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PH sends 1st shipment of heirloom rice to US

By Czeriza Valencia, The Philippine Star

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MANILA - The Philippines is sending an initial volume of 15 metric tons of heirloom rice from the Cordilleras to the United States this year, the Department of Agriculture (DA) announced yesterday.

Ready for shipment to California are 10 tons of 'mina-angan' variety from Banaue and 'hungduan' from Ifugao, and five tons of 'ulikan' variety from Pasil and Lubuagan in Kalinga. The shipment is valued at P870,000.

The shipment was consolidated by Rice Terraces Farmers Cooperative (RTFC) in cooperation with a US-based non-government organization Rice Inc. Eighth Wonder Inc. that would receive the rice in California.

"This will help sustain the status of rice terraces as a world heritage treasure," said Marilyn Sta. Catalina, director of DA Regional Field Unit-Cordillera Administrative Region.

"These 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."

The shipment is part of the 27.6 MT volume that the Philippines will send to the US this year.

The remaining volume is undergoing organic fumigation in the Philippine Rice Institute laboratory in Nueva Ecija, in compliance with strict US sanitary and phytosanitary requisites.

The DA is encouraging farmers in the Cordilleras to preserve traditional farming practices and grow indigenous rice varieties for export.

The Philippines is focusing on the exportation of premium rice varieties, albeit in small quantities, because the country cannot compete neighboring Southeast Asian countries in the exportation of ordinary rice.

To prepare northern Philippines for this endeavor, the DA has provided a P20 million grant to the Ifugao provincial government for the rehabilitation of damaged portions of Batad rice terraces.

The Philippine Rice Research Institute is also conducting DNA fingerprinting of heirloom rice varieties in the country to protect local varieties from adverse claims, especially Cordillera's export-quality varieties.

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