access to RCEF-related and science-based rice information has greatly improved, thus providing the RCEF farmer-beneficiaries with knowledge, which is a prerequisite for technology adoption toward increased yield and reduced production cost.



To make communication more strategic, the right message is communicated to the right farmers, through the right channels, at the right time.

- HANAH HAZEL MAVI B. MANALO

INFO IN A BOX

Development and distribution of IEC materials

Need-based IEC materials in print and audiovisual formats are given away during seed distribution, training and workshops, KSL activities, and have also been made readily available in farm schools, local government units, FITS centers, and info hubs.

Knowledge-sharing and learning (KSL) activities

- Program briefings and information caravans are done to promote RCEF program services and address related concerns; and Talakayan/ E-talakayan for better acceptance of rice mechanization technologies.

- The info hubs and FITS centers offer accessible knowledge resources to farmers within their respective localities.
- Stakeholder engagement is pursued to secure the commitment of LGUs to support the programs.
- RCEF PalayAralan TV, streamed via Facebook, is a one-stop source of RCEF info.
- SMS and calls provide immediate response to farmers' queries and guide them through sending of RCEF and technology-related text blasts to areas with lesser training interventions.
- Social media contain technologies, respond to farmers' queries, and provide real-time program updates.

- Websites of each program component share updates while the PinoyRice Knowledge Bank website serves as a one-stop source of rice information.
- Radio, TV, and print engagements are also done to magnify the programs' visibility and manage media inquiries.
- School-on-the-Air (SOA), like Radyo Eskwela that aims to pull up beneficiaries' understanding on rice mechanization technologies and for FCAs to share their experiences; and SOA on production of high quality inbred rice and seeds, and farm mechanization were also rolled out and streamed via Facebook.
- Advocacy campaigns focus on crop establishment technologies to accelerate their adoption among farmers; on youth to encourage them to engage in agriculture; and on nutrient management to cushion the effects of soaring prices of fertilizers.
- Exhibits aim to ease information accessibility of beneficiaries.

RICE COMPETITIVENESS RCEF ENHANCEMENT FUND

What has RCEF accomplished?

RCEF programs have been faithful in providing various services to Filipino farmers all over the country since 2019. The programs have reached greater heights and are weaving an intricate tapestry of collective learning and development. Let's take a look at the RCEF accomplishments thus far.

Compiled by: Nikka Estrella G. Telen

Infographics by: Sarah Joy N. Ruiz

SEEDS



18.25 million

Bags of certified seeds distributed



1.77 million

Unique beneficiaries



1.5-1.9 million

Hectares planted annually

(data as of August 31, 2024)

MECHANIZATION



27,954

Machines and technologies distributed



11,951

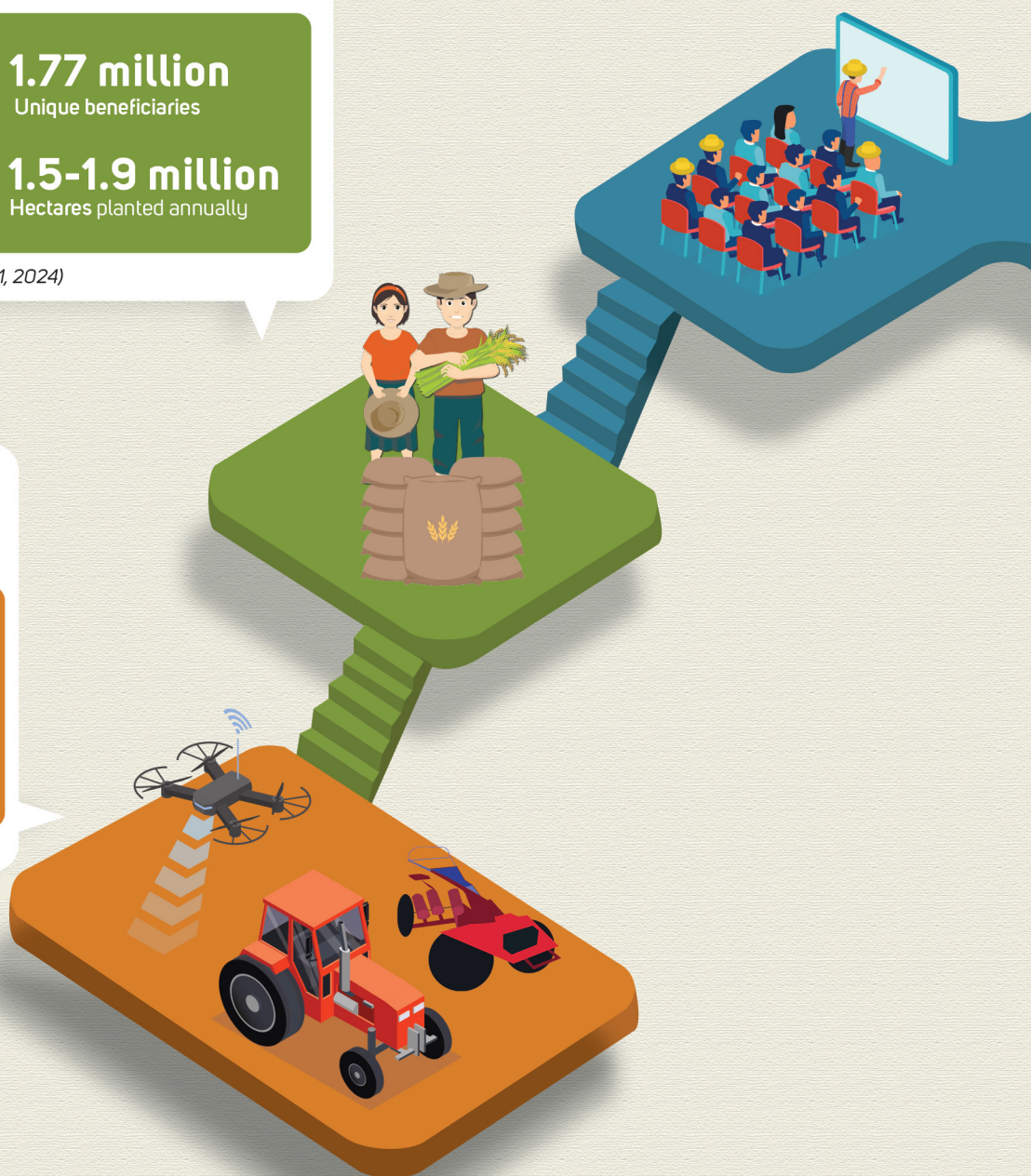
Farmer Cooperatives and Associations (FCA)



