

NTA is looking for ways for sustainability and development of a globally competitive tobacco industry, including the socio-economic welfare of the tobacco farmers, with the presentation of the Tobacco Industry Roadmap to various industry stakeholders.

The presentation, held during the 2nd Tobacco Industry Forum on July 24 at the NTA Central Office in Quezon City, also highlighted the importance of a long-term industry development plan in increasing farm competitiveness and reducing rural poverty.

Present were Top Management of NTA, branch managers, representatives from the private sector, farmer leaders, and other stakeholders.

Administrator Robert L. Seares said that with the roadmap, stakeholders can now agree to work together towards improving farmers' incomes, increasing exports, job creation and crop diversification including alternative farming systems, and provide inputs for the development of the manufacturing industries.

He added that the agency would also look at incorporating the "inclusive, stakeholder-crafted and market-

NTA sets roadmap for globally competitive tobacco industry

driven industry roadmap" in assessing the performance, opportunities, and challenges as well as in formulating policies, outlining goals and strategies, and implementing programs for the benefit of the 65,000 registered tobacco growers and all those that depend on the

industry for their livelihood.

The formulation of the industry roadmap was the result of the Tobacco Action Plan signed by the different sectors of the tobacco industry during the 1st Tobacco Industry Forum held in Davao City on

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PTI President Rodolfo F. Salanga (left) holds the placard for Technical Working Group (TWG), while the rest of the stakeholders each holding placards bearing the responsibilities of the TWG Action team (from right) Dr. Rolando T. Dy of UA&P; Atty. Cyril Lobaton of JTI; ULPI President Winston Uy; Atty. Bayen Elero-Tinga of PMFTC; NAFTAAC President Bernard R. Vicente; and Administrator Robert L. Seares.



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NTA gets nod for ISO 9001:2015

THE NTA Central Office and the Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD) passed the Surveillance Audit for Quality Management System (QMS) and recommended for ISO 9001:2015 certification.

This was announced on July 20 by the external audit team from the Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS) after checking the processes of the scope of the audit, namely, (1) Research and Development, (2) Regulatory Services, and (3) Technology Assistance, Extension and Production Support Services.

During the closing ceremony of the second-stage audit, SGS auditors Arnold Dizon, John Lazaro, and Ellen Cruz revealed that the agency got one minor nonconformity and some opportunities for improvement. The Correction and Corrective Action Plans will be submitted within five calendar days from the date of the exit conference. The results included the audit report from auditor Magdalena Balingit who was assigned to check on

the organizational and functional units/ processes and activities of FTSD and the Product Development Division of the Industrial Research Department (IRD) in Batac City.

During the audit, selected process owners and staff who were trained to relevant knowledge and technicalities related to the transition from ISO 9001: 2008 to the 2015 version, were made to explain the existing processes and their improvements which were aligned to the later version.

Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa in a message following the successful audit, cited the collaborative efforts of NTA officials and employees for the NTA's recommendation to ISO

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College scholarship grants resumed; 243 slots available

NTA has started accepting new batch of applicants who want to avail themselves of the agency's Scholarship Program starting academic year 2018-2019.

This was announced by Dr. Cristina C. Lopez, Administrative Department Manager and Chairperson of the Committee on the Tobacco Farmers' Dependents Scholarship Program, after the approval by the NTA Governing Board on December 15, 2017 for the continuous grant of scholarship assistance to the dependents of tobacco growers.

"We are only continuing this program that we suspended two years ago because of the senior high school program, which delayed enrolment for college freshmen," Lopez said.

Per revised implementing guidelines dated June 26, 2018, the agency has budgeted P4.06 million for the scholarship grants. A bigger portion or P2.818 million is available to support new slots for 243 scholars. The rest of the amount has to support the scholars who have availed themselves of the program before the two-year suspension.

According to Lopez, the 243 available new scholarship grants have been distributed among the eight NTA Branch Offices based on the number

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The agency receives passing mark on the Stage 2 Surveillance audit for next level ISO certification. From left (front row) Corporate Planning OIC Manager Fortuna C. Benosa, Administrative Department Manager Dr. Cristina C. Lopez, SGS auditors John Lazaro, Ellen Cruz and Arnold Dizon, Administrator Robert L. Seares, Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, Internal Audit Manager Dinah E. Pichay, and Finance Department Manager Ma. Teresa B. Laudencia, and members of the NTA QMS Core Team, Task Force Chairpersons, and Secretariat.

N.E. Valdez

NTA gets nod for ISO 9001:2015 certification ... from page 1

9001:2015 certification. Atty. Verzosa joined NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares and core process owners during the opening meeting with the SGS auditors highlighted by the Top Management Updates presided by Corporate Planning OIC Manager and Quality Management Representative (QMR) Fortuna C. Benosa.

Dinah E. Pichay, Internal Quality Audit (IQA) Team Leader, addressed all those involved in the audit preparation in her message: "All our efforts paid off: from the transition training, getting lost and dazed locating new clauses reference numbers, writing audit checklists, conducting the actual audit, report writing, following-up compliance and verifying action plans. We couldn't have attained this without you."

IRD Manager Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan considered the audit result as a "blessing" in spite of the inclement weather and work suspension during the day, while FTSD Manager Imelda N. Riñen said "it is a fitting gift" as the agency would be celebrating its 31st Foundation Anniversary on July 24.

Before the external audit, the NTA

IQA Team conducted early this year the internal quality audit of the NTA's QMS for 2018, per approved IQA Plan. The top management and staff also attended the training course on Auditing QMS facilitated by the Development Academy of the Philippines and the second management review of the implementation of the QMS.

NTA Central Office and FTSD have maintained the standardization clauses under the ISO 9001:2008 since its certification in September 2016. Some of the key updates of ISO 9001:2015 include the emphasis on risk-based thinking to enhance the application of the process approach, improved applicability for services, and increased leadership requirements.

NTA conducted on July 11 the second management review of the implementation of the agency's Quality Management System (QMS) for ISO 9001:2015 for areas where improvement is needed or desired in order to improve the processes and customer satisfaction.

The Top Management review is aimed at ensuring the continuing suitability, adequacy, effectiveness, and alignment of

QMS with the strategic directions of the organization.

Included in the review were information on the performance and effectiveness of the QMS based on customer feedback and satisfaction results; feedback of relevant interested parties, including updates on the Freedom of Information (FOI); project performance and conformity of products and services; effectiveness of actions taken to address risks and opportunities; opportunities for improvement; monitoring and measurement of results; results of audit conducted by the IQA; and performance of external providers.

The first Management Review was held on June 29. Those who provided inputs with their respective presentations for review were Excelsior R. Mejia (Customer Satisfaction Determination Chairperson), Neyo E. Valdez (FOI Focal Person), Regulation Department Manager Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros, IRD Manager Bonoan, FTSD Manager Riñen, IAS Manager Pichay, HRMO V Perla C. Manzon (for the Administrative Department), and Finance Manager Ma. Teresa B. Laudencia. 🍌

College scholarship grants resumed ... from page 1

of tobacco farmers and area of tobacco production, with the breakdown as follows: Ilocos Norte, 34; Abra, 19; Candon, 66; Vigan, 22; La Union, 27; Pangasinan, 19; Cagayan, 15; and Isabela, 41.

There will be no new scholar to be supported in Mindoro with the phase-out of the NTA Field Office in the province this year. "But we will support those who have obtained the scholarship grants before the phase-out," Lopez explained.

The allocated slots shall be for four-year courses, preferably agriculture, fisheries, forestry, home technology, and economics or five-year courses related to agriculture.

According to Lopez, the agency wants to encourage a career in the field of agriculture as a career option to optimize the program's contribution for the continuing development and modernization of the sector.

