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BAGUIO CITY—Organic heirloom rice production has found a niche market abroad, gauging by the slow but steady increase in volume of indigenous rice exports.

But often taken for granted is the fact that upland farmers also supply a robust domestic market.

Marilyn Sta. Catalina, Cordillera director of the Department of Agriculture, says some indigenous rice varieties have been exported to the US since the late '90s because these grains are genuinely Filipino in origin. Among them are the Ifugao "tinawon" and the Kalinga "unoy."

The DA is taking the heirloom rice industry to the next stage by submitting samples to experts who will map their genetic make-up and establish their authenticity and lineage as homegrown Philippine crops, says Assistant Secretary Dante de Lima, the DA's [national](#) rice program coordinator.

Eighth Wonder Inc., a US-based trading firm that specializes in products from the Cordillera's rice terraces, has distributed up to a ton of grains produced in Mt. Province, Kalinga and Ifugao in the last 10 years.

The DA has embarked on harnessing upland rice also for export, encouraging [improvements](#) in the yield for Mt. Province's "Mountain Violet" variety, Kalinga's unoy, "jekot" and the "ulikan" red grains as well as for Ifugao's tinawon, "fancy rice" and "diket," Sta. Catalina says.

For the moment, farmers market their terrace produce at the same wholesale value they offer domestic markets, which have their own loyal [customers](#) for highland rice.

Jessica Gallegos, 18, who tends her grandmother's rice stall at the Baguio City public market, says red rice is [quickly](#) sold even at P50 a kg.

"What sells briskly are rice varieties grown in the Cordillera and in Cervantes, Ilocos Sur, which attract repeat customers as well as the local Korean community," she adds.

She says the family stall started selling 12 varieties of upland rice in 2003. "Farmers would sell their produce to us for P40 to P50 a kg, and we add P10 to make a profit," she says.

The price and quality of heirloom rice have not changed through the years, she points out.

"Every March and October, after harvests, farmers bring us tinawon and "galo" (purple rice) from Ifugao, "kintoman" from Benguet and Mt. Province, unoy and "saluyaw" from Kalinga, "bonkitan," "baay" and "red malagkit" from Abra, and "balatinao" and brown rice from Cervantes, totaling 240 to 480 cavans in all," she says.

She explains upland rice varieties are also sold in the 60 rice stalls in the Baguio market. These are sourced from Kalinga, Isabela, Cagayan, Nueva Ecija and Pangasinan. **With a report from EV Espiritu**