

# **ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN THE PHILIPPINES**

## **- PAST, PRESENT AND PROSPECTS**

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### ***I. History of Organic Agriculture in the Philippines.***

Prior to the massive agricultural programs that introduced new crop breeds and utilize heavy synthetic fertilizers, agriculture in the Philippines was mostly employing organic agricultural system. Farmers used traditional seeds that did not require heavy fertilization. This was partly due to the good soil condition of the Philippine agricultural lands back then. The Filipino diet was also more diverse because of the seasonal agriculture production.

Introduction of commercial mono-cropping agricultural system in developed countries eventually caught up in the Philippines in the late 1960s. This agricultural system uses new varieties of high yielding seeds which require heavy fertilization. By the mid-1980s, its negative effects on the Philippine agricultural soil and biodiversity became apparent. Thus, the call for environment friendly agricultural production systems, including organic agriculture, started to gain ground.

In 2005, the Philippine government finally responded to the call of stakeholders to address soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, and to recognize emerging market of organic produce and products through the issuance of Executive Order 481. The National Organic Agriculture Program (NOAP) was created along with the National Organic Agriculture Board (NOAB) and the National Technical Committee (NTC). The NOAP was focused on 1) Regulations and Guidelines, 2) Certification and Accreditation, 3) Market Promotion and Networking, 4) Organic Information for Producers, Handlers and Processors, and 5) Research, Development and Extension. The NOAB — composed of the DA, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and other seven (7) representatives engaged in the practice of organic agriculture — was assigned as the policy making body with the NTC assisting the NOAB in implementing its identified and approved policies, programs and projects.

Promotion of organic agriculture in the Philippines was intensified through institutionalization of Republic Act (RA) 10068, also referred to as the “Organic Agriculture Act of 2010.” The Act established NOAP as a comprehensive organic program wherein direction and general guidelines for implementation were provided by the NOAB. Another provision of the Act is

the updated NOAB composition, — the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) was added as a member of the Board— detailed organization, as well as its enhanced powers and functions.

Moreover, other agencies under the DA were tasked and mandated with certain functions to further promote organic agriculture in the country. The Bureau of Agriculture and Fishery Standards (BAFS) served as the national technical and administrative secretariat of the NOAB, designated and authorized to grant official accreditation to organic certifying body or entity, and register organic food and organic input producers. The Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR) was in-charge on the research, development and extension, and creation of organic agriculture RDE network.

Local Government Units (LGUs), particularly provincial governors, were also mandated to form a provincial technical committee to implement activities in line with the NOAP and establish trading posts for organic inputs within their area of jurisdiction. Other provisions of the Act include labeling and retailing of organic produce and provision of incentives for the production and propagation of organic farm inputs and to farmers whose farms have been duly certified as compliant to the Philippine National Standards (PNS). In the first year of implementation of the Act, 50 million was appropriated to the Program.

Year 2020 when RA 10068 was amended by RA 11511 and introduced the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), an internationally accepted organic certification system developed by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM) as an alternative organic certification system. The law also provided for a minimum of one (1) billion pesos annual budget for the NOAP.

## ***II. Present Status of Organic Agriculture in the Philippines***

In terms of area, certified organic agriculture in the Philippines is still very small. There are approximately 6,600 hectares with organic certification from the DA-BAFS. However, out of the total organic certified area, only 1,400 hectares are registered with the DA-BAFS, consisting of both third party- and PGS- certified, as of the end of 2022. Organic certification is only valid for a year.

Various factors attributed to the slow expansion of organic area in the country. First, due to the complicated and expensive procedures of third-party certification, many third-party organic certified farms have not renewed their organic certification. This situation persists when the market of third-party organic certified farms no longer requires updated organic certification and accepts the produce as organic out of trust and confidence with their supplier.

Another reason is the limited resources of the certifying and accrediting agency which delays the certification and accreditation of candidate organic farms. Physical inspection of farms requires a lot of resources, especially manpower to conduct inspection. As of December 2022, there are only two (2) third-party certifying bodies in the Philippines and five (5) PGS-Organic Certifying Bodies (OCBs).