To qualify, one must be a graduate

of any secondary school in tobacco-growing provinces, a legitimate dependent of a bona fide tobacco farmer, or duly registered with the NTA, and has not availed of any government scholarship.

The scholarship grantees are required to enroll in state universities and colleges located within the province of his or her residence, or any tobacco growing province outside the province of his or her residence.

An NTA scholar is entitled to P11,600 a year for miscellaneous fees and stipend for the chosen course.

The deadline for the submission of applications to the NTA Branch Offices should not be later than two weeks before the start of classes of the state university or college where the applicants intend to enroll.

"Those who are interested and have further questions may visit our NTA Branch

Offices," Lopez said.

Some of the NTA scholars completed their college degree with Latin honors, while some others passed the board exams for their respective courses, including Ariane Shane E. Valdez of San Fabian, Pangasinan and a graduate of BS Agriculture from Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (South La Union Campus) who placed 7th in the Agriculturist Board Examination in 2017.

Early this year, NTA hired nine scholars after their graduation, and three of them got their regular appointments as of August 2018.

The NTA started offering scholarship grants, through the provincial branch offices, to deserving college students, who are dependents of tobacco farmers in school year 2011-2012. It is in line with the Tobacco Free Education Program embodied in Republic Act No. 9211 (Tobacco Regulation Act of 2003). 🍌

NTA @ 31: Gearing up for the tobacco industry's progressive development

RECENTLY tobacco industry is making a big push forward. Industry leaders are keen to make an impact at sustainability and development of a globally competitive tobacco industry with the Tobacco Industry Roadmap. Administrator Robert L. Seares is promising more efforts on the part of the agency to raise the bar of service to the tobacco growers. Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa is banking on the Tobacco Fund to sustain the competitiveness of the industry by assisting farmers in identified potential investment of stakeholders.

NTA has not crowned itself with glory in fulfilling its mandate to our farmers for the past three decades. There are a lot of things to be done. Our leaders, past and present, have been continuously finding ways to provide for the socio-economic welfare of the tobacco farmers, their families and communities, and outlining goals and strategies for the industry that has been generating billions of taxes, providing big income to thousands of farmers, and employing people.

For the past five years or so, tobacco production has faced with so many challenges. Increased taxes on tobacco product, with more legislations to increase tobacco excise tax now being deliberated in Congress, have considerably affected the production level, decreasing the number of farmers involved in farming.

ULPI's Winston Uy, in a message during the Tobacco Growers of the Year awarding ceremonies, noted, however, that even as the industry has been beset with challenges, the Philippine tobacco is "changing to be a globally competitive crop." He said that "all our export markets are knocking on us, not because we have cheap tobacco," but because the farmers are producing quality tobacco and the agency and various stakeholders, the private sector and the local government units, are doing the right thing in giving assistance to produce quality tobacco and, more importantly, assurance that the farmers can sustain that opportunity to earn farm income higher than any other crops.

He then proposed a Grow, Grow, Grow Program, similar to the Build, Build, Build program of the Duterte Administration. "We need to grow a lot of tobacco. In the process we have tremendous opportunity to create good livelihood which is different from just creating or getting a job," he added.

With this emerging positivism, the agency will be relentless as always in identifying alternative opportunities for economic development and equip the farming sector accordingly to attain production goals. Corporate Planning OIC Manager Fortuna C. Benosa assured that NTA is putting its available funds to better use by creating more projects that benefit our tobacco growers, in addition to what the agency is now implementing.

Meanwhile, our farmers, as in previous years, will start the cropping season to hope again for another robust harvest. 🌱

NTA sets roadmap .. from page 1

June 15, 2017.

After the Davao forum, the Philippine Tobacco Institute (PTI) worked with the University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P) in obtaining relevant data through field survey and interviews of farmers in tobacco-growing areas and analyzing the socio-economic footprint of the industry.

Dr. Rolando T. Dy, Study Team Leader and Executive Director of UA&P Center for Food and Agri Business, presented a PowerPoint on "Improving the Competitiveness of Farming Communities in the Philippines Towards Poverty Reduction (The case of multi-crop farming: tobacco-rice/corn sequence)."

He said that the study is a product of two forums (one in Davao and one in Cagayan de Oro), one focus-group discussion (in La Union) and five stakeholders' verification workshops (one in Ilocos Sur, one in Isabela, one in Pangasinan, and two in Misamis Oriental), which were all attended by the tobacco stakeholders, as well as key informant interviews and meetings with government institutions.

NTA Director and PTI President Rodolfo F. Salanga presided over the formal presentation of the Second Tobacco Industry Action Plan and Tobacco Industry Roadmap to the stakeholders in the forum.

He said that in the action plan, the stakeholders set as specific goal the increase of tobacco yield levels and improvement of farmers' incomes. He added that the stakeholders "will work together to encourage substitution of imported processed tobacco through appropriate and effective use of Tobacco Fund; promote sustainable and efficient projects from excise tax revenues, including alternative farming systems; and achieve sustainable tobacco programs."

Salanga called for the creation of Technical Working Group (TWG) composed of six action teams each to implement short (2018-2020) and medium-term (2021-2023) Strategic Action Plans.

He added that the TWG will also set and implement standards in agricultural practices, environmental management and key social and human rights.

The Action Plan contains the following roles and responsibilities of the TWG: (1) ensure the implementation of the plan; (2) conduct advocacy work; (3) evaluation and monitoring; and (4) update the plan. The Action Teams, on the other hand, are tasked to (1) promote best practices along the supply chain; (2) conduct research and training; (3) facilitate financing and information access on production, trade and prices; (4) propose policy and legislative reforms; and (5) work towards elimination of illicit trade.

Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, Deputy Administrator for Operations, presented the Strategic Short and Medium-Term Action Plans with the Tobacco Industry Roadmap.

In his presentation, he discussed on the vision, mission, and goals of the agency; roadmap key objectives, interventions and action programs; priority action programs for tobacco areas in Luzon and Mindanao; list of potential investment projects by uses of funds from tobacco excise tax; and implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of projects.

ULPI President Winston P. Uy, in his message during the NTA 31st anniversary celebration, commended the NTA and all the stakeholders as well as the UA&P for creating the road map. "That will give us the idea on how to move forward," he said. 🌱



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(L-R) TGY Awardee Francis T. Bautista, Director Teofilo R. Quintal, Director Nestor C. Casela, Administrator Robert L. Seares, TGY Awardee Margarita F. Surell, TGY Awardee Ferdinand E. Gapate, DA Undersecretary Evelyn G. Laviña, PMS Undersecretary Atty. Karen V. Jimeno, TGY Awardee Elmer R. Abat, TGY Awardee Ronald V. Baguionon, Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, and TGY Awardee Dionicio V. Saldivar Jr.

THE National Tobacco Administration celebrated its 31st Anniversary by honoring six provincial winners of the Tobacco Growers of the Year Awards (Virginia category) at the NTA Central Office Quadrangle in Quezon City on July 24.

Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Evelyn G. Laviña, representing DA Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol as Guest of Honor, joined other guests from the government and private sector, the NTA Top Management, senior officials and employees and farmer leaders in the awarding ceremonies and anniversary celebration.

Laviña urged the farmers to “keep growing and keep planting,” as she exhorted them and the stakeholders to consider blending tobacco production as a crop alongside or even as an alternating crop with suitable high value crops.

“This will give the tobacco farmer a better change to augment his income and lifting him from his current situation, and will serve as an effective buffer and cushion to tobacco price fluctuations,” she said.

She also reminded the NTA officials of the formulation of a grand plan of rehabilitation and growth of the tobacco industry, taking into consideration the present threats and opportunities, their strengths and weaknesses.

