

Philippines DA-BFAR, LGU Itbayat inaugurate Batanes's first-ever tilapia hatchery

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Batanes fish farmers will soon have their own local source of tilapia fingerlings as the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) and the Local Government of Itbayat inaugurate today, April 4, 2024, the province's first-ever Municipal Tilapia Hatchery in Barangay Raele in the island municipality of Itbayat, Batanes.

Equipped with breeding, nursery, and treatment and conditioning ponds, as well as a water system vital for hatchery operation, the facility is expected to produce 300-500 thousand pieces of tilapia fingerlings annually. This production will cater to the requirements not only of the island municipality but of the whole province, helping it become self-sufficient in terms of supply of tilapia fingerlings.

"Now that you have your own tilapia hatchery, you will no longer need to ride big waves just to obtain your supply of fingerlings from other provinces in the mainland just to be able to conduct fish farming," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. said in his video message addressed to the local government and fish farmer participants of the inauguration program. "This project is in line with the Department of Agriculture's goal to make agriculture and fisheries a viable investment option," he added.

At present, the province has six (6) associations engaged in fish farming who depend on supplies coming from Isabela and Cagayan. These supplies are usually transported for long hours of land travel and by plane, entailing huge costs for transport alone. Yet, by the time the supplies reach Batanes, the fingerlings have already suffered 30-50% mortality. This project aims to address the issue to reduce input costs, improve production efficiency, and, in turn, increase fish farmers' income.

Strategically located in the only area in Batanes with a freshwater lake favorable for aquaculture activities, the hatchery is seen to sustainably boost tilapia production in the northernmost part of the country with communities that currently depend largely on their marine resources for income and food security.

While capture fishing remains to be the primary source of livelihood among the locals as the province boasts a rich marine ecosystem and resources, the fisherfolk admit to experiencing challenges to their productivity mainly due to the province's own geographic characteristics and proneness to typhoons. With the hatchery, tilapia farming becomes a potential alternative livelihood.

According to the Provincial Fishery Office of Batanes, with more locals witnessing the viability of culturing tilapia in tanks and the operationalization of the hatchery, many residents are now also constructing their own tanks, which soon can effectively address common fish supply gaps during the lean season.

Aside from the inauguration of the hatchery, the DA-BFAR conducted a fisherfolk forum and distributed fish cages and fishing gears to fisherfolk of Itbayat as additional livelihood assistance.

Meanwhile, to ensure that even the country's farthest fishing communities such as those in Itbayat are given proper government support, the DA-BFAR operates a Provincial Fishery Satellite Office in Barangay San Rafael which supervises and administers fisheries-related operations in the area, from ensuring sustainable fishing activities to promoting aquaculture initiatives in order to empower the local fisherfolk while fostering a peaceful and collaborative fisheries governance within the locality