

Abandoning monocropping expected to boost farming households' food security

By Patricia B. Mirasol
Reporter

IT'S DIFFICULT to imagine farmers being at risk of growing hungry, being so close to where the food is grown. But agricultural households that specialize too much in any one crop to maximize their land may find themselves in exactly that situation; avoiding such a predicament will require them to cultivate a variety of crops and farm animals.

"You can't consume the same crop or food every day," according to Ma. Elena P. van Tooren, executive director of the East-West Seed Foundation, Inc., adding that growing mixed crops also helps food security within a community because it makes food accessible, available, and affordable.

The East-West Seed Foundation is the corporate social responsibility arm of East-West Seed Philippines, which breeds and produces vegetable seed for tropical conditions.

"Grow local, consume local, shorten the food supply chain," she said in an e-mail.

The Food and Agriculture Organization has said that one of the most advantageous features of home gardens is their "location adjacent to homes, close association with family activities, and a wide diversity of crop and livestock species to meet family needs."

Per the World Food Programme (WFP), about a quarter of Philippine agricultural households are food insecure, compared to only 9% for non-agricultural households.

Regenerative agriculture — an approach that highlights intercropping,

where multiple crops are planted together; agroforestry, the cultivation and use of trees and shrubs with crops and livestock in agricultural systems; and livestock integration — may likewise help contribute to food security.

The approach helps both farmers and the environment by "ensuring that the agri-ecosystem remains productive, with less damage to the environment," said academican Eufemio T. Rasco, Jr., chair of the Agricultural Sciences Division of the National Academy of Science and Technology.

"Switching from the present practice to regenerative agriculture practices may temporarily compromise food production, however, as it takes time to heal a damaged agro-ecosystem," he said.

"This damage resulted from years of monoculture, harmful tillage practices, and chemical farming," he told *BusinessWorld*.

Mr. Rasco added that the Philippines could be uniquely resistant to regenerative farming because of the "limited" diversity of its food — dominated by rice — and high meat consumption.

"The existing practices in rice production is arguably the most environmentally destructive form of agriculture," he said. "Meat has a higher environmental footprint than plants and fish. We need to shift to a more diverse diet, mostly plant-based."

Ms. Van Tooren describes regenerative agriculture as "one level higher" than organic or natural farming, as it requires more planning.

"At this time, even natural or organic farming has limited adoption, with farmers claiming that commercial crop production is not possible with natural or organic methods and procedures," she said.

FULL STORY



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Complexities of cold storage big hurdle in farm supply chain

By Beatriz Marie D. Cruz
and Sheldeen Joy Talavera

MOST consumers, having bought their groceries for the week, might simply stash their vegetables in the refrigerator and not give them a second thought.

Blown up to industrial scale, however, the complexities of keeping produce fresh and saleable multiply, which might help explain why farmers find it difficult to store their excess harvest. Even if enough facilities were built to service the entire harvest, the practice of storing produce is all about finding the sweet spot between building properly-sized facilities, managing the difficulty of keeping multiple types of produce fresh, and doing so at scale to justify the cost.

"A cold storage facility is a huge refrigerator. It has separate compartments used for storing food products at different temperatures depending on need," Anthony S. Dizon, president of the Cold Chain Association of the Philippines, said in an e-mail. "Cold chain practice for vegetables needs to be planned carefully to ensure that economies of scale are adequate to justify investment in storage facilities."

He said the facility must have separate compartments for storing vegetables whose temperature needs vary wildly. Lettuce, he said, should be kept at 0 degrees Celsius, while bell pepper is best at 7 degrees.

"In the case of onions, they need to be stored separately to avoid odor contamination of other products," Mr. Dizon said.

Onions are the food item of the moment, having experienced price spikes in recent months. It probably didn't help the onion market that an onion farming cooperative complained to Congress last week about having lost millions of pesos after its harvest was stored at the wrong temperature.



REUTERS

According to the Philippine Onion Industry Roadmap, cold storage helps "balance the peaks and troughs of onion supply," helping farmers save their bumper crops for release when demand picks up.

In 2022, the onion industry lost about 100,000 metric tons "due to lack of facilities such as cold storage and improper handling," according to the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Dizon said that onions should be cleaned and pre-cooled to avoid temperature shock. "Under proper storage conditions, onions are expected to last in storage for 6-8 months," he said.

"(Cold storage facilities) are important so onions can have a longer shelf life," Joy E. Dela Rosa, operations manager of Bonena Multipurpose Cooperative of Bongabon, Nueva Ecija, said by telephone.

What terms exactly are farmers given when they seek out cold storage services?

According to Mr. Dizon, a farmer must agree with the cold storage operator on storage conditions, cost, and duration.

"Storage charges for vegetable products depend on the item density, which dictates the quantity that can be stored in a specific area," he said. Cold storage operators

also charge for handling and transporting the produce outside the storage facility. A handling charge may also be collected for bringing the produce in and out of storage.

The admission process for any crop involves an inspection of the produce to check for damage, pests, or moisture.

