

## Rice terraces farmers see brighter future with export of traditional rice

By Robert L. Domoguen

Munoz, Nueva Ecija - Lakay Delfin Otgalon, well known Tinawon rice grower from Mumpholia, Hingyon, Ifugao waited patiently for the machine operator to declare the right clearance for the mechanical threshing and milling of the traditional rice they brought with them all the way from Ifugao.

At 76, lakay Delfin is visibly the oldest from among 32 farmer-participants from Ifugao and Kalinga who visited the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) and Bureau of Postharvest Research and Extension (BPRE) last week. Their visit here was organized by the RICE, Inc and DA-RFL-CAR to allow them the opportunity to evaluate rice threshing and milling equipment models with potential for improvement and use for traditional rice.

As lakay Delfin, fixedly appreciated the demonstrations of the potential benefits of modern technology to highland rice terraces farming, like the shortening of the time and cost of labor, he became anxious to hear if the machines already presented can mill the rice to his satisfaction. Will the machine-milled rice be equal to hand pounded rice?

As we waited for a positive answer, Lakay Delfin made his appeal saying that any mechanization intervention to duplicate hand pounding in the threshing and milling of traditional rice must also give "due respect and dignity that we give to our rice. Milled traditional rice," he said, "must not be too coarse when cooked and eaten as in brown or unpolished rice or too white and lacking in flavor as in well-milled rice. In the process of milling, wastage must be minimized to the minimum." After several trials and adjustments, the PhilRice technician and mill operator found the right milling clearance and

immediately gave lakay Delfin and Ms. Vicky Garcia, Rice Inc Executive Director a sample of the milled Ifugao traditional rice. Lakay Delfin and Ms. Garcia gave their nod of approval for the ethnic and export quality of the milled rice. Lakay Delfin still had his misgivings on the scattered grains on the floor during threshing. "It takes much from us to grow them and we hate seeing them being scattered this way," he said. However, this practical discovery that traditional rice can be milled to a "hand-pounded quality," added fuel to lakay Delfin's hope that rice terraces farming can yet be helped to bring about a better future for his children and their children's children.

Lakay Delfin is not alone in this aspiration to see the rice terraces become profitable and reliable as a source of income and livelihood in the highlands of Ifugao.

The presence of many participants in this field trip and their interest to explore appropriate ways of mechanizing their post harvest operations is an indication of their renewed interest and hope in rice terraces farming as a sustainable source of food and income, according to Mr. Alfonso Kayong, Municipal Agriculturist of Hungduan, Ifugao.

This revival in rice terraces farming started since Miss Mary Hensley of Eight Wonder, Inc and Ms. Vicky Garcia of Rice Inc implemented the Cordillera Heirloom Rice Project in Ifugao and Kalinga last year. This project implements sustainable economic development and cultural revitalization through the production and sale abroad of traditionally-grown rice from the rice terraces, he added.

For this year, Mr. Kayong noted that farmers have been returning to cultivate abandoned rice terraces. "Many of them have also increased their commitment to deliver more

than 100 kilos each of rice for export to the U.S.A through the Cordillera Heirloom Rice Project and the Rice terraces Farmers Cooperative of Ifugao and Kalinga," Mr. Kayong said.

Mrs. Linda Bindadan of Banaue, Ifugao returned to rice farming early this year after trying her hand in "several business pursuits." Married with two children, she welcomed the news that the traditionally grown rice from the rice terraces can be exported to the USA. After participating in the briefings conducted by RICE, Inc, she joined the Rice Terraces Farmers Cooperative of Ifugao and Kalinga and now looks ahead to a better future for her family.

I am glad with this new development in rice terraces farming. It gave me the opportunity to return to my roots and be quietly pre-occupied with the nitty-gritty and simple pleasures of rice terraces farming with my family, Linda explained.

With their small farm, Linda estimated that she can harvest and sell for export about 300 bundles of rice or more or less 360 kilograms of milled rice. "I can still increase this by working as a tenant for those who have bigger rice lands." She explained that in Ifugao, a rice tenant gets 50% share of all the harvested rice from the tenanted land.

The rice terraces farmers of Ifugao who participated in this field trip to PhilRice and BPRE are simple folks whose daily pre-occupation are focused on the art of mountain rice terracing and how to make it work and serve legitimate human needs. They said that "other pursuits and pre-occupations that disturb the peace and destroy life do not jibe and belong to rice terraces farming and the community life that we all ultimately aspire for in Ifugao and elsewhere in the region." \*\*



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By Joel B. Belinan

Bontoc, Mtn. Prov. - The Regional Development Council here last week urged all local chief executives, presiding officers and members of local sangguniangs to refrain from using money produced by the