1,808,196

Individual farmers

(data as of May 31, 2024)



RICE FARMER FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE (RFFA)



P21.920 billion

Amount disbursed



4,383,994

Farmers served
(2021-2023)

(data as of May 31, 2024)



CREDIT



Loan released

► **P2.168 billion**

Development Bank
of the Philippines (DBP)

► **P2.601 billion**

LandBank of the Philippines
(LandBank)

Borrowers

DBP

27 Individual farmers

26 FCA

29,927 Individual sub-borrowers
(within the FCAs)

LANDBANK

15,747 Individual farmers

278 FCA

21,740 Individual sub-borrowers
(within the FCAs)

(data as of May 31, 2024)

EXTENSION



12,493

Training sessions
conducted



289,359

Participated in
training sessions

► **475**

Training sessions
by ATI (for trainers,
extension intermediaries,
specialized participants)

► **385**

Training sessions
by PhilRice (for farmers,
trainers, specialists)

► **703**

Training sessions
by PHiMech (for trainers
& specialists)

► **10,930**

Training sessions
by TESDA (for farmers)

► **12,268**

participated in
trainings by ATI

► **11,011**

participated in
trainings by PhilRice

► **18,404**

participated in
trainings by PHiMech

► **256,676**

participated in
trainings by TESDA

(data as of May 31, 2024)

BEYOND THE GRATEFUL MISSION

MINARD F. PAGADUAN

The goal to elevate the farmers' lowly situation has fueled the six-year journey of the RCEF programs, compelling us to reflect on our mission—to make farmers competitive. Despite the challenges and disappointments faced, overcoming them has exemplified the commitment to the welfare of millions of Filipino farmers.

By promoting the use of certified seeds, farm machinery, and improved practices, the programs aim to enhance farmers' productivity. Partnerships with government and private agencies bolster these efforts, facilitating adoption campaigns and sustainable practices.

Community development

In Bohol, farmers went through difficulties accessing certified seeds, relying instead on traditional practices and using good seeds. RCEF's interventions transformed the farming landscape, significantly increasing yields by approximately 40%, from 2.2t/ha to 3.1t/ha.

Over 140,000 farmers now benefit from certified seeds, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Larry M. Pamugas, acting provincial agriculturist.

The programs have strengthened farmers' trust in the government, with increased yields and improved practices through RCEF's training programs.

"Effective implementation of RCEF programs hinges on strong partnerships that tackle critical needs like technical assistance. In coordination with the municipal level, our office, ATI, PhilMech, DA thru the Provincial Agriculture Technology Coordinating Office, and PhilRice work together to deliver this vital support," Larry said.

Despite not having authority over the 48 city/municipal agriculture offices, the Provincial Agriculture Office adeptly managed the RCEF programs beyond its assigned scope. It also fostered the creation of the Barangay Climate Resilience Volunteer Technician program to support further RCEF program initiatives, guided by community development principles. These volunteers, including farmers with a strong commitment to service, act as key conduits for sharing technical knowledge and support with their fellow farmers.

Over 600 farmer-volunteers have been trained, reaching nearly 60% of the 1,100 communities. It's expected to continue, further boosting farmer productivity through community strategic partnerships.



Collaborative efforts and relationship-building are at the core of ALSA Dose's values. The association remains committed to supporting farmers through the best practices in implementing the RCEF Extension Program, continuously striving to enhance its impact and effectiveness.