"Onions can also be stored after they have been cleaned and should not (be older than) seven days after harvest," Eric D. Batbatan of Royale Cold Storage, which operates facilities in Rizal and Bulacan, said by telephone.

Farmers and cooperatives usually store 1,000-10,000 bags of onions with Royal between April and December. The company's capacity for onions is about 5,000 pallet positions.

He said improperly stored onions run the risk of sprouting or freezing, becoming unmarketable. In such cases, negligence will have to be established before compensation is paid.

"If we receive (good produce) at the inbound inspection, the responsibility rests upon us. If there is any damage, we would pay our client," Mr. Batbatan said.

Mr. Dizon said the client is expected to take out insurance while the produce is kept in storage in third-party warehouses.

Philippines to host the APEC Business Advisory Council in Cebu

The Philippines will host the third leg of this year's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Business Advisory Council (ABAC) in Cebu from July 27 to 30, headlining the region's private sector priorities on economic integration, sustainable growth, financial services, inclusion, and digitalization and innovation under the theme of "Equity, Sustainability, and Opportunity."

As the first international event within its borders since reopening after the pandemic, the Philippines will welcome top business leaders from the 21 APEC economies, who will be discussing ABAC's approved 2023 Work Program. Simultaneously, this is also a window for the country to present potential business opportunities whilst showcasing the beauty and heritage of Cebu.

"We are thrilled and honored to be hosting ABAC 3 in Cebu this year, and we look forward to not just tackling various areas of economic concern and urgency, but, more importantly, working together in a highly synergized way to produce meaningful insights and solutions," Aboitiz Group President and CEO Sabin M. Aboitiz said.

Mr. Aboitiz also serves as the Vice-Chair of ABAC's Sustainable Growth Working Group (SGWG).

The working group will lead discussions on effective responses to climate change, realistic decarbonization transition strategies, and efficient and sustainable processes across the regional food value chain.

Other initial areas of focus will be discussed by other working groups and task forces. The Economic Integration Working Group will talk about accelerating the realization of the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), supporting the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its advocacy for the rules-based multilateral trading system, improving trade resilience, and promoting trade and sustainability.

The Digital and Innovation Working Group will review the



Attending ABAC 1 in New Zealand are (from left) Liveable Cities Challenge Chairman and ABAC PH member Guillermo Luz, Aboitiz Group Chief Reputation & Sustainability Officer Ginggay Hontiveros and ABAC PH Lead Staffer Patrick Chua.

strengthening of cybersecurity, the promotion of coherent and interoperable digital identity systems, and the facilitation of cross-border data flows.

Meanwhile, the Finance Task Force is set to examine the facilitation of cross-border digital financial services, support for a just and affordable transition, financing of sustainable innovation, promotion of interoperable central bank digital currencies, and facilitation of cross-border data flows in financial services.

Finally, the Inclusion Task Force will tackle empowering women and engaging indigenous peoples in the economy, integrating ESG practice for MSMEs, as well as formalizing the informal economy and bridging generations through economic engagement.

Joining Mr. Aboitiz as part of the Philippine delegation is Tomas Alcantara, Chair of ABAC

Philippines, and other ABAC members, Joanne de Asis, Francis Chua, and Guillermo Luz. Together, the representatives will be raising key issues relevant to the Philippines, particularly energy security, food security, climate change, and digitalization and innovation, especially with regards to education and the future of work.

Hosting the prestigious international event is expected to bring positive buzz, not just to Cebu's local economy, but to its cultural life as well. Cebu boasts a long history of being a center of culture and the arts, being home to the likes of the centuries-old Sinulog festival. In 2019, Cebu city was also hailed as a "creative city of design" by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Foreign dignitaries will also appreciate Cebu's coastal and urban attractions, including the

8.9-kilometer Cebu-Cordova Link Expressway, which connects mainland Cebu to the historic island of Mactan, being the country's longest sea-crossing bridge.

The United States is the host economy for this year's APEC and serving as Chair of ABAC is US member Dominic Ng, Chairman and CEO of East West Bank. The first 2023 ABAC meeting was held in Auckland, New Zealand last February 12 to 14. This is to be followed by the second meeting in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam on April 27 to 30. The fourth and final ABAC meeting for the year will be in San Francisco, California, USA in November.

ABAC's 2023 Work Program will be discussed by business leaders in each of the quarterly meetings. Detailed recommendations will then be developed and conveyed to APEC governments via APEC



Vice Chair, 2023 ABAC Sustainable Growth Working Group and Aboitiz Group President & CEO Sabin Aboitiz

Senior Officials, Trade, small market enterprise (SME) and Finance Ministers, or directly to APEC Economic Leaders.

The ABAC was established by APEC economic leaders in November 1995 to provide perspectives and advice from the private sector towards achieving the APEC's goals of liberalizing trade and investment, facilitating business activities, and promoting economic and technical cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

The APEC is an inter-governmental economic forum created in 1989 meant "to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific." In 2020, APEC Leaders unveiled their Putrajaya Vision 2040 which underscored their vision of "an open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community by 2040, for the prosperity of all our people and future generations."