

## Awakening the sleeping giant in PH agriculture sector

**MANILA** -- Department of Agriculture Secretary William Dar sees a growing sense of optimism surrounding the country's agriculture sector, which he described as a "sleeping giant" that needs to wake up from its slumber.

In a year-end press conference on Thursday, Dar expressed hope that the sector would continue on its growth trajectory after a major comeback in the third quarter of 2019 with a 2.87 percent production, reversing the -0.87-percent decline posted in the same period last year.

Dar said he expects the agriculture sector to attain a 2.5 percent to 3 percent production increase for the last quarter of the year.

"We are hopeful that this favorable condition will be sustained into the fourth quarter of the year to allow us to attain a full-year growth," Dar said.

Dar, however, noted that there is still so much to do, stressing that a systematic development strategy must be pursued to awaken the sleeping giant in the Philippine agricultural sector.

"We really have to think outside the box. We have to invent, innovate, reshape if you want to unlock the sleeping giant of the agriculture sector," he said.

"With the right policy and right strategies and mechanisms, this sleeping giant can become the force with which more contribution to the gross domestic product can happen," he added.

### "New Thinking for Agriculture"

With Dar at the helm, the DA has laid the groundwork for modernization and industrialization through the "New Thinking for Agriculture" toward the vision of a food-secure Philippines with prosperous farmers and

fisherfolk.

The leadership's battle cry is "Masaganang Ani, Mataas na Kita."

The cornerstone of Dar's strategy is composed of eight paradigms: modernization, industrialization, promotion of exports, farm consolidation, road map development, infrastructure development, higher budget and investments, and legislative support.

"We reviewed and aligned the entire DA family's programming towards the updated framework to ensure that we in the DA family are synergized and coherent as we perform our respective tasks," Dar said.

"The New Thinking employs agri-industrialization and 'agri-preneurship' as strategies to modernize the country's agriculture sector. Through these approaches, we hope to boost the sector's productivity and competitiveness, creating employment and income opportunities in the Philippine countryside," he added.

The department is focusing efforts on increasing productivity, lowering production cost, value-adding, and market matching.

To date, the DA has visited a total of 12 regions for consultation and distribution of farm machinery and equipment, seeds, and other interventions worth nearly PHP3 billion.

For the coming year, the DA will promote inclusive agribusiness that will transform food producers to entrepreneurs and encourage young Filipinos to take interest in farming activities.

"We will institutionalize a youth development program to enable younger generations to start-up businesses through the incubation of agricultural technologies," Dar said.

"When they are

ready, we will provide them financial assistance, payable in five years with zero interest," he added.

### RCEF toward Modernization

Dar said the implementation of the component activities of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), which is designed to help modernize Filipino rice farming amidst globalization, has been accelerated further during the final stretch of the year.

Some highlights of the progress of major components include the following: on seeds, 50 of 57 target provinces have received 465,000 bags (20kg/bag) of inbred rice seeds; on credit, some PHP301.379 million in loans were released to 164 individual farmers and three cooperatives with zero-interest, non-collateral credit; on mechanization, 2,938 units of machinery based on the assessed needs of 620 farmers' cooperatives are set to be distributed later this month.

In addition, the draft of the Philippine Rice Industry Roadmap reflecting the industry's strategic plan has been completed and is undergoing review.

To further help local rice farmers, Dar said the PHP3-billion Rice Farmer Financial Assistance (RFFA) shall be disbursed to 600,000 rice farmers. This unconditional cash transfer program will help farmers tilling one-half hectare to two hectares of land.

### Eventful 2019: Facing challenges head-on

Dar, who took over the department with barely five months in office, has faced the falling prices of palay and copra, the high price of rice, the onslaught of African swine fever (ASF) and Fall Army Worm, and the

usual occurrence of typhoons.

"This period had truly been eventful and challenging for us... But we did not back down and confronted them head-on. In such a critical time, this leadership provided much-needed direction and focus," Dar said.

Dar noted that the DA was able to temper the high price of rice by increasing the National Food Authority's unloaded stocks in the market and shore up palay prices by securing the commitment of local government units to bankroll their own local procurement and by increasing palay support price by as much as PHP2 per kilo.

Dar also said the DA managed the outbreaks of ASF through decisive and strict biosecurity and elevated quarantine measures and monitoring in affected farms and nearby areas.

### Laser-like Focus for 2020

"For 2020 and the remaining years of the Duterte Administration, we intend to lead DA with greater vigor and laser-like focus as we pursue our imperatives. The Filipino people, notably our smallholder farmers and fisherfolk, expect nothing less from us," Dar said.

