
Kibungan folk still plant indigenous rice varieties

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KIBUNGAN, Benguet – Indigenous rice varieties here endure and continue to provide locals with staple grains, despite the unexplained lessening of the volume of water supply for the rice-fields, local officials and residents said.

Kibungan Mayor Benito Siadto said the rice crisis is hardly felt by the locals. Siadto, the local town council and department heads reported.

The ongoing agricultural profiling also enabled the town's agriculture office to map out local rice production and identify indigenous rice varieties that are still cultivated today.

Only around 500 hectares are devoted to rice production and these are mostly in Barangays (villages) Palina, Poblacion and Tacadang, according to Municipal Agriculture Officer Renette Mayamnes.

Mayamnes identified 16 indigenous rice varieties still being cultivated in Kibungan and said these are planted in two distinct seasons, the Kintoman (dry) and the Pulaglag (wet).

Red, white rice varieties

Kintoman rice include red rice varieties gal-ong, lasbakan, lablabi, kabal, dikalot, makabsog, langpadan and balatinao. White rice varieties as sabsaba, lamadya, ngilaan and kalipago are also kintoman rice, according to Mayamnes, who clarified that kintoman does not refer to a rice variety but to a rice cropping season.

Pulaglag red rice include talabtab and diket. Makanining and balisanga are white pulaglag rice. Laley, lamadya, ngila-an, bongkitan and balatinao are also planted during the rainy season. Balatinao is the "black" rice used in wine-making.

Glutinous rice varieties of diket, bongkitan and balatinao are also planted. There are non-glutinous rice varieties of the same local names.

All varieties take five to six months from planting to harvest. The Les-eng rice

terraces in Tacadang and the Palina rice terraces at the foot of Mt. Kilkili turn golden yellow when rice is ripe and ready for harvest in June and December. Like Tacadang and Palina, Poblacion also has its rice terraces at the foot of the rocky walls that rise up to 2,500 meters above sea level.

No rice crisis here

According to Siadto, Kibungan residents have been accustomed to alternatives, so they would not suffer too much if the commercial staple gets scarce. "We have squash, camote and the traditional rice here," he told the media.

The National Food Authority (NFA) also brought in government-subsidized rice to the town, but unlike in Baguio City and other areas, there was no queue seen in the town, Siadto added.

An employee of the local multi-purpose cooperative said the price of Kibungan rice has gone up to P120 (\$2.74 at the May 30 exchange rate of \$1:P43.75) per salop (approximately 2.5 kilos) from the previous P100 (\$2.29) due to the increase in the prices of commercial rice.

Some rice farmers have opted not to sell their produce since the price of rice has gone up. Many farmers also buy rice in between harvest seasons.

The cooperative may need at least one week to make the indigenous rice varieties available.

"Biruken pay no adda ti nag-bayo ta no awan ket masapol pay nga agbayo" (We still have to see if someone has pounded rice because if there are no available rice, we will ask somebody to pound it) the source said.

Rice paddies drying up

Retired elementary school Principal Concepcion Locaben, who is now in charge of the town hall canteen could not help but wonder why there is not enough water to irrigate the rice terraces. She pointed out that even water falls that used to provide irrigation even in the dry season have dried up.

Locaben said many rice paddies have been planted to vegetables, instead, while the farmers await the onset of the talabtab or rainy season, when they could plant the rain-fed varieties.

An old woman from Brgy. Sappat said her family and neighbors have stopped planting rice since 1979, when the Boneng Mines dammed a portion of the mountain for its tailings disposal. She said the dam caused the rice fields to dry up.

Sappat and other Kibungan folk turned to the chayote, which does not require much water. Aside from chayote, coffee, cabbages, potatoes and other temperate vegetables are also being planted by Kibungan farmers.

Almost 90 percent of the land area is devoted to agriculture. Kibungan has a total land area of 20,000 hectares subdivided into seven barangays, namely Badeo, Lubo, Madaymen, Poblacion, Palina, Sappat and Tacadang. Of the barangays, Madaymen is the largest, Lubo smallest with only 1,500 hectares. - **Northern Dispatch/Bulatlat**