Eminent rice scientist and academian appointed new SEARCA Director

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio has been appointed as new SEARCA Director for a three-year term and he assumed office on 1 May 2019.

Dr. Gregorio is the eleventh to hold the top SEARCA post since its establishment in November 1966 by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO).

Dr. Gregorio is an Academician at the National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) of the Philippines. He is also currently a professor at the Institute of Crop Science of the UPLB College of Agriculture and Food Science.

A distinguished rice scientist, Dr. Gregorio served the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) for almost 30 years, including a five-year stint as IRRI's rice breeder in Africa based at Africa Rice Centre station at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Nigeria from 2004 to 2009.
BUTUAN CITY, Philippines—Step up and step out! Be at the forefront of development!

This was the rousing message of Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, to the graduates of Caraga State University (CSU) at the CSU commencement exercises themed “Breaking Barriers for Relevant Global Engagement” and held on 30 May 2019.

Having hailed from the mountains of Bukidnon where he was born and studied through high school, Dr. Gregorio related how he stepped up and stepped out into college at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) and stepped out in his career at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) working on rice breeding for tolerance to saline-prone and problem soils and other varieties, taking him all over the country and the world, and later as crop breeding manager for corn at East-West Seed Company.

Dr. Gregorio noted that CSU is an excellent school that has equipped its graduates to make a difference in their chosen field.

Headed by Dr. Anthony M. Penaso, CSU offers undergraduate and graduate programs in agriculture, information technology, mathematics, and science education. Other undergraduate programs it offers are engineering, forestry, and sciences. It also has a graduate program in environmental management.

Dr. Gregorio nonetheless pointed out that “stepping up and stepping out does not necessarily require you to make your career in another province or another country.”

“Rather, it means not limiting yourself in your thinking and aspiring, not allowing geographical barriers or perceived hindrances due to your field of expertise to keep you from maximizing your contribution to the global community, even as you work and make a difference in your local capacity,” he said.

Having just assumed the top post at SEARCA, Dr. Gregorio shared how his new post gives him the privilege to think and influence globally while being able to influence and act locally.

SEARCA is mandated to promote inclusive and sustainable agricultural and rural development in the Philippines and the 10 other Southeast Asian countries. SEARCA does this through programs that offer graduate scholarship and institutional development assistance, conduct research and development, and provide science-based information to those who need it most.

Dr. Gregorio said four of CSU’s own faculty members are among the 1,400 recipients of SEARCA scholarships who have completed their PhD and master’s studies and have gone on to occupy high positions of responsibility in governments, academe, private sector, and international and national institutions. He said some have even become ministers, deputy ministers, members of Parliament or Cabinet, presidents of universities, and other prestigious posts.

Moreover, Dr. Gregorio shared that SEARCA has also been working with partners to contribute to internationalization of education in the Philippines to address the challenges and changing landscape of Southeast Asia’s labor market brought about by the ASEAN integration.

“This includes building technical and leadership capacities of faculty, continuous curricular reforms, strengthening government-industry-academe partnership, increasing student and faculty mobilities, and enhancing English language proficiency,” Dr. Gregorio explained. He said all these steps are towards a bigger initiative of universities to ensure equitable access to job opportunities and high-quality skills development trainings.

In closing, Dr. Gregorio enthused CSU’s Class of 2019 with inspiring words of SEARCA’s founding Director Dioscoro L. Umali: “Be the heroes we never were and live.” (LLDDomingo)
SEARCA alumnus keynotes UPLB recognition rites

Dr. Weerapon Thongma, Acting President of Maejo University, Thailand and SEARCA alumnus, challenged fellow graduates of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) to become leaders of their institutions during the UPLB Graduate School Hooding and Recognition Ceremonies held on 21 June 2019.

The ceremony was attended by 358 master’s and doctoral students, one day before receiving their graduate degrees at the 47th UPLB Commencement Exercises.

Having completed his PhD in extension education at UPLB under German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)-SEARCA scholarship, Dr. Weerapon shared his insights on how to be successful with the graduating class.

He emphasized the values of ethics and kindness, of doing the right thing, and endeavoring to do more than what one has promised in order to succeed as leaders.

Furthmore, Dr. Weerapon reminded the graduates, who hail from various parts of the world, that as future leaders, they should enrich their respective skills while being respectful of other people and culture.

Dr. Weerapon is among the many SEARCA alumni who have gone on to occupy positions of leadership in academe, government, research, civil society and private sector in their respective countries or at international institutions.

Maize industry in Cambodia publication off the press

The proceedings of a policy roundtable on the case of maize industry in Cambodia conducted by SEARCA and partners in December 2018 has been published.