The awardees (Virginia category) for crop year 2017-2018 were Francis T. Bautista of Ar-arusip, Badoc, Ilocos Norte; Ronald V. Baguionon of Barbar, San Juan, Ilocos Sur; Ferdinand E. Gapate of Oaig Daya, Candon City; Dionicio V. Saldivar Jr. of Tangbao, San Isidro, Abra; Elmer R. Abat of San Felipe, San Juan, La Union; and Margarita F. Surell of Bulbulala, Balaoan, La Union.

Each of the awardees received a plaque of recognition and P20,000 cash from the agency.

The contest recognizes the continuing efforts of tobacco growers who show innovativeness, efficiency, compliance

with Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), and who protect the environment and demonstrate application of science and technology-based knowledge, during tobacco production and getting the maximum income from their labor.

The provincial awardees were selected by the Branch Technical Committee headed by the Branch Manager. Results were validated by the National Technical Committee and endorsed to the National Advisory Committee chaired by Administrator Robert L. Seares for approval.

The awardees will compete with the first two batches of provincial winners for the National Contest next year.

Also cited were the extension workers who assisted the provincial awardees, namely: Rosemarie T. Soriano, TPRO I, Ilocos Norte Branch; Jose A. Taclas Jr, TPRO III, Vigan Branch; Reynaldo L. Padillon, TPRO I, Candon Branch; Mardelito B. Bacaricas, TPRO I, Abra Branch; Aurelia C. Santos, TPRO I, La Union Branch; and Estrelita E. Nabua, TPRO I, La Union Branch.

The theme of the celebration, *NTA at 31: Gearing up for the tobacco industry's progressive development*, means “more effort on the part of the agency to raise the bar of service to the tobacco growers,” according to Administrator Seares.

“Other than our unrelenting commitment to excellence and development, we have good reasons to celebrate this year,” he said. He cited the finalization of the Tobacco Industry Roadmap during the 2nd Tobacco Industry Forum (see headline story, *page 1*) held hours before the awarding and NTA getting the recommendation for ISO 9001:2015

certification after passing the Surveillance Audit for Quality Management System a week before.

Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, in his message, said that presentation of the industry roadmap is “a testament we are doing something to make the tobacco industry more sustainable and progressive despite the challenges.” He added that with the roadmap, the tobacco farmers will continue to rely on the crop in the years to come.

Atty. Verzosa also commended the NTA family for its commitment to uplift the life of the farmers, the extension workers from the branch offices for providing technological services to the farmers, the branch managers and central office managers for satisfactory supervision of their respective departments, and all the employees for their dedication to do well for the good of the agency.

TGY awardee Gapate, speaking on behalf of the awardees, commended the agency, especially the extension workers for giving him the opportunity to benefit from tobacco farming. “The industry is a big help in my family. Through tobacco growing, I was able to improve our house, and send my two children to school, one of them finished college and is now working as teacher abroad,” he said in Ilokano.

Grow Grow Grow

ULPI President Winston P. Uy revealed that the tobacco is “changing to be a globally competitive crop.”

“On top of that, all our other export markets are knocking on us, not because we have cheap tobacco, but because we

are doing it correctly. *Dahil sa lahat ng hirap na pinagdaanan natin, we are now in the forefront of tremendous growth,*” he said in a message.

He then urged the stakeholders to have a Grow, Grow, Grow Program, similar to the Build, Build, Build program of the Duterte Administration. “From what all our customers have given us is an indication for the next years, for the succeeding sustainable years, that we need to grow a lot of tobacco. In the process, we have tremendous opportunity to create good livelihood which is different from just creating or getting a job,” he added.

Karen Jimeno, Undersecretary for Disaster Resiliency of the Presidential Management Staff, and representing Special Assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence “Bong” Go, challenged the agriculture sector to continue growing their crops. “But we have to do that with the consciousness, that climate change is inevitable, it is a reality, and disasters keep increasing for the whole world with a new normal every year,” she said.

She urged all members of the NTA to work with the national government to ensure that farmers can access insurance and financing for their crops.

Patrick Muttard, Director of Corporate Affairs of PMFTC, in his message, commended the NTA for having proven itself “to be an expert resource of policy advocates and a strong presence in local communities throughout the Philippines.”

Retirees honored, Fellowship Night

Part of the celebration was the recognition of outstanding employees and those who are retiring this year, and the induction of the newly elected officers of National Federation of Tobacco Farmers and Cooperatives Inc. (NAFTAC) headed by its newly installed president Bernard R. Vicente of Sinit, Ilocos Sur (see related

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Clockwise (from top left) DA Undersecretary Evelyn G. Laviña; Administrator Robert L. Seares; ULPI President Winston P. Uy; and Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa

Admin Dept Head is Outstanding Employee

CRISTINA C. Lopez, Department Manager III of the Administrative Department, was honored with the PRAISE Most Outstanding Employee Award, during the culmination program of the agency’s 31st Anniversary Celebration at the NTA Central Office Quadrangle in Quezon City on July 24.

The Program on Awards and Incentive for Service Excellence (PRAISE) Award is given to officials and employees in recognition of their superior accomplishments and exemplary efforts, dedicated toward the fulfillment of the agency’s vision and mission.

Lopez is the most senior Department Manager, first employed as Division Chief of the Planning and Programming Division/Plans and Programs Department of the Philippine Virginia Tobacco Administration, the predecessor of the NTA. She has a Doctoral Degree in Business Administration (magna cum laude) from San Beda College (now University).

This was the second recognition as Most Outstanding Employee for Lopez who received the same award in 2008.

Among her recent achievements with the Administrative Department, which has been steering the Agency’s path to a “Winning Corporate Culture,” was the active collaboration and contribution towards the approval by the Civil Service Commission of the NTA Strategic Performance Management System (SPMS) Implementing Guidelines, which is now used as the tool for Office and Individual Performance Evaluation, and the NTA Merit Promotion Plan (MPP).

Also awarded with Lopez during the culmination program were outstanding



Dr. Lopez receives her trophy and cash incentive from NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares

employees for the supervisory category (SG 18 to 24), service category (SG 10-17), model employees, and model agriculturists and TPROs (Tobacco Production and Regulation Officers) of the different Branch Offices. (See table below.)

Special Guest PMS Undersecretary Atty. Karen V. Jimeno joined NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares, Director Nestor C. Casela, Director Teofilo R. Quintal, and Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa in the awarding of plaques of recognition and cash incentives to the awardees. 🌱

P.R.A.I.S.E. AWARDEES

Supervisory Category

1. **Cristina C. Lopez**, Department Manager III, Administrative Department
2. **Emma Beth B. Fantastico**, Chief Agriculturist, La Union Branch
3. **Resty C. Cambe**, Accountant III, Candon Branch

Service Category

1. **Rosita J. Alcoy**, Science Research Specialist I, Industrial Research Department, Batac City
2. **Rosemarie T. Soriano**, Tobacco Production and Regulation Officer (TPRO) I, Ilocos Norte Branch
3. **Noralyn I. Idica**, TPRO III, Vigan Branch

Model Employees

1. **Carmelita V. Albano**, Senior Bookkeeper, Finance Department
2. **Charleza A. Cabagsang**, Computer Operator II, Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD)

3. **Eduardo D. Enriquez**, Driver II, Ilocos Norte Branch
4. **Patricia Lourdes F. Cortez**, Cashier II, Vigan Branch

Model Agriculturists and TPROs

1. **Jesusa D. Calano**, TPRO III, Ilocos Norte Branch
2. **Ma. Mercedes M. Ayco**, TPRO III, FTSD
3. **Helen D. Peña**, Agriculturist I, Candon Branch
4. **Victor V. Valledor**, Agriculturist II, Vigan Branch
5. **Florencia T. Salimbay**, Agriculturist I, Abra Branch
6. **Potenciano H. Apilado**, TPRO I, La Union Branch
7. **Marlon G. Facun**, TPRO I, Pangasinan Branch
8. **Moises D. Duran**, TPRO I, Cagayan Branch
9. **Lagrimas B. Beltran**, TPRO I, Isabela Branch

Outstanding farmers, workers feted at NTA 31st Anniversary... from page 5

story, *page 7*).

