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FEATURES

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## DA allots P10 million to develop Ifugao rice areas

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Written by Marvyn N. Benaning / Correspondent

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has earmarked an initial P10 million for the development and expansion of areas devoted to traditional upland or heirloom rice grown at the Ifugao Rice Terraces.

At a Cordillera rice stakeholders' workshop held at the Banaue Hotel in Ifugao province's Banaue town recently, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and National Rice Program Coordinator Dante S. Delima said the P10 million is aimed at boosting the output of these rice varieties in the face of rising overseas demand.

"The amount is over and above the regular budget allocation being set aside by the DA Regional Field Unit in the Cordillera for the development of the Ifugao Rice Terraces," Delima said.

He ordered the regional office to identify, assess, verify and consolidate farmers' inputs for inclusion in a work plan to be implemented beginning this year.

DA Cordillera Regional Executive Director Marlyn Santa Catalina welcomed the move, saying it will mean a lot in the development of traditional upland- or heirloom-rice varieties grown in the terraced paddies of Ifugao.

She cited the efforts being undertaken by non-governmental organization Rice Inc., which exported 24 metric tons (MT) of heirloom-rice varieties to the US last year.

This year Rice Inc. is set to ship some 30 MT of traditional upland rice to the US in partnership with the government.

Production of heirloom-rice varieties like tinawon, unoy and dalican was affected recently by typhoons, which damaged portions of the rice terraces.

Early last year the DA allocated P21 million to rehabilitate portions of the Batad Rice Terraces, a primary rice-production area for the community there and a major tourist attraction.

The DA, in convergence with different national and local government agencies and private entities, facilitated the project's implementation by clustering the area into seven units, with village councilors assigned to oversee each cluster.

Project components include agricultural infrastructure, production support, extension support, education and training services, agricultural infrastructure and program management.

Under agricultural infrastructure, some 55 percent of the targeted restoration of damaged and abandoned rice terraces were completed as of April, with P3.98 million out of the allocated P8.5-million funds already spent by the provincial government.