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## Heirloom Rice Project Launched in Mt. Province

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***Cordillera values traditional farming in the rice terraces for this is a living indigenous infrastructure for food production, soil and water conservation, and, lately, for tourism, too. But lately, the rice terraces was abandoned due to declining yields, erosion, lack of irrigation water due to disappearance of forest cover, and lack of interest in farming.***

At the time when farmers were migrating from the rice terraces, the Revitalize Indigenous Cordillera Entrepreneur, Incorporated (RICE, Inc.) started implementing the Cordillera Heirloom Rice Project (CHRP) in Kalinga and Ifugao. It aims to revive traditional rice farming by putting value on the existing rice varieties in the Cordillera as well as on the traditional and organic ways these varieties are grown, and by putting premium on the care of the environment.

The project was a success. It has effectively stopped the migration of farmers, and has encouraged them to farm in the rice terraces again.

This is why RICE, Inc. has expanded the CHRP to Bontoc, Mt. Province. It was launched on March 15 and the launching was attended by Mt. Province Governor Maximo Dalog, Department of Agriculture-CAR Regional Executive Director Cesar Rodriguez, National Irrigation Administration-CAR (NIA-CAR) Director Dr. Abraham Akilit, and RICE, Inc. Executive Director Ma. Victoria Garcia among others.

Governor Dalog thanked the DA for supporting the launching program and for providing the Mt. Province technical assistance on organic rice production. Director Rodriguez, for his part, said that DA, in cooperation with the provincial LGU, will set up a bio-N mixing plant and train stakeholders on its operation

Governor Dalog also encourages the Department of Science and Technology to implement the SET-UP Program in Mt. Province. It is a soft loan initiated by the agency in Lubuagan. Kalinga to help farmers procure post harvest facilities.

He also called on the Department of Trade and Industry to assist the heirloom rice growers in the Cordillera develop export-quality packaging for their products, and appealed for increased support for research and extension to enhance the production of heirloom rice varieties while maintaining the good traditional practices that sustained the rice terraces throughout the centuries in the region.

The NIA-CAR, on the other hand, assisted RICE, Inc. and LGUs in the evaluation of existing heirloom rice varieties for possible export to the United States of America. Out of 30 samples, RICE, Inc. approved 13 rice varieties in Mt. Province. These would be shipped by the Eighth Wonder Incorporated under the trade name "Ginolot", says Dr. Akilit.

He also said that Mt. Province has the most extensive rice terraces in the region but not all rice farmers here can participate in the CHRP because their farms have been polluted with chemical inputs. They need to be trained, he continues, on how to rehabilitate their farms for at least three years through organic farming before they are accredited to become members of the heirloom rice growers of the province.

On the other hand, Thomas Killip, presidential assistant for the Cordillera, urged national and local government agencies and non-government organizations to pool their resources in support to the rehabilitation of the rice terraces. The convergence of efforts he said, will "result in sustainable economic enterprise for area farmers engaged in the production of selected traditional rice varieties for export.

He added that ultimately traditional rice varieties should also be available for local consumers as we realize the value of sustaining rice terraces.

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