Of the 18 retirees, six personally received their plaque of appreciation, namely, Mario E. Corpuz, Department Manager III, Ilocos Norte Branch; Benjamin C. Lacuesta, Driver II, Isabela Branch; Rosie Melba C. Pajarillo, Budget Officer II, Finance Department; Danilo P. Ponce, Secretary I, Industrial Research Department; Alexis B. Jamias, TPRO I, Ilocos Norte Branch; and Zosima D. Caday, Cashier III, Isabela Branch.

According to Dr. Cristina C. Lopez, Administrative Department Manager, the retirees deserved much appreciation “because they spend their working life with us by being members of our NTA family.”

Corpuz, speaking in behalf of the retirees, commended the staff of Ilocos Norte Branch, for their good rapport, good coordination with stakeholders in project implementation and friendship for the 13 years he served as manager of the Branch Office in Batac City.

Department Managers Fortuna C. Benosa of Corporate Planning and Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros of Regulation hosted

the awards night.

Fellowship night hosted by Melanie R. Parel (Information Officer) and Excelsior Mejia (Market Specialist IV) followed after the TGY awarding, highlighted by group dance performances by the different departments and branch offices, and awarding of winners in the sportsfest sponsored by the NTA Employees Association (NTAEA) and raffle draws.

The 31st Anniversary program was preceded by day-long Employees’ Fun Day, facilitated by NTAEA officers headed by its President Excelsior R. Mejia, and a Thanksgiving Mass.

Celebrations from the Br. Offices

La Union

NTA La Union and Tobacco Dust Production Plant (TDPP) celebrated the anniversary with out-of-town trips to Alaminos and Bolinao in Pangasinan and Subic in Zambales on August 9 and 10.

Both Administrative and Operations employees of the two organizational units had on the first day a morning walk and breakfast at Alaminos, visited landmarks and tourist sites such as Saint James

the Great Parish Church, the Bolinao Lighthouse, Bolinao Enchanted Cave, and Bolinao Resort at Patar Road. On the second day, they conducted indoor activities which included shopping and relaxation massage.

NTA La Union Branch Manager Giovanni B. Palabay and TDPP Manager Hermogenes A. Galvez saw the importance of such out-of-town bonding to give their respective teams chance to unwind and clear out minds from daily work hurdles and enhance not only professional, but also social relations.

“The employees were also grateful of such opportunities to recharge, avoid burnout and get ready again for more upcoming office and extension works,” added Manager Palabay. *(Kristin Mae S. Castañeda)*

Ilocos Norte

NTA Ilocos Norte conducted a Sports Development Program dubbed “Anniversary Games (Millenials and Elders Camp Edition)” at the Batac Office from July 16 to 18.

Employees formed separate teams to compete in volleyball (for men), volleyball (for women) games, and traditional games such as *tumbang preso*,

NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares joined the annual synchronized tree planting activity of the National Tobacco Administration at this year’s command center in Rosalio Eduarte National High School (RENHS), Brgy. Talogto, Dolores, Abra on August 17.

About 200 people participated in the simultaneous inter-agency and multi-sectoral tree planting activity, now on its sixth year, as part of the agency’s effort to contribute its resources towards ecological restoration, in line with the government’s National Greening Program (NGP). Tree planting activities, were also conducted on the same date in greening sites in tobacco-growing municipalities in Regions I and II.

The one-day event in Dolores was also graced by Cris Albolote, Environment and Natural Resources Officer of DENR-

Abra; Rene Eugenio of Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corporation (PMFTC); Dolores Vice Mayor Emelito Cortez; Ronald G. Seares, Senior Executive Assistant to the Mayor; David P. Lingayo, Jr., RENHS principal; Imelda N. Riñen, Manager of NTA Farm Technology and Services Department; and Nora A. Corre, NTA AgriPinoy Operations Manager.

In his message, Administrator Seares reminded participants on the importance of trees in helping prevent the adverse effect of global warming. “There is a big

impact of planting trees on the lives of the people, especially on one’s health and our environment, and this impact will continue from generation to generation,” he added.

Also providing support during the activity were students and faculty of RENHS; NTA scholars from Abra State Institute of Sciences and Technology (ASIST); officials and employees of Dolores LGU; and volunteers from the Department of Education, Philippine National Police, National Food Authority, and Philippine Information Agency; Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc., and PMFTC; and extension workers and staff of NTA Abra and AgriPinoy.

According to NTA Abra Manager Esmeralda G. Valera, the branch office is targeting to plant at least 150,000 seedlings this year in various planting sites in the province alone. Nationwide

Administrator Seares (left) and the planting volunteers, mostly students, with agency officials and representatives from public and private sector

Synchronized tree planting project now on its sixth year



bending and walkathon (individual and group categories).

According to NTA Ilocos Norte Manager Mario E. Corpuz, everybody enjoyed the game. "This proves that the elders can still compete with the younger ones even in tough and challenging events," he said.

Manager Corpuz led the formal opening of the three-day competition highlighted with the parade of participants from four teams represented by colors. According to Elaine A. Tinio, Administrative Officer V and Overall Sports Coordinator of the Branch Office, the Anniversary Games was conceptualized with the objective of Empowering Women, Saving and Nurturing Environment, in support of the Gender and Development Program of the agency.

The Branch Office, along with the Farm Technology and Services Department and Industrial Research Department in Batac City, also conducted Seminar Series 2018 Year IX held on July 6, 9 and August 26, at the Branch Office, as part of the annual activities for the NTA Anniversary celebration. (Elaine A. Tinio) 🌿

target is at least 1.6 million tree seedlings. (Melanie Rapiz-Parel)

In Pangasinan

On the same date, NTA Pangasinan Branch Manager Engr. Cesario G. Sambrana and Chief Agriculturist Roger T. Madriaga spearheaded the tree-planting activities in the province at the Branch Office's command center in Barangay Bumbuwaya in San Manuel, Pangasinan.

According to Manager Sambrana, a total of 90,087 tree seedlings were planted in Bumbuwaya and other selected greening sites in Laoac, Asingan, San Fabian, Bayambang, Manaoag, and Sta. Barbara in Pangasinan, and San Manuel in Tarlac.

The seedlings, mostly mahogany and gmelina, were sourced from established nurseries of the Branch Office.

This was participated by heads of the local government units, municipal agricultural officers of the Department of Agriculture, school officials, students, farmers and representatives of the private sectors, including the buyer firms ULPI and TransManila Inc.

The tree-planting at Barangay Bumbuwaya culminated with the visitation of the participants to the San Roque Dam in San Manuel, Pangasinan.

Before the actual activity, extension workers were assigned to coordinate at planting sites with roving members to supervise and monitor the tree planting activities. (Alma G. Toralba & Marlon G. Facun) 🌿



Part of the celebration of the Ilocos Norte Branch was the launching of the "Making Environment Clean: Linisin Natin ang Kapaligiran: A Garden of Love," an environmental cleanup drive initiative of the Branch Office held at the NTA Screen House in Batac City on August 13. Branch Manager Mario E. Corpuz (center in white cap) joined the employees and staff of the Branch Office, FTSD and IRD during the launching. **Divina D. Pagdilao**

New nat'l officers of farmers' association take oath

NEW officials of the National Federation of Tobacco Farmers Association and Cooperatives, Inc. (NAFTAC), led by its President, **Bernard R. Vicente, and Executive Vice-Chairman, Bienvenido Millare, were sworn into office on July 24 by NTA Administrator Robert L. Seares.**

The event was held during the culminating program of the NTA 31st Anniversary Celebration at the NTA Central Office Quadrangle in Quezon City.