We regularly hold meetings to bridge gaps and share best practices. We also initiate consultation meetings with partners such as TESDA, PhilRice, PhilMech, DBP, and LBP to directly address the concerns of FS.

- MECHELLE P. SUENO,
President of ALSA Dose

Info dissemination

DZMQ, a government-owned radio station in Dagupan City, Pangasinan, has been crucial in disseminating RCEF program information. With a 10,000-watt transmission power, it has evolved into a loud community voice, now simulcasting on Facebook as Radyo Pilipinas-Dagupan.

Radyo Pilipinas has always been a trusted ally for Dr. Maricel D. Dacapias, Chief of the Information Services Section at DA ATI-RTC I. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this partnership was energized, providing relief through mass information dissemination.

"The pandemic, coinciding with the launch of RCEF, made it essential for farmers to be well-informed about seeds, mechanization, training, and credit programs. Stations like Radyo Pilipinas-Dagupan were a tremendous help," Maricel recalled.

"We also have other active partner stations in Region 1, such as Radyo Kailian and Radyo Kabinnadang of Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, Radyo Karruba in Burgos, and DWCI-FM in Piddig, Ilocos Norte, leading us to win various awards," she added.

Through live broadcasts, recorded interviews, and purposive programs, DZMQ effectively communicated every aspect of the RCEF programs to its listeners. Working closely with government offices, including ATI, PHilMech, and PhilRice, the radio station served as a conduit for adoption campaigns.

Beyond broadcasting, DZMQ participated in community info caravans, engaging directly with farmers and stakeholders.

Despite challenges in reaching audiences beyond traditional radio listenership, DZMQ leveraged social media platforms to broaden its coverage, emboldening audience engagement and facilitating real-time feedback loops.

"Farmers have reported increased yields and enhanced farm practices, attributing these to access to certified



For nearly six years, Radyo Pilipinas has been dedicated to providing farmers with vital information on new farming practices through the regular airing of RCEF program.

seeds and modern techniques promoted through our radio program. DZMQ's contributions motivate us to continue our community engagement efforts," pledged Dr. Maricel M. Fronda, station manager.

She also confirmed that DZMQ Radyo Pilipinas remains dedicated to RCEF, planning more informative broadcasts, and community engagements, and maximizing the use of multimedia platforms to sustain momentum and amplify the impact of these initiatives.

Capacity-building

The ALSA (Association of Learning Sites for Agriculture) Dose, based in Region 12, consists of 85 ATI-accredited LSA and Farm Schools (FS) in North and South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and General Santos City. They stand united in their collective efforts and commitment to support their brother farmers.

The association has greatly contributed to the effective implementation of the RCEF Extension program. Through meticulous coordination with ATI and partners, each FS is assigned to specific areas, ensuring the equitable

distribution of program slots across barangays in every city and municipality.

It has also streamlined its training processes to remove administrative burdens from ATI, ensuring that farmers receive prompt and effective training. Their deep understanding of the farming community allows them to tailor training programs to fit the specific needs of farmers.

"They efficiently engage their communities and go the extra mile to ensure everything runs smoothly," said Kissciel L. Rubi, ATI strategic communication staffer.

"ALSA Dose has a deep understanding of farmers' needs and is well-positioned to help drive the adoption of new technologies," she added.

The RCEF programs' partnerships with public and private entities have driven consequential behavioral changes and productivity improvements among farmers. As RCEF 2.0 begins, these collaborations will continue to uplift the agriculture sector because they demonstrate a steadfast collective commitment to enhancing farmers' lives. 🌱

NURTURING SEEDS OF SUCCESS

YOBHEL LOUISSE P. BELTRAN

The RCEF Seed Program is changing the lives of farmers by providing high-quality seeds and modern farming technologies. Let's meet three personalities who have embraced change, rebuilding their livelihoods, and restoring optimism for the future.

Farmers' push for hope

Joven M. Briones, 62
Iba, Zambales

Inspiring others can be challenging, especially when your guide is your own story. As chairperson of the Palanginan Sta. Barbara Irrigators Association, Joven's journey as a farmer-cooperator for the RCEF PalaySikatan program has become a beacon of hope for many.

"Switching from good seeds to inbred certified seeds through the RCEF program was one of the best decisions I've made," Joven stated. He is among the many farmers in Zambales who regularly receive free seeds.

Joven's story is a testament to the desirable impact of the program.

"With my 2ha area, I used to harvest only 4.4-5t/ha, but after switching to RCEF seeds, my harvest increased to 6.6-7.7t/ha. The varieties are also more resistant to pests and diseases," he said.

Beyond being a seed beneficiary, Joven also participated as farmer-cooperator in the technology demonstration initiative that showcased the benefits of high-quality inbred seeds and modern technologies, including the walk-behind transplanter. This machine significantly boosted Joven's farming efficiency. "Manual transplanting required 20-25 laborers, but with the transplanter, only 3-5 people are needed," he explained.