SEARCA and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), organized the policy roundtable under the project Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration in the ASEAN Region: Responding to Food Security and Inclusiveness Concerns (ATMI-ASEAN). Funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), ATMI-ASEAN is implemented by IFPRI and SEARCA.

ATMI-ASEAN focused on strengthening the institutional capacities of ASEAN Member States (AMS) to develop and implement policies and sub-regional programs in support of the integration of smallholders in agriculture and food markets. Specifically, the targeted AMS were Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

The policy roundtable was the first major event of the ATMI-ASEAN project in Cambodia on maize or corn, the country’s third largest agricultural commodity produced, next to rice and cassava.

The proceedings of the policy roundtable discusses the state of food security and nutrition in Cambodia and the opportunities and challenges in agricultural trade in the country. Moreover, it detailed policy options in support of increasing the competitiveness of Cambodia in the domestic and international markets with focus on its maize industry. The publication also contains an assessment of the potential role of farmers, civil societies, as well as private sectors in supporting the integration of small-scale rural producers (SSRPs) in the regional and global value chains.

Eminent rice scientist/ from page 1

Throughout his career, Dr. Gregorio has bred more than 15 rice varieties, most of which are salt-tolerant varieties that have greatly helped farmers in Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, and the Philippines. He also led efforts to develop micronutrient-dense rice varieties to address anemia and malnutrition in Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

But rice breeding is not Dr. Gregorio’s only forte. Prior to his appointment as SEARCA Director, he also served as Crop Breeding Manager for Corn at the East-West Seed Company, Inc. from 2015 to 2018 where he was the global lead of the sweet corn and waxy corn breeding programs for South and Southeast Asia, the Latin Americas, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Dr. Gregorio has been the recipient of numerous awards, including Outstanding Young Scientist Award (OYS 2004) and Outstanding Publication Award given by NAST; The Outstanding Young Men (TOYM 2004) in the field of Agriculture-Plant Breeding and Genetics; the Ho Chi Minh Medal Award for great contribution to the cause of agriculture and rural development in Vietnam; Ten Outstanding Youth Scientists (TOYS 1981) of the Philippines given by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) of the Philippines; Honorary Scientist, Rural Development Administration (RDA), Korea; and other awards for his outstanding research and research management achievements.

He has authored and co-authored at least 90 articles published in various scientific journals, chapters on rice breeding in 14 books, and five scientific manuals and bulletins. He mentored and supervised 20 PhD and 27 MS students and more than 40 BS students in plant breeding and genetics at UPLB and other universities in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America; and he continues to hone scientists and future scientists as a mentor and teacher.

Dr. Gregorio obtained his PhD in Genetics, MS in Plant Breeding, and BS in Agriculture at UPLB.
In keeping with its commitment to promote inclusivity and sustainability in agricultural value chain development, SEARCA conducted the 2nd Value Chain Development (VCD) Course on 22-26 April 2019 at its headquarters.

Now on its second year, the SEARCA-pioneered VCD course aimed to analyze and design interventions through the agricultural value chain lens in order to promote value addition for various value chain players, especially the marginalized actors in the process.

The course also sought to enable the participants to identify gaps and design interventions that integrate inclusivity given the socioeconomic dynamism, production technologies, and government and market structures in both national and regional context across Southeast Asia.

The second course offering introduced a more well-balanced facet of inclusivity by using the gender lens through a lecture-discussion on gender mainstreaming in agricultural value chains and integration of the gender element in the workshop discussions and outputs throughout the course.

The course trained a cadre of 20 research and development professionals and practitioners from the academe, government institutions, and local government units in Southeast Asia.

Faculty members of the UPLB College of Public Affairs and Development (CPAf) led by Associate Prof. Wilfredo Carada served as resource persons and training facilitators. With him were Dr. Aileen V. Lapitan and Professor Rhea Ledesma-Gumasing.

Associate Prof. Carada stressed that inclusivity means bringing positive and desirable change in activities in the agricultural value chain. Advanced competency and productivity will create an enabling environment for marginalized smallholder farmers and fisherfolks to have greater integration and more opportunities to secure a fair share in the value chain process.

Meanwhile, the need to focus on inclusive agriculture and agribusiness development, and how the elements of inclusiveness and sustainability should work together in the value chain process was underscored by Dr. Nerlita M. Manalili, NEXUS Agribusiness Solutions Managing Director. She pointed out that greater capacities of farmers should always be accompanied by increased market access and opportunities for sustainable growth and food security down to the household level.

Dr. Manalili also enthused the participants to fully understand the value chain context, emphasizing the need to add value in product transformation across the stages and processes of the value chain.