The oath-taking of the new set of officials was preceded by meeting of the farmer-leaders and election of officers, organized by the Farm Technology and Services Department (FTSD), also held at the NTA Central Office.

Vicente, a Virginia tobacco grower and former Sangguniang Bayan Member of Sinait Ilocos Sur, won the election over Millare of Abra.

Other elected officers were Cesario G. Gapatan (Ilocos Sur 2nd Dist.), vice-chairman for Virginia Neutral; Hedelberto Advincula (Abra), vice-chairman for Virginia Improved; Franklin B. Dumpit (La Union), vice-chairman for Burley Neutral; Nestor Padron (Ilocos Norte), vice-chairman for Burley Improved; Mario C. Cabasal (Ilocos Sur 2nd Dist.), vice-chairman for Native; Florida R. Rosario (Ilocos Norte), secretary; Arlene

Vega (Ilocos Sur 1st Dist.), treasurer; and Faustino Agudong (Isabela), auditor.

Elected members of the Board of Trustees are Luciano L. Saquing (Cagayan), Reymund Piñon (Cagayan), Arnulfo Cadabona (Ilocos Norte), Zosimo Solito (Isabela), Jerry Osias (La Union), Saturnino C. Distor (Pangasinan), and Domingo Hufana (Pangasinan).

Vicente said that the tobacco farmers have gained a lot working with the agency. He cited the commitment and sincerity of agency officials which "had proven your worth and earned you much deserved recognition and fame," he said.

NAFTAC, organized in 2011, is the duly recognized partner of NTA in bringing about significant developments in the social and economic lives of the farmer-members and the tobacco farming community in general.

Vicente has become the third president of NAFTAC after Ernesto Calindas (2011-2013) and Mario C. Cabasal (2013-2018).

The election is under the supervision of FTSD, in coordination with the Branch Coordinators of the Farmers Organizational Development Program of the agency.

According to FTSD Manager Imelda N. Riñen, the activities of the association are under the guidance of the FTSD and the Corporate Planning Department. (Felisa R. Aurellano) 🌿



NAFTAC President Bernard R. Vicente (inset), during his inaugural address, and with the officers and board of directors of the newly organized NAFTAC in their formal induction administered by Administrator Robert L. Seares.



Establishing sustainable program with the *Tobacco Fund*

by Neyo E. Valdez

WITH the release of the Tobacco Industry Roadmap this year, NTA has tapped the Tobacco Fund in planning for priority action programs for tobacco areas in the country.

In fact, NTA expects the Tobacco Fund, which reached a net balance of P62.54-billion this year, to finance potential investment projects to benefit the tobacco growers and their communities.

To achieve sustainable tobacco program, Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa said that NTA must ensure that all the projects and programs to be funded by the Tobacco Fund will maintain or increase farmer profits towards zero poverty, which is the overriding goal of the Industry Roadmap, and specifically to increase yield levels and improve farmers' income.

Atty. Verzosa, during the presentation of the Roadmap to the stakeholders on July 24, said that the Tobacco Fund can help realize the competitiveness of the industry by assisting farmers in the identified potential investment of stakeholders.

The agency has been using the Fund for the support of tobacco supply chain, through farm mechanization, farm inputs, curing barns, extension and marketing support, agricultural production, processing and marketing, reforestation, irrigation, and trading center; and for expenses related to NTA and tobacco research and grading, through capacity building, farmers' training center, and quality and assurance laboratory.

According to Corporate Planning OIC Manager Fortuna C. Benosa, the projects currently supported by the Tobacco Fund for 2018 are Curing Barn Assistance, Production Assistance to tobacco growers, and Capability Enhancement. From 2010 to 2017, the Fund also supported the Tobacco Dust and Pulp Production Project, Multi-purpose Curing Barn, AgriPinoy Food Processing Plant, Irrigation Support Project, AgriPinoy Milling Complex, Renewable Energy Farm Project, and Irrigation Support Project for small tobacco farmers.

"We have more projects in the can, in addition to what we are now implementing, and here, we are only putting our available funds to better use," Benosa said.

NTA also collects non-tax revenues corresponding to the services it renders in the exercise of its regulatory authority, which has been contributing to a large measure in making the agency financially self-sustaining as a government-owned corporation.

Historical Background

The Tobacco Fund was established through Republic Act (RA) 4155, entitled



"An Act to Promote and Strengthen the Virginia Tobacco Industry," signed by then President Ferdinand Marcos on June 20, 1964.

The Fund is collected from the proceeds of 50% of the tariff or taxes of imported leaf tobacco and 50% of the specific taxes on locally manufactured Virginia type cigarettes. It is meant for the continuation of the Philippine Virginia Tobacco Administration (PVTA) support and subsidy operations including the purchase of locally grown and produced Virginia leaf tobacco, its procurement, redrying, handling, warehousing and disposal, and the redrying plants; for operational and field expenses; and for the establishment of the Tobacco Research and Grading Institute.

The Commissioner of the Internal Revenue and the Commissioner of Customs were directed to turn over and deliver immediately the said funds to the PVTA "as soon as collections are made."

On November 8, 1977, President Marcos issued Presidential Decree (PD) No. 1234, instituting a procedure for the management of Special and Fiduciary Funds earmarked or administered by government agencies and corporations. The law ordered the remittance to the Treasury and treated as Special Funds in the General Fund "all income and collection" authorized by law for Special and Fiduciary Funds, including the Tobacco Fund. The amounts collected and accruing to the Special or Fiduciary Funds shall be considered as being "automatically appropriated."

In 1987, PVTA and seven other tobacco agencies were consolidated into one, the National Tobacco Administration, under Executive Order

(EO) No. 116 by then President Corazon Aquino. Section 9 of EO 245 (the NTA Charter), dated July 24, 1987, which implemented the consolidation of the tobacco agencies, ordered that the funds held by the Philippine Tobacco Board, the Philippine Tobacco Administration, the PVTA, the Virginia Tobacco Fuelwood Corporation, and the Philippine Tobacco Research and Training Center, including but not limited to return on investments, revenue from operations, and other sources, shall accrue and be turned over to the NTA to form part of its fund.

NTA, as the entity in which the PVTA was merged, likewise acquired the power, functions, and funding of the absorbed corporation. Thus, the Tobacco Fund accrues to the NTA, to be managed and spent by it in accordance with law.

Before the merger, or as of December 1985, the Tobacco Fund had a balance of P3.587-billion per certification of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR).

A Long Struggle for Entitlement

The initial request for the partial avilment of the NTA's entitlement to the Tobacco Fund was made by then NTA Administrator Atty. Carlitos S. Encarnacion, in three separate letters all dated May 17, 2004 sent to the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) for the partial release of the fund for the implementation of the Agency's Revitalization Program for the Philippine Virginia tobacco industry; and to the BIR and the Bureau of Treasury for official certification on the status of the balance of the Tobacco Fund.

The BIR is the government agency that issues the certification as to the amount that the NTA is entitled under the law for taxes on locally manufactured Virginia-type cigarette as well as specific taxes on tobacco and tobacco products. For the tobacco fund sourced from the tariff on imported tobacco, it is the Bureau of Customs which will issue the necessary certification.

The Revitalization Program was basically intended to alleviate the current condition then afflicting the local industry. The program consisted of such major components such as improved technology application in the production of high quality tobacco, research and leaf grading/quality assurance

operations, upgrading of laboratory facilities and equipment, manpower capability development for research and leaf grading/quality assurance, market research and export trade promotion and development of other industrial uses of tobacco.

On October 28, 2004, Administrator Encarnacion sent a follow-up letter to the DBM with the additional request for the establishment of Special Account, pursuant to PD 1234.