However, convincing his fellow farmers to adopt these new technologies was challenging. Joven faced skepticism but remained persistent. He invited them to visit his farm, sharing the practices that led to his increased yield. His efforts paid off, as many members of his association eventually adopted the new methods, leading to remarkable improvements in their productivity.



"The program made a huge impact on our productivity. We learned to use inbred certified seeds and proper management practices," Joven said.

Today, Joven continues to inspire farmers in Zambales, encouraging them to embrace new farming practices and seize new opportunities for growth.

Embracing change

Lilibeth A. Bacongco, 54
San Carlos City, Negros Occidental

Two hours away from Bacolod, the provincial capital city of Negros, San Carlos City boasts of a 40km coastline, parts of which are lined with lush mangroves. This also has a rice area, a home to Lilibeth, a farmer and beneficiary of the RCEF Seed Program.

Lilibeth manages a 2-ha farm, where her typical yield was 5.5-6.6t/ha using good seeds.

"I started farming when I was young; it became our main source of livelihood. Buying rice seeds can be challenging as they are quite expensive, almost P2,500 per 40kg of seeds. There were times we even had to borrow seeds from fellow farmers," Lilibeth recalled.



We are grateful to the RCEF Seed Program for providing free inbred certified seeds and introducing us to new technologies. It has greatly improved our farming practices. ”

- LILIBETH A. BACONGCO

ROCEL DYAN C. SILVA

Despite these challenges, Lilibeth persevered to ensure that food would always be on her family's table. Her son, Jirec, witnessed her dedication and highlighted how beneficial the RCEF program has been to their farming efforts.

Lilibeth participated in the PalaySikatan 2.0 techno-demo. Through this project, she began using the seed spreader for direct seeding and planted high-quality inbred rice seeds.

Even at her golden age, Lilibeth embraced the new technology with enthusiasm.

"The project provides equal opportunities for all rice farmers. My mother was thrilled to try the Seed Spreader for the first time. It was easy to use and saved a lot of time compared to manual direct seeding," Jirec remarked.

Since receiving high-quality seeds from the program, Lilibeth's yield has increased to 7.2-8.3t/ha, significantly enriching their livelihood income.

"We are grateful to the RCEF Seed Program for providing free inbred certified seeds and introducing us to new technologies. It has greatly improved our farming practices," Lilibeth declared.

Rebuilding dreams

Lorna C. Santander, 62
Alicia, Zamboanga Sibugay

Losing hope and almost giving up is how Lorna describes her past struggle as a rice farmer.

"Before, we solely depended on seeds from our co-farmers. It was hard to find certified seed sources in our area, and we almost lost hope, but then RCEF came and saved us," she said.

Lorna has always been a resilient and hardworking farmer. With a small plot of land and a few animals, her family's survival depended entirely on their farm. Despite the challenges, she held onto hope, believing better days would come.

For years, Lorna's life was a constant battle against nature's unpredictability and financial hardships. Her old house, barely standing, was a testament to her perseverance. With just 3ha of farmland, her usual rice harvest was 3.3t/ha—insufficient to support their living expenses.

"We didn't have access to high-quality seeds, and we often faced pest damage,



resulting in major losses," Lorna lamented.

According to Imelda M. De Asis, the municipal agriculturist of Alicia, the RCEF program made it convenient for farmers to access high-quality rice seeds.

"Farmers find the program helpful because they no longer have to worry about rice seeds, allowing them to allocate money for fertilizer or other necessities," she said.

When the RCEF program arrived, Lorna found hope. She managed to rebuild her once crumbling house, replacing it with a sturdy home for her family. The program also enabled her to purchase some animals, providing additional support and a source of income for her family.

"A huge thanks to the RCEF Seed Program. With the assistance of free high-quality seeds, I was able to make slow progress in providing a better life for my family," Lorna looked gratified. 🍌

SBAC proudly notes the coop's growth through RCEF Mechanization Program, enabling its 108 members to reduce costs and boost productivity with combine harvesters and rice seeders, benefiting the entire local community.



JOHN LLOYD P. MINA



DMPC farmers have successfully tackled challenges from excess water and adverse weather by utilizing mechanical dryers and advanced machinery, resulting in an impressive increase in average harvests.

In pursuit of alleviating the burdens inherent in rice farming, Eulogio G. Federizo, Edgar S. Bayano, and Rebecca B. Lumindas, along with the members of their farmer cooperatives and associations, have found hope through the RCEF Mechanization Program.

Gradual acceptance

Santor Bongabon Agricultural Cooperative (SBAC) in Bongabon, Nueva Ecija

The saying “third time’s a charm” proved true for Carlos Canlas and Eulogio “Chair Elly” G. Federizo when they established the SBAC. Initially hesitant due to his background as an OFW, Chair Elly soon realized that managing a cooperative was much like running a business.

Land ownership was crucial for the coop’s success and farmer Norma Bonus played a pivotal role by providing her land, which allowed SBAC to qualify for government grants.

