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DA allots P24M for rice terraces rehabilitation

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QUEZON CITY, May 9 -- The Department of Agriculture has earmarked P24 million for the restoration of typhoon-damaged portions of the Banawe rice terraces.

Another P10M is also allotted to further develop and increase the production of traditional "heirloom" rice varieties for both domestic and export markets, the Department of Agriculture said Wednesday.

The restoration of damaged terrace walls and irrigation canals, particularly in Barangay Batad, Banawe, Ifugao, will be completed by June 30, 2013, said Department of Agriculture assistant secretary and national rice program coordinator Dante Delima.

Thus, this coming main season, Delima said Ifugao farmers will be able to plant their traditional or heirloom rice varieties in as many paddies as possible in the world-renowned Banawe rice terraces.

The DA led the Banawe rice terraces restoration project, which started in March 2012, by sharing P24.3M of the total project cost of P26.5M. It was initiated by Secretary Proceso J. Alcala, when he visited Ifugao, on November 25, 2011. Several portions of the Batad rice terraces were damaged by typhoons Pedring and Quiel in 2011.

Other agencies that pitched in are the Provincial Government of Ifugao (P1.05M), Department of Social Welfare and Development (P1M), Municipal government of Banawe (P50,000), and Barangay Batad (P20,000).

Delima said the DA is allotting another P10M to enhance the development and increase the production of traditional upland or heirloom rice varieties like tinawon, unoy, and dalican.

The amount will fund several projects and initiatives proposed by Cordillera rice farmers during a seminar-workshop, held April 29 to May 1, 2013, at the Banaue Hotel in Ifugao.

Delima has instructed DA-Cordillera regional director Marilyn Sta. Catalina to help farmers identify, assess, verify, and consolidate their project initiatives and include these in the DA-Cordillera regional work and financial plan for implementation beginning this year.

The planned projects include: establishment of a regional heirloom rice processing center (RPC) in Lamut, Ifugao, and satellite village RPCs in different which will be equipped with micro mills, pedal threshers, and appropriate mechanical and solar dryers; and construction of tramlines.

Sta. Catalina said the additional funding will mean a lot in further enhancing the production of heirloom rice varieties, particularly those planted in Ifugao rice terraces.

She also cited the efforts of Rice Inc., a non-government organization, led by its executive director Vicky Garcia, which coordinates with farmers groups the export heirloom rice varieties to the United States. Last year, it exported a total of 24,000 kilograms or 24 metric tons (MT) of heirloom rice to the US, and another 30MT this year.

In all, Delima said the DA aims to help maintain the sturdiness of the rice terraces and empower Ifugao farmers so they could sustain the production of heirloom rice varieties for domestic and export markets.

He said as of April 30, 2013, 98 of the damaged terrace walls was restored, 21 communal irrigation systems were repaired, and five solar dryers were established in different sites, including a community seed bank, and conduct of 16-week farmers' field school attended by 43 Ifugao heirloom rice producers.

To date, 10 heirloom rice varieties were collected and purified, while 600 kilograms of seeds were stored as part of the community seed buffer stocking, Delima said. (By Adam Borja, DA Nat'l Rice Program; and Marlo Asis, DA Information Service)

- See more at: <http://news.pia.gov.ph/index.php?article=1781368073684#sthash.CPcMm8Pn.dpuf>