Milagros V. Regalado, Assistant Commissioner of the Legal Service of the BIR, in a legal opinion, clarified that RA 4155 “is still in effect” despite amendment of its Section 4 by succeeding legislations, because other provisions which were not expressly repealed “remain in full force and effect.” In the same letter, the BIR is ordered, as its ministerial duty, to issue certification relative to the status and balance of the Tobacco Fund.

In November 2005, Ruby Alvarez, Director of Legal and Legislative Services of the DBM, said that earmarking of 50% of tariff or taxes on imported leaf and 50% of specific taxes on locally manufactured Virginia type cigarettes per RA 4155 and PD 1234 were “not affected” by the enactment of RA 7171 (An Act to Promote the Development of the Farmers in the Virginia Tobacco-Producing Provinces) or RA 9334 (An Act Increasing the Excise Tax Rates Imposed on Alcohol and Tobacco Products). She added that RA Nos. 7171 and 9334 merely increased the percentage of taxes earmarked for specific purposes.

Agnes Devanadera, Government Corporate Counsel, issued Opinion No. 166 on August 3, 2006, stating that the

Tobacco Fund “constitutes 40% of the balance of the entire collection of 50% of the tariff or taxes on imported tobacco and 50% of specific taxes on locally manufactured Virginia-type cigarettes,” after the other allocations as provided under RA Nos. 7171, 9334, 5447 (Act creating the Special Education Fund), 7160 (Local Government Code), and 8240 (which gives 15% of excise taxes from Burley and Native tobacco to provinces that produce them). She clarified that the 40% share would amount to 15.21% of total excise tax collections on locally manufactured Virginia type cigarettes.

With favorable opinions on its side, NTA renewed requests for the establishment of the new Special Account for the Tobacco Fund where NTA’s entitlement will be deposited by the National Treasury based on the certification by the BIR.

In a letter dated June 13, 2006, then DBM Secretary Rolando G. Andaya Jr. informed Administrator Encarnacion that DBM finally approved the establishment of Special Account in the General Fund pursuant to RA 4155 and PD No. 1234, to account the share of the NTA from the Tobacco Fund. Then on September 15, 2006, Omar T. Cruz, Treasurer of the Philippines, informed NTA that it had deposited the amount of P575,053,239 to the Special Account in the General Fund of NTA, representing its 40% share from the excise taxes of locally manufactured Virginia type cigarettes.

More Funds to Benefit Farmers

It was a long fight to recover the Tobacco Fund.

Before the first release of the Fund to the NTA, the agency had to rely on subsidies from the government and corporate

income to finance its various programs and projects, particularly its flagship project, the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS), and for operational expenses and personal services.

The deposit was made in 2006 but it was only in 2010 when NTA gets the full benefit of the Tobacco Fund, with the release by the DBM of P408,990,000 to agency’s Corporate Operating Budget for 2010. With the fund, the agency expanded its Market-Driven Quality Tobacco Production to address the growing demand for domestic manufacturing and export markets, primarily through the TCGS, which included the Integrated Farming and Other Income Generating Activities (IFOIGAP) where NTA provides assistance to tobacco farmers in the production of rice and high value crops, and hog and poultry raising

According to Administrator Robert L. Seares, the yearly increase in the Tobacco Fund will definitely bring additional resources for the agency that will help fund its various projects and programs.

“If we spend wisely, the Fund will contribute to the success in the implementation of our programs and projects for the benefit of our farmers,” Seares said.

The Tobacco Industry Roadmap calls for the promotion of sustainable and efficient projects from the excise tax (RA Nos. 7171, 8240 and 10351) and the Tobacco Fund, including alternative farming systems.

Now the agency hopes that the projects, which will be approved by the NTA Governing Board, would really translate to sustainable tobacco programs and Administrator Seares assures stakeholders that this will help our farmers in the long-term. 🌱

USDA leaf expert ... from page 12

Branch; Ruby A. Dacanay, TPRO I, La Union Branch; Eleanor A. Rapanut, Supervising TPRO, Regulation Department; Rosemarie T. Soriano, TPRO I, Ilocos Norte Branch; and Marife P. Peralta, TPRO Job Order, Abra Branch; and for **Burley**: John Jharrel B. Aruelo, TPRO Job Order, La Union Branch; Marzel E. Manzanias, TPRO I, Ilocos Norte Branch; Joannaliza D. Ordinante, TPRO I, La Union Branch; and Victor V. Valledor, Agriculturist I, Vigan Branch.

The opening program was graced by Administrator Robert L. Seares, Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, NTA Directors Nestor C. Casela and Teofilo R. Quintal, Legal Counsel Atty. Roberto M. Sison, and department managers Atty. Rohbert A. Ambros (Regulation), Dinah E. Pichay (Internal Audit Service), and Ma. Teresa B. Laudencia (Finance). (Melanie Rapiz-Parel) 🌱

Techno Updating Workshop for CY '18-19 in La Union

TO update information and technology components that could be incorporated in the Tobacco Production Guide for Crop Year 2018-2019, NTA convened the Techno Updating Task Force for a two-day workshop last August 2 and 3 at the NTA La Union Office in Bauang, La Union.

According to Industrial Research Department Manager Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan, the Task Force identified mature information and technology derived from the following sources: NTA Research and Development (R&D), private sector R&D, protocol research, adaptability trials of seed varieties by the National Seed Industry Council, and farmers’ best practices as validated by the NTA.

“Unlike in our previous techno-updating, this time we involved more officials, experts and researchers for maximum inputs,” he said.

The workshop was divided into three Focus Group Discussions headed by Vigan Branch Manager Minerva P. Mizal for Virginia, Isabela Branch Manager Herman C. Torres for Burley, and Cagayan Branch Manager Dr. Corazon R. Riazonda for Native Tobacco.

The Task Force members also came up with a unified technology for production of quality tobacco, and agreed on the operational plan and schedule of activities for the IFOIGAP Tobacco Contract Growing System for Crop Year 2018-2019.

The Tobacco Production Guide for all tobacco types and subtypes is an important tool for the agency’s TPROs and Agriculturists, Science Research Specialists and other Extension Service Providers in helping the tobacco farmers get the maximum return from their tobacco farming enterprises.

The Tobacco Production Manuals are expected to be released in November this year. 🌱

“FEEL fulfilled. Forty years in the government, indeed, is a lifetime treasure.”

Mario E. Corpuz, Department Manager III of the NTA Ilocos Norte Branch, isn't exaggerating or expressing with overwhelmed emotion when he uttered the line in a message during the culmination program of NTA's 31st anniversary celebration on July 24.

Corpuz was speaking in behalf of the retirees honored by the agency, though he officially retired on August 15, his 65th birthday.

He is stating a fact, with evidence of his achievements to back it up.

Among the current crop of branch managers, Corpuz has the longest stint in the government service and the longest experience as a branch manager.

He started working for the tobacco industry in 1978 as Farm Management Technician of the defunct Philippine Virginia Tobacco Administration (PVRTA). He got his permanent appointment as Senior Farm Management Technician in 1981, assigned in the 2nd district of Ilocos Sur.