“You can’t get a grant if you don’t have land,” Chair Elly explained. Lacking funds, they relied on Norma’s support, who lent them her property.

Founded on March 7, 2017 with 17 members, SBAC has grown to 108 members. Chair Elly’s leadership, focused on sound financial management and inclusive decision-making, has driven its steady growth, supported by the members’ dedication.

A key moment for SBAC came in 2020 when they were selected as grantee

MECHANIZED SUCCESSSES

CHRISTINE MAE A. NICOLAS AND MARIE FE G. CARPIO

under the RCEF Mechanization Program and received six agricultural machines from DA-PhilMech. Their combine harvester, four-wheel tractor, hand tractor, dryer, and two precision rice seeders significantly reduced costs and improved efficiency.

Even before receiving RCEF support, SBAC had already been using machines. Chair Elly noted that since their coop owned the machines, community members, even non-members, benefitted from faster service. “The positive impact is that it made their use cheaper and faster,” he said.

Despite improvements, some members hesitate to adopt technologies like the rice transplanter. Chair Elly noted that many are cautious, as their livelihoods rely on small landholdings.

“It’s not easy to change mindsets,” he admitted. However, he remains

optimistic, as some members have started using the transplanter, which has shown promise in nearby barangays.

As SBAC continues to advocate for mechanization, Chair Elly Federizo is confident that these innovations will drive productivity and efficiency, helping to secure a sustainable future for local farmers and the community.

Impressive results

Sts. Peter and Paul Multipurpose Cooperative (SPPMPC) in Poblacion, Hinunangan, Southern Leyte

The 13,600 members of the SPPMPC will never forget Typhoon Odette



YOBHEL LOUISSE P. BELTRAN



SARAH JOY N. RUIZ

SPPMPC expresses gratitude to the RCEF for helping its 13,600 members recover from the impact of Typhoon Odette and significantly enhancing productivity.

that hit them in December 2021. This destructive storm not only tormented their families and homes but also destroyed the rice mill they had received from a government program in 1998—the only rice machinery they had at that time.

As a cooperative focused on trading *palay* then, the loss of this machine also meant the demise of a vital income source.

“SPPMPC was established in 1968 with 15 cooperators; we processed coconuts into copra due to financial constraints. Even after our rice mill was destroyed and the pandemic locked us down, we provided financial aid to our members. Fortunately, RCEF helped us recover,” Edgar S. Bayano explained.

Since 2021, RCEF Mechanization Program has provided the cooperative with 10 units of machinery, including a combine harvester, four-wheel tractor, transplanter, hand tractor, and a rice processing system 2. These machines are operated by selected members, as many others still lack the necessary skills to use them.

“We find it somewhat easy to operate after watching video tutorials, but it’s still challenging,” he admitted.

While only a few members currently avail of the services of the machines, the results are clearly impressive and have significantly helped. “Previously, using a thresher required an average of 30 people to operate. Now, with the combine harvester, we only need three operators,” Edgar shared.

He also highlighted how the four-wheel tractor saves time, allowing plowing to be completed in only an hour per hectare, compared to several hours before. Transplanters now take only two hours, whereas manual planting used to take 10-15 hours per hectare. Additionally, their assets increased to P700 million from P690,000 last year.

Farmer-members are now benefiting from mechanized rice planting introduced by RCEF. Their main request is a spare parts depot for easy machine part replacements.

“We hope a depot will be set up within the cooperative or through the local government so future generations can continue enjoying the benefits of mechanization,” Bayano envisioned.

No more spoilage

Diplahan Multi-Purpose Cooperative (DMPC) in Zamboanga Sibugay

While typhoons could flood certain areas, DMPC has always struggled with excess water. This abundance saved them from the ill effects of El Niño, but they are not expecting such a benefit with La Niña underway.

“Farming was not easy before the RCEF services. Oftentimes, our harvests were damaged due to unavoidable bad weather,” Rebecca Lumindas said.

For 25 years, the 1,600 members of DMPC have vividly witnessed the struggles of rice farming in their area.

Palay harvests would often rot as heavy afternoon rainfalls begin in March, coinciding with the harvest season from March to May.

Farmers also dry their harvests on roads, disrupting traffic, and spend P1,000/ha to spread rice straw as fertilizer to avoid waste.

“RCEF has transformed our perspectives on farming. Since 2019, we have received inbred certified seeds and a mechanical dryer with a rice mill. Additionally, we were later provided with a transplanter and harvester,” she enumerated.

In 2022, DMPC received additional machinery, including two mechanical dryers, a levee maker, and a tractor this year. PHilMech has been training members on proper operation, maintenance, and accurate income record-keeping.

“Our harvests no longer spoil,” Rebecca said. “We no longer dry them on roads, and harvesting is faster. Instead of paying up to P5,000/ha for manual transplanting, we’ve reduced costs to P4,000 with the transplanter, covering operator fees, fuel, oil, and lubricants.”

