



PHL exports Cordillera heirloom rice variety to the US

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MANILA, Sept. 23 (PNA) — The Philippines has exported 15 metric tons of organic heirloom rice from the Cordillera region to the United States.

In his address during the send-off ceremony at the Manila International Container Terminal, Manila over the weekend, Agriculture secretary Proceso Alcala said the export of the Cordillera rice is considered as "a milestone in government's effort to expand markets for premium varieties and promote the rich cultural heritage attached to it."

"This will help sustain the status of rice terraces as a world heritage treasure," he added.

The shipment, worth P 870,000 that consists of ten tons of "mina-angan" variety from Banaue and "hungduan" from Ifugao and five tons of "ulikan" from Pasil and Lubuagan in Kalinga, were consolidated by the Rice Terraces Farmers Cooperative (RTFC), in cooperation with a non-government organization — Rice Inc. Eighth Wonder Inc., a US-based NGO that helps market products from the Cordillera's rice terraces to California.

Alcala said the rice export forms part of the 27.6 metric tons that the country will send this year to the US which were bought from 272 farmers from the three provinces.

In an interview Monday, National Rice Program Coordinator Dante De Lima said the rice variety has a strong demand in the US market because of its distinctive quality. "Consumers in the US prefer heirloom rice because it has a pleasant smell, colored and comes in long-grain form," according to De Lima.

He also disclosed that the DA has been facilitating export to the US by establishing linkages between buyers and suppliers.

Support services are also provided through training programs for farmers, farm machinery and capability building of agricultural technicians and scientists, he said.

De Lima said DA has also embarked on a campaign meant to preserve farming practices in northern Philippine region and expand overseas markets for indigenous rice varieties. These include the P20 million grant to the Ifugao provincial government to rebuild damaged portions of Batad rice terraces.

The Philippine Rice Research Institute (PRRI) also conducts a DNA fingerprinting of heirloom rice varieties in the country to protect local varieties from adverse claims, notably Cordillera's frequently exported varieties.

To date, shipments of various heirloom varieties such as 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" to the U.S. totaled 97 tons including last year's 24.4 tons valued at P1.3 million. (PNA)

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