



## DoST ramps up MSME aid with tech upgrades, loan access

THE DEPARTMENT of Science and Technology (DoST) said over 100,000 micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have tapped its Small Enterprise Technology Upgrading Program (SETUP) since 2002, as it expands support through laboratory testing services and a new financing tie-up offering loans of up to P50 million.

DoST Secretary Renato U. Solidum, Jr. said MSMEs can avail themselves of government programs aimed at helping them commercialize their products and become globally competitive. Among these is SETUP, which provides technology upgrading assistance, including seed funding for equipment acquisition, as well as training and consultancy services.

"Before we provide financial assistance to procure technology or equipment, we also provide technical guidance," he said during the implementation announcement of the Philippine Technology Evaluation and Standards for Testing on Tuesday.

According to the DoST, SETUP also offers services such as functional packaging and label design, as well as database information systems. The program is open to MSMEs in priority sectors, including food processing, furniture and furnishings, and agriculture- and aquaculture-based products.

For regulatory compliance, MSMEs can also access laboratory services through DoST's

OneLab network, which is composed of about 70 member laboratories, including Regional Standards and Testing Laboratories, research and development institutes, and private and international partners.

"We have laboratories all over the country... which provide the necessary testing so MSMEs can improve their products," Mr. Solidum said.

The OneLab network provides chemical, physical, microbiological, and radiological testing, as well as calibration services for industries such as water, wastewater, food, and furniture. Services are standardized to ensure timely and accurate test results.

Mr. Solidum said testing is crucial for MSMEs seeking to export, particularly those in the food sector, to ensure compliance with varying international Food and Drug Administration standards.

Meanwhile, DoST signed a partnership with the Land Bank of the Philippines to help MSMEs and startups gain access to financing. Approved enterprises may avail of loans starting at P500,000 for startups, P5 million for expanding MSMEs, and up to P50 million for larger-scale projects.

DoST said it has shortlisted around 10,000 MSMEs, including existing beneficiaries of its programs, for referral to the bank's evaluation. — **Edg Adrian A. Eva**

# Philippine kitchen feeds riders hit by fuel costs

By Almira Louise S. Martinez  
Reporter

A MARIKINA-BASED restaurant is stepping in to support public utility vehicle drivers and delivery riders as rising fuel prices squeeze daily incomes, serving more than 4,000 free home-cooked meals every weekend.

Trining's Kitchen Stories, led by founder and Executive Chef Jayson G. Maulit, began the initiative to help workers forced to choose between spending on fuel or food.

"I don't want that feeling of having people choose between the safety of their family and dignified food... People's choices right now are either gasoline or food," Mr. Maulit said in a Zoom interview.

The meals are distributed under the restaurant's volunteer arm, #TuloyPH, which has mobilized staff and volunteers to prepare and deliver food to drivers across Metro Manila.

Mr. Maulit said feedback from beneficiaries underscores the strain faced by transport workers.

"One driver said his last P100 was used to buy gasoline," he said. "Another said his budget for the whole day is just enough for cigarettes because he believes it can curb hunger for a short time."

Fuel costs remain elevated despite recent rollbacks. In Metro Manila and other highly urbanized areas, diesel prices are sold as much as P107.48 per liter, while gasoline price has reached P107.11 per liter, according to the Department of Energy.

Mr. Maulit said hearing such stories firsthand reinforced his goal of embedding social impact into the restaurant's operations.



TRINING'S KITCHEN STORIES OFFICIAL FACEBOOK ACCOUNT

"I knew that if I opened a restaurant, it had to be centered on social impact," he said. "If we're in a position to help, we should do so."

The initiative builds on earlier efforts that began during the COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) pandemic, when the restaurant provided meals to frontliners.

It later expanded its relief work during typhoons, including large-scale feeding operations that reached more than 50,000 meals across Metro Manila and nearby areas over five days.

This year's program, which began in April, is supported by about 19 staff members who volunteer their time every weekend. Donations from private people and businesses help sustain the effort, with contributions ranging from meat and vegetables to cooking oil and canned goods.

"We start with what we have," Mr. Maulit said. "When donations come in, that's when we reimagine the menu."

He described the initiative as a community effort that brings together businesses and people to support vulnerable sectors.

"It's like a whole-of-society intervention where the private sector stands with fellow businesses, and then you get support from the public," he said.

To expand the program, Trining's plans to launch a "prepaid meal" system that lets customers sponsor meals for those in need at P110 each.

"Anyone who is food insecure can come here and we will be able to give them a meal," Mr. Maulit said.

He added that restaurant kitchens could play a broader role beyond commercial operations, especially during periods of economic strain.

"What we're proving is that restaurant kitchens can help build social impact, especially for vulnerable populations in times of crisis," he said. "They can become a sanctuary where the food remains the same, both in crisis and celebration."

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