Cooperative members get priority access to machines at P1,000-P1,500 lower rates than private owners. Non-members can rent after members are served.

With support from the RCEF Mechanization Program, TESDA scholarships, bank loans, and seed and fertilizer assistance, Diplahan farmers increased their average harvest from 3.2t/ha to 4.6t/ha. 🌾



SUFFICIENT AND STABLE

CHRISTINE MAE A. NICOLAS

At 54, Nariza B. Tan, a member of *Pambayang Pananakahan ng Zaragoza*, from Sto. Rosario Young, Zaragoza, Nueva Ecija, has spent 16 years managing their rice farm. However, it was the Expanded Rice Credit Assistance program (RCEF ERCA) that truly revolutionized her farming operations.

Managing 8.5ha, including 2.5ha of her own land, she faced common challenges in small-scale farming—limited capital, inconsistent yields, and unpredictable costs. RCEF ERCA provided her with the financial stability and resources necessary to overcome these hurdles.

Fixing finances

Nariza marked a crucial shift in her approach to farm finances in 2019 when she learned about the credit program.

"I first heard of RCEF ERCA during a meeting here in Zaragoza held by the Department of Agriculture, in coordination with the Office of the Municipal Agriculturist and representatives from the Landbank

of the Philippines (LBP). I needed additional capital at that time, so I inquired," she said.

ERCA under RCEF allocates P1 billion annually to help small rice farmers access low-interest financing with minimal collateral. The fund is equally shared between LBP and the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) at P500 million each.

For Nariza, RCEF has been a lifeline. It didn't just provide her with a loan; it opened the door to a more sustainable farming approach.

"In addition to credit, we also receive free inbred certified seeds," she shared, emphasizing how crucial the support that has been for maintaining and improving her farm's productivity.

The credit program has allowed her to borrow up to P50,000/ha, which she availed to secure a P250,000 loan to cover her 5ha area.



Being able to borrow money with such a low interest rate is a big help because the needs of the rice crops can be met. There's no need to skimp since there's a source for expenses. ”

- **NARIZA B. TAN**, Zaragoza, Nueva Ecija



"The interest rate for individual borrowers is very low at 2% per annum, so it's a huge help to me," she said.

To qualify for the RCEF ERCA loan, Nariza had to be enlisted in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture, she must not have outstanding loans for the same project, she has to complete a technical training, and submit necessary documents such as the loan form, a sworn statement, and a valid ID.

Worry-free

Beyond financial support, RCEF has empowered Nariza to adopt better farming practices by facilitating access to modern inputs and technology. With the savings generated from the low-interest loan—estimated at P8,000 to P10,000/ha—she can invest in other vital farm inputs such as irrigation, pesticides, and fertilizers.

"Farming is like a business; you need enough capital to harvest sufficiently and well," she explained. With RCEF, she's not just managing to keep her farm afloat, she's setting it up for long-term success.

Despite facing challenges like pest infestations and diseases that robbed part of her harvest last season, Nariza's access to RCEF resources has helped her mitigate these risks. While her recent harvest was only 8t/ha, she remains confident that under optimal conditions, her farm can produce up to 9.9t/ha.

"Being able to borrow money with such a low interest rate is a big help because the needs of the rice crops can be met. There's no need to skimp since there's a source for expenses," she explained.

Nariza repays her loan every six months after harvest and can reapply for a loan after just one month,

ensuring a continuous flow of capital for her biannual rice farming.

"It may take up to three months to become an RCEF ERCA beneficiary, which might seem a bit long, but once you meet all the requirements, the process runs smoothly. Re-loan applications take only about a month. I encourage others to visit the nearest LBP or DBP branch to learn more," she advised.

"I hope RCEF ERCA expands so they can help more people," she concluded, expressing her gratitude for the program and her hope for its continued growth. For Nariza, the benefits of the credit program go beyond financial aid—they represent the stability and opportunity that every farmer needs to succeed. 🍌



MOLDERS OF THE NOBLE

ROCEL DYAN C. SILVA

GERALD PAUL G. AQUINO

Dedicated Filipinos are transforming agricultural education through their remarkable journeys and unwavering commitment. Their stories of overcoming personal challenges to become influential farm school trainers breathe life to the profound impact of resilience and dedication in fostering community growth and empowerment.

Jennifer E. Doyola, 45, trainer

Jampol Integrated Farm
Alang-alang, Leyte

She has transformed a youthful dream that she had to abandon into a fulfilling career as a dedicated trainer.

As the eldest among 10 siblings, Jennifer bore the weight of responsibility early on. With her family struggling as rice farmers, she sacrificed her aspirations of higher education and a teaching

career to support her siblings, ensuring they had opportunities she did not have.

In 2022, Jennifer's life took a pivotal turn when she attended the Rice Specialists' Training Course (RSTC) by PhilRice Bicol under RCEF. Initially feeling out of place among professionals, she drew confidence from her extensive farming experience.

