

CAR vegetable farmers targeted for assistance

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it will help vegetable producers in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) to raise their output, with P130 million worth of financial aid, equipment, and irrigation projects.

In a statement on Sunday, Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said that the assistance is designed to increase the output of highland crops.

“To further enhance the region’s output, we are turning over P417,000 worth of farm machinery to three cooperatives and associations in Mountain Province,” Mr. Laurel added.

The region produces 80% of the country’s highland vegetables.

He said that P454 million was also earmarked to fund three infrastructure projects in the area, while P13.9 million was allocated for an unspecified agriculture

project. The works are set to be completed within the year.

“The assistance we’re providing will promote sustainable growth through better production, processing, marketing, and distribution of high-value crops,” he added.

Mr. Laurel said that the DA is planning to tap local government units in the region to promote crop diversification, in an effort to stabilize farmer incomes and encourage the cultivation of other crops.

“The government can also tap the abundant harvests of farmers for distribution and sale in Kadiwaa centers,” he added, referring to the government-subsidized direct-from-farmers outlets.

CAR farmers earlier sought government intervention due to the low prices offered by traders for highland vegetables, forcing some of them to dump their crops.

The DA’s regional office in CAR reported that the drop in prices

was due to a lack of buyers for the upland vegetables between Dec. 28 and Jan. 3.

Additionally, Mr. Laurel said that the agency has allotted P25.9 million for the rehabilitation of rice farms affected by Super Typhoon Egay (international name: Doksuri). The storm had affected 14,714 farmers in the area.

The Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization disbursed P82.9

million worth of rice production and post-harvest equipment and facilities in Kalinga and Ifugao provinces.

Some P41.2 million worth of irrigation projects were also turned over to CAR irrigator associations, according to Mr. Laurel.

“These irrigation systems will increase yields on 195 hectares tilled by 299 farmers,” the DA said. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Farmers call for focus on streamlined gov’t, not Constitutional amendments

FARMERS said on Sunday that legislators need to pay more attention to governance issues and reducing red tape, rather than pushing plans to amend the 1987 Constitution, calling the need to shore up food security more urgent.

Gregorio A. San Diego, Jr., chairman of the Philippine Egg Board Association, said seven foreign broiler producers and large Philippine integrators are mainly concerned about red tape.

“All of them including us are all complaining about the increasing chicken meat-import and LGU (local government unit) regulations, (and) not about land ownership,” Mr. San Diego said in a Viber message, referring to one of the proposed Constitutional reforms.

Last week, Albay Rep. Jose Ma. Clemente S. Salceda said amending the Constitution to ease restrictions on land ownership will help address food security issues.

“The key to boosting food production and reducing food prices in the Philippines is investment in agriculture,” he said in a statement.

“These restrictions cover ownership, lease, transfer, and even foreign management — leaving foreign investors very little room for involvement in local agriculture,” Mr. Salceda, who also heads

the House ways and means committee, added.

United Broiler Raisers Association (UBRA) President Elias Jose M. Inciong said amending the charter is not the answer to the Philippines’ agricultural crisis, especially if imports remain a priority over local production.

“The crisis is mainly traceable to the failure to implement the design of our treaty commitments (domestic support, trade remedies, and quarantine systems [in] sanitary and phytosanitary systems) in the World Trade Organization (WTO),” he said in a Viber chat.

Mr. Inciong, a lawyer, said that past administrations have focused on import liberalization, weakening producers.

“The sector is a victim not only of neglect but also of an insidious false narrative that it is protected by high tariffs,” he said, also citing the government’s poor implementation of current agricultural laws as well as insufficient budget support.

He urged Congress to instead focus on implementing the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (Republic Act No. 8435), the magna carta for small farmers (RA 7607), and the Food Safety Act (RA 10611).

Provisions of the Local Government Code must also be reviewed,

particularly on zoning, imposition of fees, and LGUs authority over quarantine and food safety matters, Mr. Inciong added.

Leonardo A. Lanzona, who teaches economics at the Ateneo de Manila, said passing laws that would allow agrarian reform beneficiaries to negotiate fair and efficient contracts with foreign corporations without giving away their land ensures a more equitable partnership that will make robust production more likely.