Dar underscored that the proposed DA budget for 2020 is PHP71.8 billion, which is 12 percent bigger than this year at PHP64.1 billion.

He noted that this budget puts forth measures designed to encourage small business initiatives, facilitate credit, and stimulate economic progress through the competition.

The Agriculture chief vowed to ensure the effective and proper implementation of various RCEF programs, particularly the finalization of the Philippine Rice Industry Roadmap; continued validation of the farmers' registry; and completion of the National Food Authority streamlining.

## 8 road sections closed due to Typhoon Ursula

**MANILA** -- The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) on Wednesday reported that eight road sections in the Cagayan Valley region, Western Visayas, and Eastern Visayas are not passable to all types of vehicles affected by Typhoon Ursula.

According to a report by the DPWH Central Office in Manila, as of 6 p.m., the roads closed to vehicles are the Manila North Road Sanches Mira bridge in Cagayan; Sigma-Mambuso-Jamindan road and Iloilo-Capiz road in Capiz.

The DPWH said warning signs were installed to inform motorists, and immediate actions were taken to prevent further damage.

It added that the bridge in Cagayan has

been closed to traffic since Typhoon Tisoy, which hit the region early this month.

Motorists are advised to take an alternate route, the Sanches Mira By-pass road.

In Leyte, the Tugbao-Pulak-Sta. Fe road and Mainit-San Miguel-Santol road are not passable due to flooding and fallen trees and electrical poles.

However, the DPWH said it has deployed maintenance crew and equipment for clearing operations.

The Jaro-Dagami-Burauen-La Paz road is also not passable due to damages spillway of Binhaan Bridge.

The DPWH said motorists may take the alternate route, Sta. Fe-Pastrana-Dagami Road.

The Borongan-Guiuan, Balangkayan and Calanipawan

roads in Eastern Samar are also not passable due to flooding and fallen electrical poles.

The DPWH said it continues to monitor road situations and has coordinated with the local electrical cooperative for the immediate removal of road obstructions.

At the same time, it reported that all road sections in Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Central Visayas, Northern Mindanao and Caraga are passable to all types of vehicles.

It was reported that three persons have died due to Typhoon Ursula.

The tropical storm has left thousands of passengers stranded in seaports and cancelled numerous domestic flights. (PNA)

## Groups call out Dutch gov't for 'coddling' Joma for 30 years

**MANILA** -- Anti-communist groups on Monday called on the Dutch Embassy to deport Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder Jose Maria "Joma" Sison so he can face the multiple murder charges lodged against him and help address the longstanding communist insurgency.

The League of Parents of the Philippines (LPP) and Liga Filipinas Independencia staged a protest anew at the Dutch Embassy in Makati City, as they also condemned the attack of supposed New People's Army (NPA) members on a convoy of civilians attending a Christmas party in Borongan City, Eastern Samar on December 13.

LPP chairman and Liga Filipinas Independencia spokesperson Nolan Tiongco, in an interview, said the Dutch government should stop coddling

Sison, as they called on the embassy to help send Sison home.

"Ang tingin kasi namin ang ugat ng lahat ng kaguluhang nangyayri sa Pilipinas ay bunga ng polisiya ni Joma Sison dahil siya yung tinitingalang pinuno ng CPP-NPA-NDF (We think that the root cause of the insurgency in the Philippines is Joma Sison's policies, since he is the leader of the CPP - New People's Army - National Democratic Front)," Tiongco said.

He added that the communist group has done nothing but violence and ruin people's lives.

"We are also condemning the Dutch government for coddling Joma Sison for the past 30 years," he said.

### Staying too long

The LPP and Liga Filipinas Independencia believe Sison has to be deported for not having enough documents while staying in the

Netherlands.

The group added that Sison and the rest of the founding members of the CPP have made Utrecht, The Netherlands their safe haven for too long.

Meanwhile, LPP spokesperson Remy Rosadio said their group members were startled by the series of attacks made by the NPA, saying the communist group does not realize that their violent attacks have caused the deaths of innocent people, including children.

"Ang ikinakagalit namin na pati kabataan na galing sa Christmas party nadamay. Wala na talaga silang puso na may madamay na mga inosente at talagang ipinapakita na nila kung gaano na sila kasama (We are upset that children who attended a Christmas party were hurt. They don't have hearts. They're just showing how evil they are)" she said.