"I became self-conscious knowing I was the only farmer in our RSTC batch," she admitted. "But that motivated me to excel because I knew the knowledge I would gain could change not just my farming practices, but the lives of other farmers."

Today, Jennifer stands erect as a farm school trainer, conducting workshops, introducing best practices. She coupled her dedication with the use of different information, education, and

communication (IEC) materials suitable to the accessing capabilities of the farmers of various age groups.

"Never did I imagine that I would live my dream of teaching. Now, I train not just ordinary students, but the noblemen who feed our country," she enunciated proudly.

Jennifer has since trained 17 batches of farmers from Alang-alang, Santa Fe, and San Miguel, Leyte, and her influence has grown beyond the fields, inspiring and guiding others. "I'm proud that some farmers I trained have become agripreneurs, and two are now farm school trainers," she announced.

Her story is a testament to the transformative power of education and the potential for growth, no matter one's starting point. Through her dedication, she is not only advancing farming practices but also building a community of hope and empowerment.



Alma Mae C. Cortez, 44, owner

Healthy Harvest Integrated Farm Pinukpuk, Kalinga

She embodies “resilience, passion, and dedication to community service” as she transitions from her role as a textile machine operator in Taiwan to a lead trainer and facilitator for farmers.

With a Juris Doctor (law) degree and a track record as an OFW, Alma began her journey as a trainer at Honorio Clemencia’s Farm. Now an owner herself, and lead trainer, her career shift to farming has been transformative.

Her initial training on agricultural crop production in 2019 included specialized courses on high-quality inbred rice production, seeds, farm mechanization, and rice specialists training-all through Honorio Clemencia’s Farm.

This foundation set the stage for Alma to become a prominent trainer in high-quality rice production and farm mechanization.

Since 2020, she has trained 1,650 farmers from the City of Tabuk and Pinukpuk town. Her approach goes beyond traditional rice farming technologies, incorporating food processing skills like baking and chip-making, which provide farmers with innovative ways to market their products and diversify their income streams.

Alma’s impact cuts deeply into her community, inspiring many, especially women. Gemma C. Garcia, a 2022 graduate of the Farmer Field School, shared, “Our learnings were incredibly helpful. Before, I only knew how to eat rice, but now I understand proper rice management and how to increase yield. Alma’s inspiration motivates us to pursue our goals despite challenges.”

Witnessing her graduates apply their new skills and seeing tangible improvements in their practices bring Alma immense gratification.

“The gratitude and inspiration I see in the farmers, particularly the women



who have gained new strength and confidence, drive me to continue,” Alma reflected.



By leveraging my expertise and passion, I contribute to enhancing our farmers’ lives and the overall progress of our community. ”

- ALMA MAE C. CORTEZ

Lopez Molito P. Tagtong, 43, trainer

Salam Nature’s Farm
Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay

He has transitioned from a sales agent in Isabela to a pioneering farm school trainer, making significant strides with Salam.

Growing up as a young believer of Islam in a region fraught with stereotypes and misconceptions about his faith, Lopez faced formidable challenges. Despite societal prejudices, his resolve to defy these constraints and make a positive impact in his community remained steadfast.

His commitment was solidified in 2022 when he named the school ‘Salam Integrated Farm’ (SIF) after attending the RSTC conducted by PhilRice Agusan.

“Salam is an Arabic word meaning ‘peace’. Our goal is to extend peace to farmers in our community and demonstrate that, despite the stereotypes, Muslims can be bearers of both peace and knowledge,” Lopez preached.

SIF is notable as the first Muslim-operated farm school in Region 9. Lopez emphasizes the school’s inclusive nature, welcoming and teaching farmers equally despite their different backgrounds and religions. With his expertise in speaking seven dialects, he was able to



communicate and transform farmers from different regions by modifying his modules specific to the needs of the trainees.

“We are proud that our farm school has become a refuge for farmers seeking solutions to their agricultural challenges,” he asserted. “It is not just an educational institution; it is a platform for innovation, growth, and unity,” he added

Under Lopez’s leadership, the farm school has become a beacon of hope and progress. It provides practical training on modern farming techniques, sustainability practices, and crop management, while also fostering a sense of community among farmers from diverse backgrounds and religious inclinations.

Lopez’s belief in education and cooperation as tools to bridge divides and uplift communities is evident in his work. Since its inception, Salam Integrated Farm has trained 700 farmers.

Not only that, the farm school supports eight college scholars, young farmers with the potential to become future leaders and educators. Lopez looks at funding their education as a means to break their cycle of poverty and inspire future generations.

All told, Salam stands as a testament to the power of change, demonstrating that transformation can emerge from unexpected places, driven by those who challenge the status quo and strive to build a better future. 🌱

When the government liberalized rice trade in 2019 through the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) to meet World Trade Organization commitments, many critics were quick to point out the seemingly endless negative effects it would have on the rice industry.