She also explained that that ASEAN countries should address challenges brought about by the changing mix and dynamism of existing market players and commodities for an efficiency-driven market integration in the current globalization of agricultural production.

Mr. John Garrity, United Nations Development Program Economist and Policy Advisor, also shared his expertise on reworking the value chain in the face of digitalization.

The course used 11 lecture-discussions on fundamental frameworks, principles, components and processes of the value chain system, and their practical skills and application as well as interactive training techniques with workshop outputs presented in plenary sessions.

Participants worked in groups to develop a value chain analysis and intervention design on five commodities, namely: cinnamon, rice, mango, high-value crops, and white potato. Each design included a sector situation, value chain analysis and mapping, value chain development strategy, organizational/institutional arrangements for VCD, and a monitoring and evaluation plan.

They also prepared individual re-entry action plans that outline how they will use learnings from the course in their workplace or industry.

(Report from KSerrano/RBBantayan)
BulSU explores collaboration with SEARCA on capacity building

Dr. Cecilia N. Gascon, President of Bulacan State University (BulSU) and a SEARCA alumna, visited SEARCA on 20 June 2019 with Dr. Remedios Azarcon, Director, BulSU Office of Faculty and Staff Development, to explore the possibility of a joint scholarship project. They were received by Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, and Dr. Maria Cristeta N. Cuaresma, SEARCA Program Head for Graduate Education and Institutional Development.

They discussed the potential of starting a joint scholarship to build up BulSU’s Environmental Science Program toward instituting a center for climate change.

BulSU has five campuses, the main campus being in Malolos, Bulacan. It has 14 colleges and a graduate school and offers more than 60 academic programs. Currently, it has 1,138 faculty members and 35,958 students.

Prior to taking the helm at BulSU, Dr. Gascon was also President of Southern Luzon State University (SLSU) and is credited for transforming Southern Luzon Polytechnic College into a full-fledged state university. She obtained her PhD in Forestry at UPLB in 1998 under SEARCA scholarship.

Testimonial program for graduating SEARCA scholars held

A total of 34 SEARCA scholars from eight countries completed their graduate programs in academic year 2018/2019. SEARCA recognized the scholars a testimonial program held on 20 June 2019 at its headquarters, witnessed by the scholars’ family and friends as well as SEARCA staff and two grantees of the Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC).

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, enjoined the graduates to be at the forefront of development. He also told them not to limit themselves in their thinking and aspirations, not allowing geographical barriers or perceived hindrances due to their field of expertise to keep them from maximizing their contribution to the global community, even as they work and make a difference in their local capacity.

In her response, Ms. Deasy Fitriati, PhD in Agricultural Engineering, shared how hard it was...
PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia—A regional workshop on Understanding the Fundamentals of Halal towards Food Security in the ASEAN Region was jointly organized by SEARCA and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) with support from the Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC) and the Food Security Center (FSC) of the University of Hohenheim (UHOH).

Held on 8-11 April 2019, the workshop convened 15 halal researchers, academicians, and officers from government regulatory bodies across six Southeast Asian countries to broaden understanding of the fundamentals of Halal, including its market, science, and technology, as well as the principles of Haram.

At the opening, Dr. Russly A. Rahman, Chairman of the UPM Secretariat, thanked SEARCA, UPM, UC, and FSC for “the tremendous support given to conduct the event” as well as the resource persons. He said the workshop was designed to stimulate an intellectual discussion about halal issues and the challenges that confront the halal industry.

Speaking on behalf of Dr. Fernando C. Sanchez, Jr., Chair of SEARCA’s Governing Board, Dr. Maria Cristeta N. Cuaresma, SEARCA Program Head for Graduate Education and Institutional Development, said the event serves as a venue for a more comprehensive understanding of halal and how it could contribute to food and nutrition security and to the overall competitiveness of the region’s agriculture and food sector. She expressed the hope that the regional event would be a strategic starting point for the development of a globally recognized standard for halal in the ASEAN region.

In his officiating speech, Dr. Zulkifli Idrus, UPM Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, conveyed his appreciation to SEARCA, UC, and FSC for their financial support to the workshop. He said UPM was the first university in Malaysia to establish a halal center—the Halal Products Research Institute. He noted that the global demand for halal products and business is growing due to the increasing Muslim population and their rising income levels coupled with growing levels of awareness on halal. He also invited SEARCA to explore other possibilities of collaboration with UPM.

During the workshop proper, participants from Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam presented country situationers of the halal industry. Major topics tackled included Basics of Halal, Principles of Halal and Haram, Halal Science, and Halal Technology. Current issues and challenges in the halal food industry, including a discussion on existing regulations and laws on halal and the possibility of harmonizing current halal standards within the region, were also tackled.

