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## Cordillera's heirloom rice: A bright spot in the export market

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*Mina-angan, hungduan, ulikan, jekot, diket, and tinawon*—they can be mistaken as names of people but they're not. They are actually varieties of heirloom rice from the Cordillera region which are now making a niche in the export market and are heading their way in the United States through the efforts of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

According to reports, the US-bound heirloom rice is considered "a milestone in the government's effort to expand markets for premium varieties and promote the rich cultural heritage attached to it." Exporting Cordillera's premium rice will not only provide a bright spot in the world market but will also help sustain the status of rice terraces as part of the UNESCO World Heritage site.

Preserving a taste, protecting a heritage—this is how the rice growers in Cordillera want the heirloom rice production to be recognized in the world. According to Marilyn Sta. Catalina, director of the DA-Regional Field Unit in the Cordillera Autonomous Region (CAR), who represented Agriculture Secretary Proceso J. Alcalá during the ceremonial send-off on 20 September 2013 at the Manila International Container Terminal, "more than profit, we are promoting the rich Cordilleran cultural heritage through this export." She added that the grains represent the best in the Cordilleras, notably the industry and ingenuity of its people, as they are organically grown, and manually harvested and pounded to perfection.

Fifteen metric tons of organic heirloom rice, worth P870 thousand, were sent to the US. These were composed of three varieties: 10 tons of "mina-angan" from Banaue and "hungduan" from Ifugao, and 5 tons of "ulikan" from Pasil and Lubuagan in Kalinga. The volume of premium rice was consolidated by the Rice Terraces Farmers Cooperative (RTFC), in cooperation with Eighth Wonder, Inc., a non-government organization based in the US that helps market products from the Cordillera's rice terraces. DA has been facilitating RTFC's export to the US through Eighth Wonder, Inc. since 2005.

The 15 metric tons premium rice is part of the 27.6 metric tons that the Philippines will send to the US this year, which was bought from the 272 farmers from the three mountain provinces. The remaining 12.6 metric tons is currently undergoing organic fumigation at the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) laboratory in Nueva Ecija. This procedure is in compliance with the strict US sanitary and phytosanitary requisites for importation.

To date, shipments of various heirloom varieties to the US has totaled to 97 tons, including the 24.4 tons valued at P1.3 million in 2012. Among the heirloom varieties exported were: "Mountain Violet" of Mountain Province, unoy or "jekot" and "ulikan" red grains of Kalinga, and tinawon, "fancy rice" and "diket" of Ifugao.

To assist the upland farmers in sustaining its production, the DA has embarked on various initiatives to preserve organic farming practices in northern Philippine regions and expand overseas markets for indigenous rice varieties. Part of this initiative is the funding and supporting of various research and development undertakings on organic farming in the Cordillera region through its Community-based Participatory Action Research (CPAR) program.

### Sustaining heirloom rice with CPAR

Heirloom rice is a special kind of indigenous rice that has been planted by the ancestors of Ifugao and other upland tribes. It is colored glutinous rice that possesses outstanding quality, aroma, texture, color (red, purple or violet), taste, and nutritional value. Most importantly, the heirloom rice varieties in the Rice Terraces are organically-grown. These qualities made the harvest very appealing not only to local consumers but also to foreign buyers.

One of the most popular among these varieties is tinawon (local name which literally means "once a year"). True to its name, tinawon is the first rice variety of rice that was widely grown in the Rice Terraces and is grown only once a year.

To sustain this indigenous gem that is thriving in the Cordillera region, BAR supported the tinawon production through a CPAR project. Initiated in 2011, it aims to increase the production of tinawon to supplement the export volume of heirloom rice in the US and to sustain the needs of the farmers. Through the CPAR project, farmers were introduced to various R&D interventions on organic production without compensating the increase in yields. They were taught on using bio-organic and foliar fertilizers, early transplanting, and proper distancing.

Dr. Catherine Buenaventura, supervising agriculturist of Ifugao's Provincial Agriculture Environment and Natural Resources Office (PAENRO) and CPAR project leader, said that these interventions led to a five percent increase in the production of tinawon rice during the first cycle alone. ###

#### References:

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- "There's more to Banaue Rice Terraces; the export heirloom rice Tinawon" BAR R&D Digest. July-September 2012 Issue (Vol. 14 No. 3). Bureau of Agricultural Research, Diliman, QC.
- "Ifugao's Tinawon increases production through CPAR" June 2013 Issue (Vol. 13 No. 6). BAR Chronicle. Bureau of Agricultural Research, Diliman, QC.
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Present during the ceremonial send-off of organic heirloom rice are (L-R) Pipo Araullo manager, Exporters/Ocean Freight; Ramon Rivera, warehouse manager; Lamem Gonnay, chairman, Rice Terraces Farmers of Cordillera Cooperative-Kalinga; Jimmy Lingayao, chairman, RTFC Ifugao; Donald Alabia, chairman, RTFC Mt. Province; Wicky Garcia of Rice, Inc. (an NGO assisting to coop to be entrepreneur); Mary Hardy of Eighth Wonder, Inc. (buyer of heirloom rice who assist farmers in marketing heirloom rice to US); and Marilyn Sta. Catalina, director, DA-Regional Field Unit-Cordillera Autonomous Region (CAR).



CPAR project site on tinawon located in Banaue, Ifugao

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