

## **Farmers, fishers to receive cash, food aid from excess rice tariffs, “Bayanihan 2”**

In succeeding months, small rice farmers will receive cash assistance from “excess rice tariff,” while fisherfolk, and corn, coconut and sugar farmers, and indigenous peoples (IPs) will receive cash and food assistance from “Bayanihan 2.”

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is finalizing the mechanics of the two forms of assistance to millions of small farmers and fisherfolk, thanks to a resolution approved and adopted by the Senate committee on agriculture and food, chaired by Senator Cynthia Villar, during the virtual deliberations of the proposed 2021 budget of the Department of Agriculture (DA) on October 16, 2020.

“We strongly support the favorable action of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food, led by Senator Villar, that will benefit farmers adversely impacted by the depressed prices of palay this season,” said Agriculture Secretary William Dar during the 2020 World Food Day closing program.

The Senate Joint Resolution No. 12 introduced by Senator Villar authorizes the use of the tariffs on imported rice in excess of P10 billion (B) collected by the Bureau of Customs for 2020 under the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

Secretary Dar said that the initial estimate of the excess rice tariffs in 2019 and this year may amount to P5B, which as per the joint Senate resolution will be used as cash assistance worth P5,000 to benefit small rice farmers, tilling one hectare or less.

The proposed measure is similar to the previous legislated cash aid, called Rice Farmers’ Financial Assistance (RFFA) and Financial Subsidy for Rice Farmers (FSRF).

To qualify, farmer-beneficiaries should be listed in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA).

Secondly, Secretary Dar said this time other non-rice farmers — that include corn, coconut, sugar farmers, marginal fisherfolk, and IPs — will also receive P5,000-worth of cash and food assistance under the DA’s P4.5-billion budget allocation under the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act or “Bayanihan 2”.

The DA chief said of the P5,000-assistance, P3,000 will be in cash, while the P2,000 will be in kind, at P1,000 for rice and the other P1,000 for chicken and eggs.

Based on the DA’s initial program mechanics, the rice, chicken, and eggs will be withdrawn by the beneficiaries using an e-voucher system. Qualified recipients will be issued an ID cum voucher.

“Through this mechanism, we are lifting once again our local rice industry that has been affected by the decline in palay prices, and poultry raisers who were affected by a glut due to shut down of businesses due to the pandemic,” Secretary Dar said.

He added that with the strong support of the Senate and House of Representatives, allotting higher budget and investments for Philippine agriculture, the Duterte administration will be able to transform and make Filipino farmers and fisherfolk more competitive and prosperous.

“Our goal is a country that is food-secure and resilient, where farmers and fisherfolk are empowered and enjoy better incomes and a higher standard of living,” the Secretary said during the Senate budget hearing.

The RTL allots P10 billion in tariff revenues from rice imports for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF). Excess collections, if any, are allocated for other national programs such as the RFFA and FSRF, titling of rice lands, expanded crop insurance on rice, and crop diversification.

Under the Senate joint resolution, it is proposed that all excess collections until December 30, 2020, shall be given to the DA for the RFFA implementation. This will help rice farmers during the RTL transition and cushion them from the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

