

**Statement of DA Secretary William D. Dar during the 42nd AMAF Meeting (Opening)
42nd MEETING OF THE ASEAN MINISTERS ON AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY (AMAF)
October 21, 2020, Cambodia (delivered via videoconference)**

Statement of Secretary William D. Dar
Department of Agriculture, Philippines

Your Excellencies, fellow ASEAN Ministers on agriculture and forestry;
Senior officials and delegates;
Ladies and gentlemen — a good day to all!

First of all, I would like to congratulate H.E. Veng Sakhon, Honorable Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Cambodia as chair of the 42nd AMAF and related meetings. I would like to extend my appreciation to the Government of Cambodia and the ASEAN Secretaries for hosting the AMAF meetings today despite of the Covid-19 pandemic.

I would also like to express our sympathies to the Governments of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam for the devastating effects of heavy rains and floods in recent days. We sincerely hope for the complete recovery and rehabilitation from the damages done in these countries.

Food and agriculture during the pandemic

As the world continues to battle a pandemic, we, in the ASEAN, must reinforce our cohesive response to keep food, agriculture and forestry sectors brace up for this huge challenge.

We need to ensure that there is no disruption to food supply chain in the region; and that essential, safe and nutritious produce will continue to reach ASEAN markets during this pandemic.

Given the magnitude of this challenge, our response must correspond to the scale of this crisis.

It must be comprehensive, science-based, inclusive and innovative for us to build efficient and resilient food production and distribution systems to feed a growing population, now and in the future.

With the region's current position as a premier exporter of high quality-rice, we must keep in mind the importance of developing climate-resilient rice varieties to meet regional food security and nutritional needs of our people.

Modernizing and industrializing the agricultural sector is an important agenda for the Philippines.

Our vision, which is "a food-secure and resilient Philippines with empowered and prosperous farmers and fisherfolk" necessitates dedicated efforts to empower the sector to increase agricultural productivity and profitability, taking into account sustainability and resilience.

Transforming the agriculture into a dynamic, high-growth sector is essential to speed up recovery, poverty reduction and inclusive growth, and is even more critical during the Covid-19 pandemic.

To sustainably feed a growing population in the "new normal", the Philippines follows a food systems policy shifts in the country's food system.

The shift is required from production to consumption and all places in between to compel the sector to do things differently.

The policy shift is based on the New Food Security Framework, which serves as the overarching goal of ensuring food security in the country.

The food security framework empowers the marginalized in the food system and support diverse distribution efforts; harness the food system's interconnectedness with other sectors toward building resilience; address hunger and all forms of malnutrition, and provide solutions that are context-specific.

Philippine response to Covid-19 pandemic

In the Philippines, various recovery efforts and interventions have been put in place to keep the gears of our food supply chain moving within and across borders.

Since the start of the community quarantine in March 2020, the Department of Agriculture (DA) has been implementing the Plant, Plant, Plant Program, which is part of the DA's Food Security Development Framework.

The Plant, Plant, Plant Program is an all-encompassing program for crops, livestock, poultry and fisheries of the government.

It aims to address five specific areas that will provide higher food sufficiency levels: production and availability, accessibility and affordability, price stability, sustainability, and food safety.

These are realized through the implementation of specific interventions including 1) productivity enhancement projects; 2) income enhancement projects on food markets (logistics and processing); 3) social protection and amelioration projects; and 4) Cash for Work (C4W) projects for displaced workers and unemployed.

Despite the social and economic slowdown, the agriculture sector remains resilient, even growing a quite surprising 1.6 percent in the second quarter.

Support to ASEAN Response on Covid-19

Allow me to express our appreciation and gratitude to our ASEAN neighbors that reached out to the Philippines in efforts to contain Covid-19 pandemic – to Singapore, Brunei Darussalam and Vietnam for donation of Coronavirus testing kits, PCR machines and face masks.

In the name of solidarity and unity, the Philippines expresses its commitment to work along with other ASEAN member countries in the region's cohesive response to the pandemic. These include:

keeping the ASEAN market open for trade and investment;
continuing efforts to ensure stable and sustainable food sources; and
reaffirming support to food safety through evidence-based food safety measures in the region.

Conclusion: Call for innovative collaboration amidst the pandemic

For years, ASEAN has provided the framework for promoting economic growth and stability in its member-countries.

But with the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, this organization is being challenged to evolve dramatically beyond what was initially envisaged.

This organization must provide the firm foundation in bringing in effective policy recommendations that will resolve impending issues that endanger food security, safety and nutrition in ASEAN and globally.

More than ever we need to innovate in our strategies and plans of action.

I hope that through this annual venue, we are able to develop specific policy frameworks to cohesively address the adverse impacts of the pandemic.

We need to strive to keep ASEAN food, agriculture, and forestry and brace up to meet the needs of our growing populations.

Above all, we need to continue to thrive by maintaining production, supporting the value chain, and ensuring access to the workforce under the “New Normal”.

Mabuhay tayong lahat! Good morning again!