“In effect, the agrarian reform beneficiaries can be part-owners of these corporations with their land as their input to the potential production,” Mr. Lanzona said via Facebook Messenger chat.

He added that ownership does not correlate with agricultural production. “Land is so contentious that we cannot just open the constitution and allow big foreign corporations to take over the land.”

Congress has revived talks to amend the 1987 Constitution to soften economic restrictions and admit more foreign investors.

The Senate is set to conduct its own review of the charter, specifically on easing economic constraints on public utilities, advertising, and education. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

France drops plan to decrease farmers’ diesel discount but protests to continue

MONTASTRUC-DE-SALIES, France — The French government dropped plans to gradually reduce state subsidies on agricultural diesel but that seems not enough for angry farmers surrounding Paris and still threatening to converge on the capital in their tractors.

After two weeks of protests that have spread across France, with irate farmers on Friday blocking a major highway out of Paris, Prime Minister Gabriel Attal announced a series of measures to ease financial and administrative pressure on farmers.

“We have decided to pursue our movement. The prime minister had not responded to all of our questions,” Arnaud Rousseau, head of FNSEA, France’s biggest farming union, told French TV station TF1.

Speaking earlier in a mountain village farm near the Spanish border, with his notes on a bale of hay, Mr. Attal said: “We will put agriculture above everything else.”

He said a plan to phase out state support on diesel would be scrapped, red tape simplified and an appeal lodged with the European Union for a waiver on bloc-wide rules on fallow land. “We will stop this Kafka-esque system,” said Mr. Attal, 34, France’s new prime minister, in response to the first big crisis of his premiership.

“We will stop this planned trajectory of increasing tax on non-road diesel fuel.” Mr. Attal also announced a raft of other steps designed to quell the unrest that has seen farmers spray manure over a public building and supermarket, dump hay bales in highways and empty the contents of trucks carrying fresh produce from neighboring countries.

France would remain opposed to signing the Mercosur free-trade deal, which farmers say will flood the country with cheaper Latin American meat and produce, he said.

France will also push to ease European Union rules forcing farmers to leave some of their land fallow.

Ahead of Mr. Attal’s announcements, farmers had threatened to take their protest into central Paris. “We will go right into Paris to highlight our rage, our grievances,” said farmer Matteo Legrand.

Some farmers called Mr. Attal’s pledges an encouraging start, with the road blockade in southern France, where the French prime minister spoke with demonstrators after his announcements, to be lifted on Saturday.

“That is one blockade but there are 100 more blockades. What was announced (...) does not calm the anger,” Mr. Rousseau said, adding he was waiting for an invitation from Mr. Attal to resume talks.

Earlier on Friday, the finance and farm ministers held emergency talks with food industry officials about fair prices for produce — a “number one priority” for farmers who say they are on the sharp end of the government’s drive to lower consumer prices.

Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said the government would “double down” on enforcing a law aimed at guaranteeing fair farmgate prices and vowed to be “pitiless” towards the supermarkets.

Mr. Le Maire has previously spent months pressuring food retail giants such as Carrefour and Danone to lower their prices after a phase of high inflation, thereby earning the ire of farmers.

France is the European Union’s biggest agricultural producer. France’s protests follow similar action in other European countries, including Germany and Poland, six months ahead of European elections in which the far right — for whom farmers represent a growing constituency — are seen making gains. — **Reuters**

BCDA extends filing deadline for Clark ICT project bidders

THE Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) said that it will be extending the deadline to submit the eligibility requirements for an information and communications technology (ICT) project in New Clark City to Feb. 16.

In a statement, the BCDA said the extension was granted at the request of prospective bidders.

“We understand that to do this project effectively, we will need the expertise of the private sector who can help us create a vibrant and innovative competitive market for ICT services via an Open Access Model,” BCDA President and Chief Executive Officer Joshua M. Bingcang said.

“This project is key to unlocking the potential of New Clark City as a smart and sustainable metropolis where its citizens have equal access to fast, reliable and affordable internet services,” he added.

The project involves building the foundation of fiber infrastructure and providing retail internet services across the 9,450-hectare zone.

