



## NEWS STORY

### CHRP highlights heirloom rice



**T**he Cordillera Heirloom Rice Project (CHRP) has gone far in supporting sustainable indigenous agriculture in the region.

According to Ma. Victoria Garcia, the Executive Director of Revitalize Indigenous Cordilleran Entrepreneurs, (RICE) Inc. the CHRP is a project that reaches out to rice terraces farmers in the region so they can form alliances and work together through cooperative enterprises.

Speaking at the Information and Education Campaign (IEC) on Organic Agriculture and Policy Dialogue cum Technology and Market Encounter held at the Hotel Supreme, Magsaysay Avenue, Baguio City, Garcia said that the project helps in the preservation of traditional rice production practices to be passed on to the younger generation.

Not only that, farmers in the project “serve as stewards of their own environment especially in the preservation of the terraces and traditional heirloom rice varieties of the Cordillera.

Garcia said they work hand in hand with LGU technicians and local Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in providing trainings and organizational capacity. Among these are trainings on quality control, cooperative and

business development, hands-on workshop on organic and natural agriculture method, improved processing and consolidation of products, establishing a strong farmer center cooperative, encouraging unity and peace within the tribal communities.

She noted that they do advocacy and public education about terraces, market development and incentives such as “Adopt A Terrace”, program which provides direct grants to farmers to improve their terraces.

Relating to the Slow Food “Ark of Taste” held July 3 last year, she said that there were three varieties of rice from Cordillera which were included in the list. These were, namely: Imbuucan from Ifugao, Ominio from Mt. Province, and Chong-ak from Kalinga.



“This implies that the rice has met the foundation’s standard for taste quality, environmental sustainability and respect for the cultural identity of the producers. By which the Ark recognizes that all products have real economic viability and commercial potential,” she said.

Garcia noted that they were able to develop a market in 5 ways.

First, they take into consideration their consumer or market with an advocate of “only one opportunity to make first impression” and “selling inferior products will lose credibility”.

“These attest to their credibility and competitiveness given that the rice is marketed as heirloom (traditional) varieties, grown on small family terraces with sustainable agricultural techniques, rice terraces remain traditionally utilized, and increased production to maintain varieties that have been genetically ‘seed banked’”, she said.

Second, they have also authenticated products like Mountain Violet, Ifugao Doket, Kalinga Unoy, Tinawon Fancy, Ulikan Red, and Kalinga Jekot since terraces are not from kaingin and are traditional varieties, she says.

Third, it delivers quality products. The processes observe Fair Trade Policy where farmers are involved in the process and the cooperative consolidates for the market, said Garcia.

She added: “If you do not have a quality grain to sell, you do not have a product to market.”

Fourth, Social Enterprise is aligned with Trade Fair principle – build up the capacity of farmers as producers-supplier.

Fifth, they prepare a strategic marketing plan based on feasibility study where it improved post-harvest practices equipment and quality package and label. The micro mill used processes an average of 28 bags per day that is originally fumigated using volcanic cube for carbon dioxide flushing.

The heirloom rice was already featured at different high events, like the Asian Culinary Forum held at the San Francisco last year. The Cordilleran Terraces was featured at National Geographic Traveler 2009.// *Jelly Pearl Potectan and Jayralyn Siddayao*