

Philippines DA to accelerate agricultural, fisheries sector development and modernization

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Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. welcomed the private sectors' push for greater spending on agricultural infrastructure and mechanization to hasten the farm sector's modernization, increase productivity, and ensure the country is food secure.

Secretary Tiu Laurel told regional agricultural and fisheries councils, who gathered at the Department of Agriculture offices in Quezon City to submit their recommendations to the agriculture chief. The recommendations presented by the councils were varied and included issues affecting the production of rice, fish and other aquatic resources, poultry and livestock, corn and feed crops, high value crops including rubber and fiber crops, coconut, as well as domestic trade and mechanization.

Among the recommendations of the regional councils are:

- * Establishment of cold storage facilities for vegetables, including onions, as well as laboratories for biosecurity concerns;
- * Construction of farm-to-market roads or other modes for faster movement of agricultural products.
- * Conversion of rice competitive enhancement funds to rice price subsidy.

- * Mechanization of farm processes, including those for high value crops and fiber.
- * Establishment of local nurseries and seed banks to ensure high quality planting materials and seeds.
- * Widen and intensify soil testing to optimize land use and productivity.
- * Establishment of inland fisheries and hatcheries in upland areas.
- * Revive direct farmer linkage to market via KADIWA centers.
- * Timely release of hybrid seed and fertilizer interventions.
- * Construction of more irrigation facilities.
- * Implementation of the higher biofuel blend to help the coconut industry.
- * Creation of a Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture.
- * Establishment of data center for timely agricultural statistics.

Sec. Tiu Laurel said the dialogue with regional councils gave him with a clearer perspective on how to pursue agricultural modernization. A 10-point agenda is finalized by the DA to address issues holding back the progress of the country's farm sector and its stakeholders, particularly farmers and fisherfolk. Laurel said more infrastructures, including warehouses, seaports, food terminals, and roads, will be built to help bring down the cost of food when they reach consumers.

The DA is also working towards digitalization and a thorough review of the minimum access volume to rationalize food importation. more consultations will be undertaken in the future and pledged to find funds needed to substantially address all the issues and recommendations submitted by agricultural and fisheries councils across the country. he added.

Agriculture accounts for four in every 10 jobs in the Philippines but the sector's contribution to the domestic economy is less than 10 percent. A dramatic improvement in the farm sector could generate more jobs and led to faster growth of the economy, not to mention tame inflation and lessen dependence on imported agricultural products.