It will be executed through a joint venture, with the bidder expected to handle the commercialization, expansion, repair, and maintenance of the passive ICT infrastructure.

The project seeks to incorporate an open access model in its underground network which will allow multiple data transmission providers to use it to offer retail services in the area.

The commercialization of the passive ICT infrastructure is viewed as a first step in developing a smart city with enhanced connectivity and the capacity to host data centers.



PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

“Once fully developed, New Clark City is projected to become the home of about one million residents, with projected employment of about 200,000 workers,” the BCDA said.

Mr. Bingcang said in a recent briefing that the head of BCDA’s Joint Venture Committee is working with the Asian Development Bank to work out the procurement process for the ICT project.

He added that 18 companies attended the pre-bid conference, with at least three companies purchasing the bidding documents.

“But because this is a multi-discipline project, I think most of them will consolidate and form a consortium because some are contractors, others are IT (information technology) providers, the others are funders, etc. And you all need that in this project,” he said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Formal employment in establishments rises in August 2022 survey — PSA

THE NUMBER of people employed in formal establishments rose to 5.37 million in August 2022 from 5.32 million in June 2020, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported.

The results were contained in the PSA’s 2021/2022 Integrated Survey on Labor and Employment. The comparative pe-

riods are irregular due to disruptions from the pandemic.

The services sector had the largest workforce with 3.78 million, followed by industry with 1.45 million and agriculture, forestry and fishing with 139,190. — **Abigail Marie P. Yraola**



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For Filipinos, studying abroad is a golden opportunity. Beyond obtaining a high-quality education, it paves the way toward a thriving career. It’s not surprising then that an increasing number of Filipinos are showing interest in studying overseas. In 2022, data from UNESCO, or the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, revealed that nearly 23,000 Filipinos are pursuing education abroad.

“In the next five years, we can expect a 13% increase in Filipinos seeking quality education abroad. The endless possibilities it offers, coupled with strong support from the private and public sector, suggest a rising trend,” said PETNET President and CEO Adrian Alfonso Ocampo.

Aside from the educational and career benefits, there are additional exciting aspects to anticipate when studying abroad.

EXPLORING NEW PLACES AND BUILDING CONNECTIONS
Studying abroad goes beyond the classroom; it’s an opportunity to explore land away from home. During weekends or breaks from classes, students can schedule trips to roam across the country and meet new people, turning the experience into a combination of study and vacation.

IMMERSING IN A NEW CULTURE
Understanding and immersing oneself in a different country’s culture is another perk. By learning how the locals live and embracing their traditions, students gain a unique and expanded perspective of the world.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH
International education and work experience provide a competitive edge. It shapes people into dynamic, agile individuals who can adapt quickly.

PETNET, Inc. expanded its partnership under one of its service brands, PETNET Forex Solutions, with global B2B payments company, Convera, who provides leading payment solutions in the education space and is trusted by more than 900 institutions worldwide.

By leveraging Convera’s extensive network of partner universities, PETNET aims to offer a simple and economical solution through the Convera GlobalPay for Students platform for managing direct payments to international education providers,” said Mr. Ocampo.

With accessible programs for Filipino students, funding overseas education is now more manageable, particularly regarding tuition fees.

The Convera GlobalPay for Students platform ensures that Filipino students and payers can pay their tuition in Philippine Pesos (PHP) with the assurance that the payment will arrive on time, in full, without hidden charges. Tailored for international students, the platform offers a simple and reliable way to pay education fees.

Students, parents, and sponsors can select PETNET as their preferred payment option during checkout and complete their payment online via bank transfer.

Through this payment platform, PETNET Forex Solutions and Convera are empowering Filipinos by providing accessible payment solutions that bring them closer to their dreams of academic opportunities abroad.

“The Convera GlobalPay for Students platform hopes to assist Filipino students with access to a seamless and economical method of direct payments to education providers abroad,” said Mr. Ocampo. “Studying overseas is an opportunity you don’t want to miss. And we are glad that through our platform more Filipinos are being empowered to seize this once-in-a-lifetime breakthrough.”

Access the Convera GlobalPay for Students platform by visiting students.convera.com.

Stay updated on PETNET Forex Solutions’ latest services by following them on Facebook and LinkedIn.