While consumers were said to benefit from lower rice prices due to the influx of rice imports, local farmers were to suffer from the lower *palay* prices. To help farmers, RTL included the P10-billion RCEF, with P1 billion for the Rice Extension Services Program (RESP) to boost efficiency through training and extension activities.

In the book *Comparative Efficiency of Rice Farming in Asia and the Philippines*, experts argued that increasing efficiency is key to the success of RCEF. The key question is, did these efforts create a tangible impact on its farmer-beneficiaries?

Unexpected allies



Renil T. Ballon, 47, a former overseas Filipino worker from Pontevedra, Capiz, had only childhood memories of helping his father in the field when he decided to start rice farming in 2018.

Following conventional practices, he harvested 1.4-1.6t/ha, but he



Now, I monitor the field because I learned from the training that not all insects are pests; some are allies. I no longer spray insecticides to take care of the friendly ones. 🗨️

- RENIL T. BALLON, PONTEVEDRA, Capiz

MORE YIELD, LESSER COST

REUEL M. MARAMARA

wanted more. In 2023, he joined the RCEF-Farmer Field School (FFS) at DC Integrated Farm School.

Previously, Renil sprayed insecticides at the sight of any insect. "Now, I monitor the field because I learned from the training that not all insects are pests; some are allies. I no longer spray insecticides to take care of the friendly ones," he said.

He also learned the importance of the right element, amount, and timing (EAT) of fertilizer application. Instead of using four bags, he now uses two bags of fertilizer, which includes 14-14-14. Following the recommendations of the Abonong Swak Combo 1 method, he reduced fertilizer use and still achieved a 48-cavan/ha yield in the 2024 dry season, which is a 50% increase.

With his new practices, Renil reduced his production cost from P20,000 before joining the RCEF-FFS to P13,000 in the 2024 dry season.

"I never thought almost everything I did was wrong. It was very different," Renil laughed in disbelief. He now plans to try more combinations of Abonong Swak to keep improving his yield.

Easier than ever

Like Renil, Merlyn C. Tubilid, 57, from Nabunturan, Davao de Oro, was most struck by pest management during her RCEF-FFS training at F. Bernal Agricultural Integrated Farm in 2022.

Before, she couldn't distinguish between harmful and beneficial insects and sprayed pesticides around 10 times per season.

"They taught us new technologies that reduced our costs through integrated pest management, and yet our yield increased by 62%, from 5t/ha to 8t/ha," she shared.

Farming for almost 20 years, Merlyn noted that government support, including machines received three years ago, has lowered production costs.

Before that, they bought all inputs, rented all machines for land preparation, and hired manual labor for crop establishment, raising production cost significantly.

"For instance, we pay P10,000 for manual transplanting. Now, we only pay P2,500 thanks to the rice transplanter, which is a 75% reduction in transplanting cost," she said.

Merlyn's enthusiasm for learning has earned her farm accreditation as a learning site for agriculture. With added confidence from learning rice science through the RCEF-FFS, she's now preparing it to become a farm school.

"I was hesitant at first, but I thought if this is to share what we have learned with other farmers, so be it," she said. Once accredited, her farm will be the first farm school in their community. 🌱



VOXPOP

► HANAH HAZEL MAVI B. MANALO

BEYOND COST, YIELD



MALVIN REGENIA, 32
NSCC Agri-Tourism Farmville
Ilocos Sur

"Thanks to RCEF. My production cost decreased by 50%. I yielded an additional 10 sacks. My income also doubled. Because of these, I was able to buy a *kolong-kolong*. I also enjoy a concrete home now. We were sleeping in a wood-frame house before. I could also send my two children to school. I also have more time to do other jobs, such as fishing and farming other land because of the use of machines."



JOVANIL COMBATE, 43
San Isidro Farmers-Irrigators'
Association
Davao del Norte

"Our income from providing custom service of RCEF machines such as combine harvester and farm tractor, has also kept the association running. We earn P250,000 from the harvester and P30,000 from the tractor per cropping season."



VIVENCIO MAHINAY, 62
Crispin Farmers'
Multipurpose Cooperative
Davao Oriental

"Because we earned more from providing custom service of the machine that we received from RCEF, we provide a lower loan interest rate of 1.5% every month, we sell cheaper farm inputs, and we collect a lower fee from providing custom service to our members."



PATRICIA MEDRANO, 52
RB Agri-tourism and Skills
Development Center Inc.
Ilocos Norte

"In my 30 years of farming, it's my first time to have been trained on rice. Now, I am not borrowing or lending money as capital for the next cropping season because of the 30% increase in my income from rice farming. Thanks to RCEF for the opportunity."



November is National **Rice** Awareness **Month**

Be RiCEPONSIBLE

Adlay, mais,
saba, atbp. ay
ihalo sa kanin

Brown rice
ay kainin

Kanin ay
huwag sayangin

Dapat bigas
ng Pilipinas
ang bilhin



DA-PHILRICE CENTRAL EXPERIMENT STATION
Maligaya, Science City of Muñoz, 3119 Nueva Ecija



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