

Cash and food subsidy program to aid over 35k NegOcc farmers, fishers

BACOLOD CITY, December 9, 2020 -- Part of the Department of Agriculture's (DA) interventions to local producers weighed down by the effects of the global health crisis is the Cash and Food Subsidy Program that will cater to 35,544 farmers and fisherfolk in Negros Occidental as Agriculture Secretary William Dar rolled-out the initial distribution to 115 recipients on December 8 at the Panaad Park, Bacolod City.

Included in the Stimulus Package for Agriculture under the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act, the program has apportioned ₱177.72 million for Negros Occidental targeting 958 corn farmers, 13,027 sugarcane farmers, 7,180 coconut farmers, and 14,379 fisherfolk.

Dar said the DA had extended earlier this year ₱5,000 cash aids to rice growers through the Rice Farmers Financial Assistance, and the Financial Subsidy for Rice Farmers. The move intends to ease the plight of farmers confronted by the two-year transition or adjustment period of the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), an act liberalizing the importation of rice to ensure national rice sufficiency.

"Ngayon, mabibigyan na rin ng ayuda ang mga non-rice farmers (this time we can already subsidize our non-rice farmers). With ₱4.5 billion national budget, we will serve around 890,000 farmers in the country," said Dar who signed a memorandum of agreement with the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) president Emmanuel Herbosa on November 9.

Farmers and fishers listed in the Registry System for the Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA) and those who have not received financial assistance from the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Agrarian Reform, and Department of Labor and Employment are qualified for the granting of ₱5,000.00 worth of subsidy to include ₱3,000 cash, ₱1,000.00 worth of rice, and ₱1,000.00 dressed chicken and eggs.

The program is also a component of the social amelioration support to the farming and fishing communities, along with the productivity enhancement support and the income-generating grant priorities under the DA's Plant, Plant, Plant Program (Agri 4Ps).

Reiterating the importance of food adequacy amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Dar said "hindi natin malalabanan ang pandemya kung wala tayong sapat na pagkain at iyan ang dahilan kung bakit patuloy nating binibigyan ng suporta ang ating mga magsasaka at mangingisda. (We cannot fight the pandemic if we do not have sufficient food, and that is the reason why we are providing support to the farmers and fisherfolk). The sector continues to move forward, and seeks divine providence to give us resiliency to weather the challenges besetting the country and much more the agriculture sector."

Based on the targets of the DA Corn Program, Sugar Regulatory Administration, Philippine Coconut Authority, and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources as the lead implementing agencies, 11,435 farmers and fishers in the region are poised to receive direct cash and food assistance.

Using the e-voucher system, farmer-recipients can claim their ₱3,000.00 cash by presenting their government-issued identification (ID) cards to DBP-accredited payout centers. In Negros Occidental, the project recipients shall proceed to MLhuiller Financial Service Centers and show the reference codes sent via text message by their concerned agencies.

Meanwhile, to upscale the operations of Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita marketing initiatives and capacitate the smallholder groups, the DA is tapping accredited Kadiwa exhibitor/s as supplier/s of food assistance. The Multi-Sectoral Alliance for Development (MUAD), who was also awarded ₱1-million trading capital under the Expanded Kadiwa Program, is the distribution partner of the Cash and Food Subsidy Program in Negros Occidental.

Beneficiaries shall also have to present their valid IDs and a QR code when claiming their food subsidy.

Leo Chavez, 38, corn farmer of Candoni said "Daku guid ang akon pasalamat sa DA kay may ara sila ginahatag nga ayuda sa amon nga mga magagmay nga mangunguma sang Negros Occidental sa tunga sang pandemya. (We are grateful that the DA is assisting small farmers in Negros Occidental to cope with the effects of the pandemic).

Western Visayas has 117,435 farmers and fisherfolk bound to benefit from the government's Cash and Food Subsidy Program beginning this year.