Organic agriculture areas by default or idle land where plants and trees grow naturally (i.e. rainforest), is also one of the parameters used by LGUs in reporting their organic agriculture areas. In 2022, approximately 395,500 hectares were reported under this category. However, most of these reported agriculture areas have not been validated.

In terms of commodities and volume of production, coconut comprises the largest organic areas, especially in default organic agriculture areas, as coconut farming in the Philippines generally does not apply fertilizers. Other organic agriculture commodities in the country are rice, tubers and root crops, herbs and spices, coffee and cacao, lowland and upland vegetables, banana and other tropical fruits, honey, livestock products, poultry products, and aquaculture products. Organic inputs such as soil ameliorants and various organic concoctions are also being produced. However, most production are used for household and community consumption. Only few farmers and fishers market their produce and products commercially and engage in global trade. These harvests are being consolidated and/or sold as fresh or processed by a few consolidators or processors of organic agriculture products.

Despite the challenges in promoting organic agriculture, the government did not waver in providing support to the industry and assist in every way they can so NOAP can execute its programs, projects and activities effectively and efficiently. During the third quarter of 2021, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) approved 13 plantilla positions for the NOAP - National Program Coordinating Office (NPCO) for its staff complement. For fiscal year 2023, the NOAP received an almost 100 percent increase in its annual budget with the approval of a 900-million pesos allotment. In addition, the DA - Agriculture Credit Policy Council (ACPC) and the DA - Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service (AMAS) have 100-million pesos allotment, to be divided equally as stipulated in RA No. 11511, for the provision of social credit and marketing assistance, respectively.

With this increased budget, the NOAP has targeted to implement various programs and activities as follows: 1) Establishment of Organic Agriculture Livelihood Projects (OALP), which includes establishment of DA stations' multiplier farm, provision of technical assistance on business planning, and promotion and advocacy sub-projects; 2) Distribution of Composting Facilities; 3) Technical assistance for the establishment of local seed centers; 4) Youth Scholarship (Internship) Program in Organic Agriculture; 5) Support

to PGS; 6) Irrigation Network Services; 7) Research and Development; and 8) Conduct of NOAB's activities.

NOAB member agencies such as the DOST, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), DAR, DTI, DILG and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) are likewise implementing and/or assisting organic agriculture related programs and projects.

Furthermore, there is an increasing public support to organic agriculture through the formation of various organizations with missions related to organic agriculture. Apart from organic farmers' cooperatives and associations, there are also non-government organizations, such as the League of Organic Agriculture Municipalities, Cities, and Provinces in the Philippines (LOAMCP-Ph) and the Organic Agriculture Society of the Philippines (OASP) which are strong movers of organic agriculture in the Philippines.

### ***III. Prospects for Organic Agriculture in the Philippines***

Implementation of various organic agriculture programs which covers the whole value chain from production, value adding, processing, up to marketing, is a promising approach to increase organic agriculture areas and further strengthen organic agriculture industry in the Philippines.

Specifically, the myriad support to PGS groups will incentivize PGS certification among small organic agriculture farms. The support from the establishment of organic agriculture livelihood programs, multiplier farms and local seed centers hopes to strengthen the organic agriculture value chain. Research findings will improve organic agriculture production and processing technologies. Massive information and advocacy campaign through various platforms, will educate consumers and the public on the benefits of organic agriculture. The roll-out of information caravan with provision of template for the formulation of local ordinances will accelerate the institutional support of LGUs to organic agriculture. Lastly, the support from the establishment of agro-ecological areas in ancestral domains and small island communities, upon the request of their respective leaders, will increase the organic agriculture areas in the country astronomically.

In summary, with the continued support from policymakers, science community, national government agencies and LGUs, producers and consumers, the prospect for organic agriculture in the Philippines is GOLDEN.