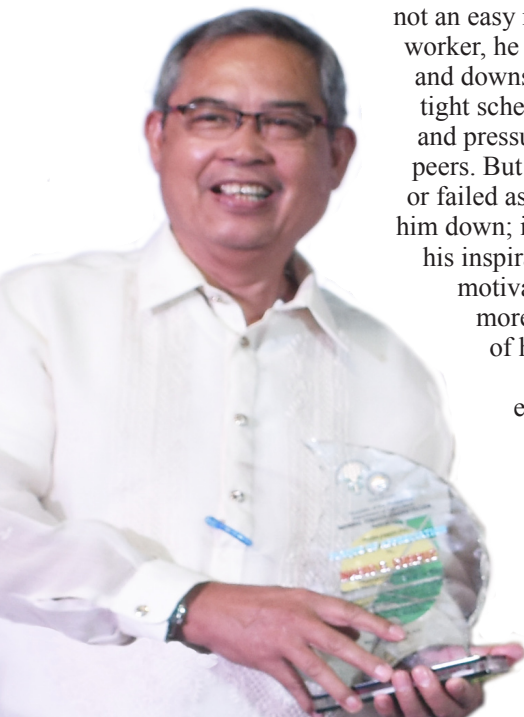
Corpuz got the biggest challenge in his government career when, during the reorganization of the agency in 1999 during the time of Administrator Antonio De Guzman, he was appointed Manager of the Cagayan de Oro Branch at the age of 46. He did not expect the appointment and, at first, he was hesitant to accept because he had to bring his family to Mindanao and leave their residence in Santiago, Ilocos Sur. Then he gave in, after consultations with his family and encouragement from his superiors.

While in CDO, he earned as an agency scholar his Master of Science in Agricultural Economics degree from the Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan de Oro in Cagayan de Oro City.

Guided by his diligence and positivism at work, Corpuz surpassed the challenges in his career. In 2001, he was sent back to Luzon after his appointment as officer-in-charge (OIC) and later Department Manager III of Abra Branch in Bangued, Abra after the retirement of then Branch Manager Monette C. Mendoza. After more than three years in Abra, he was appointed OIC of Vigan Branch from February to August 2005. Then he was assigned to Ilocos Norte Branch in Batac City, where he served as Branch Manager from August 2005 up to his retirement.

His professional journey, from his first government position until he became a Branch Manager, was not an easy road. Like any ordinary worker, he also experienced ups and downs—challenges in the job, tight schedules and deadlines, and pressures from his boss and peers. But every unachieved target or failed aspiration did not pull him down; instead he took them as his inspiration to do better and motivate himself to accomplish more than what is expected of him.

He said that not all employees are given this chance to excel. “My co-retirees and I have done our best in whatever assignments given to us by our superiors,” he said, adding that having reached retirement and given a special recognition gave them fulfillment



Manager Corpuz is all smiles as he receives white roses from well-wishers, including Administrator Robert L. Seares and wife Sesy G. Seares, as daughter Angelique Nova and wife Milagros join him on stage, during his retirement program on August 15 at the NTA Auditorium in Batac City.

Fulfilment in gov't service, a lifetime treasure for Manager Corpuz

by Divina D. Pagdilao & Neyo E. Valdez

after a long and fruitful public service.

He commended the Top Management for the “trust and confidence, their kindness, and opportunity” to serve the agency and work on his professional and personal growth. “Thank you for the experience and the motivation to overcome challenges that made me a better person today,” he said.

Corpuz, a Career Executive Service Eligible and member of the National Union of Career Service Executive Officers (NUCESO), summed up his achievements as a combination of hard work, diligence, intelligence and believing in his capabilities.

He thanked NTA Ilocos Norte whom he described as “a great family” composed of employees with positive attitude, good ideas and talents, for the opportunity to work with them.

Corpuz speaks of right attitude as a formula of success. He says that right attitude will bring a person farther than mere intelligence. Right attitude coupled with diligence, he said, is a stronger weapon than intelligence with a negative attitude.

Right attitude is knowing to grab the opportunity. “Opportunity knocks once, and if you miss to open your heart to it, the succeeding circumstances will never be the same again,” he said.

The NTA Ilocos Norte family accorded Manager Corpuz, or Sir MEC to them, much respect and love, and thanks to his guidance, they achieved excellent performance in the implementation of the different projects of the agency, fulfilling the mandates and objectives of the agency, thus achieving awards and recognition as a unit.

Establishing open communications among his staff and sharing ideas for their mutual benefit are morale booster. “Your dedication to work, working overtime when needed, good rapport, and active coordination with local government units and other industry stakeholders made our project implementation easier,” he said.

With his inspired leadership, the NTA Ilocos Norte was adjudged Best Branch Office in 2009, a very memorable feat of the Branch Office, and a testament to his effective and dedicated leadership.

Looking back, he said emphatically, “I can honestly say that I have done a good job as a public servant.” 🌿

Production Assistance for tobacco-rice farmers in Ilocos Sur

FIRST DISTRICT

TOBACCO growers in the first district of Ilocos Sur are expected to receive P3.576-million worth of production assistance for the Rice Project Wet Season 2018 under the agency's Integrated Farming and Other Income-Generating Activities Project.

The ceremonial release of checks held on July 27 at the Municipal Gym in San Juan, Ilocos Sur was attended by 28 cluster leaders.

Some 470 farmer-cooperators in the district availed of said production assistance to plant rice this wet season, according to NTA Vigan Manager Minerva P. Mizal.

The distribution was graced by NTA officials headed by Administrator Robert L. Seares and Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, NTA Director Teofilo R. Quintal, Ilocos Sur (1st Dist.) Rep. Deogracias Victor B. Savellano, Ilocos Sur Vice Governor Jerry C. Singson, San Juan Mayor Benjamin V. Sarmiento, and newly elected NAFTAC National President Bernard R. Vicente.

NTA Vigan also held at the same time the ceremonial release of 20% subsidy for fertilizers and pesticides for tobacco growers in the district who are cooperators of the Tobacco Contract Growing System (TCGS). Fifty-two cluster leaders representing 999 farmer beneficiaries of said program attended the event.

According to Mizal, the Branch Office has already released P2.528-million of its total P2.965 production subsidy to 807 farmers as of May 31, who have met the 100% loan repayment requirement for avalees. (Norilyn I. Idica)



Administrator Robert L. Seares hands over a check to tobacco grower Zosimo Valorozo of Cuantacla, Cabugao, Ilocos Sur during the ceremonial release of production assistance for the Rice Project. With the Administrator during the awarding are (from left) NAFTAC National President Bernard R. Vicente, NTA Director Teofilo R. Quintal, Rep. Deogracias Victor Savellano, and Deputy Administrator for Operations Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa.

SECOND DISTRICT

THE tobacco-rice farmers of the second district of Ilocos Sur, under the coverage area of NTA Candon, received P9,217,410 production assistance for this year's rice production program of NTA.

Administrator Robert L. Seares, assisted by Deputy Administrator Atty. Mel John I. Verzosa, NTA Director Teofilo R. Quintal, and Candon Branch Manager Estrella G. De Peralta, led the ceremonial awarding of checks to selected tobacco farmers held at the Candon City Multi-Purpose Center in Candon City on July 6.

"*Dakayo ti inspirasionmi a taga-NTA* so we are mobilizing all our resources for you," said Administrator Seares, addressing a big number of farmers present in the occasion.

He added that many programs and projects are being implemented for the tobacco growers and "many more are coming."

A day before the distribution, NTA Candon conducted an orientation seminar on the implementing guidelines of the Rice Production (Wet Season 2018) Project for 250 tobacco farmers, the last batch of the 720 farmer-cooperators, held in the same



Tobacco farmer Nestor Omaeng (3rd from right) received from Galimuyod Mayor Juanito Balingsat a knapsack sprayer, as fellow farmers Bonifacio Gray and Dwight Caba (1st and 2nd from right) wait for their turn. Also in the photo are SB Member Manuel Balbino and Municipal Agricultural Jerry Castillo who assisted Mayor Balingsat in the distribution.

Galimuyod, I. Sur farmers get P31-M farm machinery, equipment

THE Local Government of Galimuyod, Ilocos Sur turned over P31-million worth of farm equipment and machinery to the local tobacco-rice farmers on July 28.

