



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Office of the Secretary
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YAP CITES NEED TO ‘WEATHER-PROOF’ AGRICULTURE

Secretary Arthur Yap of the Department of Agriculture (DA) has cited the urgent need to “weather-proof” Philippine agriculture and fisheries so the country can better adapt to climate change and thus sustain growth amid the ever-increasing demand for food and shrinking farm production here and abroad.

“Weather’-proofing” Philippine agriculture, Yap said, includes utilizing modern tools and techniques to develop the country’s risk assessment and disaster management capabilities and investing more in equipment, infrastructure, new technologies and extension services for farmers and fisherfolk to help them hurdle changing climatic conditions that have started hurting global farm yields.

Yap underscored the urgency of shielding agriculture and fisheries from the devastating effects of climate change on two major occasions—in his keynote speech during the “Farmers’ and Fishers” Night” sponsored by the Manila Overseas Press Club (MOPC) at the Intercontinental Hotel in Makati City on Friday night and in his presentation at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Los Baños, Laguna on Sunday before a visiting delegation of American government officials and business leaders led by US Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsack.

Vilsack and top-level representatives of 20 agribusiness companies arrived in Manila over the weekend for a four-day US Agribusiness Trade and Investment Mission, which includes separate meetings with President Arroyo along with Yap and Cabinet officials; an inspection tour, briefings and a palay harvesting activity at IRRI; a milk and biscuit donation program; and a business forum at the Shangri-La Hotel in Makati City where the American businessmen will be discussing possible farm investment opportunities with about 200 local counterparts.

He said the freak traits of Typhoons “Ondoy” and “Pepeng” plus the unprecedented level of destruction these storms had wrought on Philippine agriculture is a stark reminder that climate change is already upon us and is now the No. 1 threat to global

farm production. Both cyclones have caused over P18 billion-worth of damage to agriculture alone.

“We are living in a climate-changed world,” Yap said during the MOPC gathering held at the Hotel Intercontinental Manila Friday night.

“Clearly, it cannot be business as usual for Philippine agriculture. It cannot be business as usual for industry. It cannot be business as usual for society. The toll on lives and the damage to infrastructure, homes, food supplies, energy and transportation have racked up losses in our country in the billions of pesos,” he added.

“Also in the coming years, what is very critical,” he said, “is we have to continue investing in public infrastructure. So we’re talking about water, small-irrigation, mariculture parks that are climate-change adapted.”

He said that the government needs to act swiftly, with the help of its foreign partners, to toughen Philippine agriculture against climate change so that the country could take advantage of the countless opportunities in this labor-intensive sector, especially in the areas of mariculture and biofuel feedstock production.

“With climate change already at our doorstep,” Yap said the Philippines needs to build its in risk assessment and disaster management utilizing available technologies such as Remote Sensing, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and climate check.

Yap said during the MOPC forum and in his presentation before the Vilsack-led delegation at IRRRI that the government, through the DA, is investing more in equipment and infrastructure like irrigation works that harvest rain water (big reservoir types and small water impounding projects); all-weather roads; and post-harvest facilities such as farm mechanization, storages and warehouses.

New technologies such as drought-resistant, submergence-tolerant crop varieties should also be developed, while providing extension services, weather-based insurance and loans to farmers for production and land improvement needs, he said in both occasions.

Yap also emphasized in both gatherings the need to strengthen and modernize the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics to improve its ability to track and conduct quick and effective surveys that are critical in designing and implementing programs on a local and national level.

With these programs in place, Yap said at the MOPC event the Philippines can meet the ever-growing demand for biofuel feedstock here and abroad and cash-in on this booming industry to help make agriculture a lucrative venture for its small stakeholders.

He noted that next year alone, the country would need six to seven refineries to meet its biodiesel requirements as mandated under the Biofuels Law, and another seven to eight refineries by 2015.

For 2011, about 17 to 20 distilleries are needed to process crops such as sugarcane (6.85 million MT), sweet sorghum (9.64 million MT) and cassava (2.98 million MT) into bioethanol to meet the local demand of 482 million liters. By 2014, the demand of 537 million liters of bioethanol is expected to be generated with the implementation of the 10% mandate, he added.

He said another investment area that has great potentials is the development of mariculture parks. ### (DA Press Office)