

UPLB alumni group honors DA chief for exemplary achievements

Agriculture Secretary William Dar was adjudged as this year's recipient of the prestigious "Presidential Award" by the University of the Philippines at Los Baños Alumni Association (UPLBAA), for his outstanding achievements in agricultural development and management, during the 102nd UPLB Loyalty Day celebration on October 10, 2020.

A doctorate in horticulture in 1980, Secretary Dar is the fourth recipient of the accolade that the UPLBAA gives to an outstanding graduate, thus joining previous awardees, namely: national scientist and former UP president Dr. Emil Q. Javier; former socio-economic planning secretary Dr. Cielito Habito; and UP regent Francis Laurel.

Twice appointed as DA chief – in 1998 by President Joseph Ejercito Estrada and in August 2019 by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte – Dr. Dar has also proven twice that with strong leadership, coupled with new productivity paradigms, the agricultural sector's contribution to the economy could be made phenomenal.

He started serving government as the first director of the DA's Bureau of Agricultural Research in 1987, where he laid the foundation of a research-based agriculture modernization agenda, under the leadership of then DA secretary and current finance secretary, Carlos G. Dominguez.

He also served as director-general of the DOST's Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD), where he led in crafting new strategies in holistically integrating research planning and collaborative delivery of services.

In 2000, he was appointed as the first Filipino to lead a global agricultural center, the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), based in India. In recognition of his exemplary leadership and astute management, the ICRISAT board extended his service for two five-year terms, thus he stayed in India for 15 years.

While at ICRISAT, the government of India conferred on him the prestigious "MS Swaminathan Award," India's version of the 'World Food Prize.'

Dar left a legacy at ICRISAT that continues to benefit millions of small farmers in India, Africa, and other dry-land countries, including the Philippines.

When he returned to the Philippines in 2015, Dr. Dar led the Inang Lupa Movement that advocated for the modernization and industrialization of Philippine agriculture, guided by an inclusive, science-based, resilient, and market-oriented development strategy.

Secretary Dar, in his acceptance speech, thanked his alma mater and fellow UPLB alumni for the recognition "as a leader who made an impact in the lives of small farmers, fisherfolk, and agripreneurs, both here in the country and other parts of the world."

"This (award) inspires me to work harder and with greater sense of purpose as we at the Department of Agriculture continue to battle the protracted pandemic and address its impact on our food production and distribution systems," he added.

He announced a P100-million worth of DA-UPLB joint initiatives, among them: P50 million (M) for research on transboundary plant diseases like fall armyworm and Fusarium wilt; P30M for the Institute of Plant Breeding for vegetable seed production and crop improvement in vegetables and fruits; and P20M for the construction of a packing facility with storage at UPLB-APEC, serving both as an agribusiness corridor and farmers' trading center for Laguna farmers and neighboring provinces.

He also congratulated incoming UPLB Chancellor Dr. Jose Camacho, Jr. to vigorously upscale relevant technologies to enhance productivity in the countryside and continuously develop the human capital needed by this country to lead in the transformation of a modernized and industrialized Philippine agriculture.

Secretary Dar also rallied the UPLB community, particularly those “in the agriculture and rural development sector to unite and keep agriculture going to provide safe, nutritious, affordable, and accessible food for all Filipinos.”

Dr. Dar and other UPLBAA awardees were chosen by an 11-man board of judges, composed of the respective president of the alumni association of nine colleges and two schools comprising UPLB.

The other awardees are:

Outstanding Golden Jubilarians: former DA Usec Cristino Collado, Francis Laurel, Ida Dalmacio, Isaias Lumanta and Mauro Barradas; and

Outstanding Alumni: Rep. Isidro Ungab, Mayor Rommel Gecolea, Dr. Juan Pulhin, Engr. Romeo Capuno, Jr., Roel Castro, and Amb. Bernardita Catalla (posthumous).