Mayor Juanito Balingsat, along with Sangguniang Bayan Member Manuel Balbino and Municipal Agricultural Officer Jerry Castillo, distributed two L3608-Type Tractors, 302 water pumps diesel engine (7HP), 68 diesel engine air cooled (5HP), and 1,320 knapsack sprayers to the farmer beneficiaries. NTA Candon, represented by Milo Q. Sanchez and Vanessa J. Dela Cruz, both TPRO I, witnessed the distribution held at the municipal gym.

Galimuyod is among the top producers of tobacco in the province's second district. The fourth-class municipality had 304 farmer-cooperators who planted a total of 263.90 hectares of tobacco, registered under the NTA Tobacco Contract Growing System for crop year 2017-2018. It produced 601,541 kg of Virginia and native tobacco in crop year 2016-2017. (NTA Candon)

Agoo LGU gives farm inputs, machinery to tobacco growers

THE local government of Agoo, La Union, through Mayor Stefanie Ann Y. Eriguel awarded multi-agro tillers, farm equipment and inputs to local farmers' associations on July 12.

Mayor Eriguel personally handed over 22 multi-agro tillers, 1,000 bags of fertilizers, 1,500 sachets of Humus soil conditioners, 35 water pumps with hoses, and 30 knapsack sprayers to the members of the La Union Tobacco Farmer's Association (ALUTFAI). La Union Rep. Sandra Y. Eriguel witnessed the ceremonial distribution held at the town's covered court.

According to Mayor Eriguel, the funds for the purchase of said farm machines, equipment are derived from municipality's share of the tobacco excise tax in accordance with Republic Act No. 7171.

The local chief executive said that with the provision of the benefits to the farmers, ALUTFAI expects to increase its membership and entice more farmers to engage in tobacco farming.

Aside from ALUTFAI, 20 other farmer associations received eight multi-agro tillers, 15 water pumps, 20 knapsack sprayers, 1,500 sachets of Humus, and 1,000 bags of fertilizers.

ALUTFAI, a newly registered tobacco association with the Security Exchange Commission, was organized through the joint efforts of Engr. Alberto C. Casison, Agriculturist II and Area IV supervisor of NTA La Union, and the office of Municipal Agriculturist Francisco V. Doliente. The Association is presently headed by its president Atty. Charlie Juloya.

According to Casison, NTA La Union, through Branch Manager Dr. Giovanni B. Palabay, Chief Agriculturist Emma Beth B. Fantastico and Supervising TPRO Marcelo T. Pascual, has been in close coordination with LGUs in the province for the inclusion of the farmers as direct beneficiaries of projects implemented by the LGUs using funds from their shares of tobacco excise tax. (Joannaliza D. Ordinate)

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USDA leaf expert at flue-cured leaf standards seminar for extension workers

BOBBY F. Wellons, Agriculture Marketing Specialist of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service, was the sole resource speaker during the Training on USA Official Standard Leaf Grades on Virginia and Burley Tobacco conducted by the NTA Industrial Research Department (IRD).

The participants were selected Tobacco Production and Regulation Officers (TPROs), agriculturists, and researchers from different branch offices in Regions 1 and 2, Abra, Farm Technology and Services Department, IRD, and the Regulation Department.

The group-specific training, under the cooperative agreement between NTA and Agricultural Marketing Service of USDA, was held in two batches at the Quality Assurance and Laboratory Building of the NTA Central Office in Quezon City. Twenty-nine attended the training for Virginia (flue-cured) tobacco on July 9 to 13, while 27 attended for Burley (air-cured) tobacco on July 16 to 20.

The training provided extension workers detailed technical information



Bobby F. Wellons and Dr. Roberto R. Bonoan (1st and 3rd from left) observe as Lagrimas B. Beltran of Isabela Branch, and other participants figure out the grade of Burley leaves



pertaining to official standard grades for both Virginia and Burley tobacco by means of demonstration and other training methods. Wellons, along with IRD Manager Roberto R. Bonoan and Quality Assurance Division Chief Lina A. Cera, supervised the practical exercises.

According to Dr. Bonoan, this is the first time for the agency to invite a world-acclaimed lecturer and expert on Official US Leaf Grades Standards, who is willing to share his expertise. "Rather than bringing two or three employees to attend this kind of training in the US, we have brought Mr. Wellons in the Philippines to

teach more of our extension workers," he added.

Dr. Bonoan said that the participants had graded practical exercises and reviews on leaf grading after the lecture of various topics relevant to leaf grading.

Christopher S. Cabanog, Agriculturist I, Vigan Branch, and Kristine Mae S. Castañeda, TPRO I, La Union Branch, garnered the highest grades for the leaf grading practicum for Virginia and Burley, respectively. Rounding up the top five achievers were, for *Virginia*: Immanuel A. Rafanan, TPRO I, Vigan

Pls turn to page 9

CONVERSION of the curing barn furnace from conventional design to the "anawang" furnace, as required by the NTA Curing Barn Assistance Project (CBAP) for farmer beneficiaries, has reduced time for barn tending and fuelwood feeding in the furnace. The combustion of the fuelwood takes place inside the furnace and there is no need to feed fuel as often compared with the conventional type.

"We now have more time to do other important activities in the farm," said Wilson A. Gacusan, CBAP avalee and a barangay *kagawad* of Barangay Puritac in Pinili, Ilocos Norte.

Other than time-saving gain, Gacusan reduced his fuelwood consumption by at least 30% with the use of corncobs and corn stalks as alternative fuel.

For this benefit from the newly developed furnace system in his CBAP-financed curing barn, he is very thankful for the opportunity to avail of the curing barn assistance given by the agency, through the Ilocos Norte Branch, for tobacco growers. He said that he can now plant tobacco in a wider area with his new curing barn. He only had a fourth of a hectare in the last cropping season.

NTA implemented the CBAP beginning Fiscal Year 2016-2017 to promote the use of the NTA-prescribed curing sheds; and help the farmers increase their income through the production of properly cured leaf with the prescribed sheds. The anawang is one of the two recommended types of furnace (the other is the Venturi type) for flue-curing Virginia tobacco. Among the beneficiaries of the project are 710 tobacco growers in Ilocos Norte. Of the avalees, 70 farmers including Gacusan are from Pinili town.

The NTA-recommended anawang design uses concrete hollow blocks, reinforcing steel bars and cement for the furnace. Some farmers, like Gacusan, however, used earthen rings cemented by ricehull or hay, clay and cement; while farmers in areas where big stones are abundant, piled big stones to form the anawang furnace, glued with a mixture of rice hull/hay, clay and cement. 🌿 **Divina D. Pagdilao**



Tobacco grower Gacusan with his new CBAP-financed curing barn

Production Assistance for tobacco farmers in Ilocos Sur ... from page 11

multi-purpose center.

Also present during the distribution was Dr. Francisco D. Lopez, president of the Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College (ISPSC). Dr. Lopez joined the NTA officials in distributing certificates of completion to 115 trainees for the NTA Livelihood Training Program, with the breakdown as follows: 40 in agro-mechanic, 50 in food processing, and 25 in bread, pastry, and noodle-making.

Atty. Verzosa, in his message, commended ISPSC for their support to the conduct of livelihood trainings. "We will continue our partnership in this undertaking as we aim to provide more trainings to our tobacco farmers and their dependents as one way of upgrading their quality of life," he said.

In his response, Dr. Lopez said that "NTA is close to our hearts for their trust to our trainers in the conduct of skills trainings, and for being our partner in transforming lives, and transforming communities."

Candon City Mayor Ericson G. Singson, in his message, commended the NTA officials for their relentless effort in improving the lives of the tobacco farmers, with its various programs and projects such as livelihood training and production assistance.

He added: "Here in Candon City, we provide all what our tobacco farmers need: full requirements on farm inputs, farm equipment, post-harvest facilities and cash assistance for land preparation and fuelwood. We have lined up same assistance, if not more, this coming tobacco season." (Melanie Rapiz-Parel & Orlando O. Galdones) 🌿