The participants came from Cambodia, Indonesia, (Malaysia), the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. One of their major outputs was a re-entry action plan per country that outlined the gaps/challenges in the halal industry as well as their suggested strategies and actions to respond to these gaps and challenges. Another major output was a collaborative regional action plan on building awareness on halal for both consumers and producers, and existing laws and policies on halal and what can be done to further improve such to guide the halal industry.

The workshop builds on the gains of the project titled “Safeguarding and Sustaining the Integrity of Halal Food” implemented by UPM and Tokyo University of Agriculture (Tokyo NODAI) under SEARCA’s Umbrella Program on Food and Nutrition Security for Southeast Asia. The umbrella program serves as a platform for collaborative research, capacity building, and knowledge management in response to the challenges of food and nutrition security in the individual countries of Southeast Asia and the region as a whole.

Under said umbrella program, SEARCA supported the implementation of six regional studies each developed and carried out by UC members. Besides the study on halal food, other projects include a research on food reserves, postharvest systems improvement, indigenous crops, human resource development in agriculture, and the implications of the ASEAN Economic Community to regional food security. (Report from NARamos)
UC members review pasture and forage crops curriculum and research programs

A roundtable discussion (RTD) on the status of curriculum and research programs on pasture and forage crops on members of the Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC) was conducted on 24-25 April 2019 at SEARCA.

The meeting of deans and heads of Animal Science and Crop Science Departments of six UC members aimed to identify the strengths, gaps, opportunities, and challenges in curriculum and research programs. It also recommended solutions to address the gaps and challenges, including those faced by students pursuing forage and pasture science as an area of specialization. The roundtable was partially funded by the Food Security Center (FSC) of the University of Hohenheim. FSC is one of the five centers of excellence under the program EXCEED - Higher Education in Development Cooperation funded by the German Federal Ministry for Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

Officials of the UC members represented at the RTD presented the status of their respective curriculum and research programs on pasture and forage. The participants formed two groups for a brainstorming session to identify common issues, gaps, and challenges with regard to curriculum and research programs. The exercise affirmed that curriculum-related issues include need to increase the number of experts in the field of forage and pasture, strengthen policy support, standardize courses, re-evaluate the number of credited units in the courses, improve laboratory facilities, and mobilize additional financial resources. Issues on research programs cited were the decreasing number of course enrollees, weak communication and networking among forage scientists, lack of government support for research on forage and pasture, and decreasing land area for forage production.

To address said issues, the participants crafted collaborative proposals that aim to help revitalize research and improve curriculum on pasture and forage crops. These include forming a Southeast Asian Forage and Pasture Science Society, conduct of workshops for curriculum standardization in the UC, teacher trainings and student exchanges/internships, joint researches, joint supervision of students, and joint publications. The outputs of the meeting will also be used as basis for determining other possible cooperation programs for the benefit of all UC members.

The UC members represented in the meeting were Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB), Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), and Universitas Brawijaya (UB), all in Indonesia; Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Kasetsart University (KU) in Thailand; and University of the Philippines Los Baños. SEARCA supported the meeting as UC Secretariat. (Report from MGAquino)

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Testimonial program/ from page 5

Ms. Miko Mariz Castro, MS Agricultural Economics, spoke about finding a balance between patience and persistence. She shared how she was able to hurdle her anxieties and know when to seek the help of others. She dedicated the speech to all her fellow scholars and acknowledged all the hard work they have done. She expressed her gratitude to SEARCA for providing a conducive learning environment and facilities to its scholars.

The president of the Regional SEARCA Alumni Association (RSAA) was present during the program. Dr. Josefina T. Dizon, who is Professor at the UPLB College of Public Affairs, congratulated the graduates and welcomed them to the ranks of SEARCA Scholarship Alumni.

Of the 34 graduates, 18 obtained PhD degrees, while the rest earned master’s degrees. Eight of them are from the Philippines; six each from Indonesia and Timor-Leste; five from Vietnam; four from Myanmar; two from Cambodia; and one each from Lao PDR, Malaysia, and Thailand.

SEARCA fully funded 25 of the graduates: the rest were financially supported by the Center’s partners, namely: the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Nagoya University, and the Philippine Carabao Center (PCC). (MGAquino)
MANILA, Philippines—A second meeting of the national project steering committee (NPSC) for the SEARCA-implemented Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration in the ASEAN Region: Responding to Food Security and Inclusiveness Concerns (ATMI-ASEAN) was held on 28 April 2019. The meeting was jointly organized by the Philippine Department of Agriculture (DA) and SEARCA.

The meeting updated the NPSC members and the ATMI-ASEAN project implementers on the status of the national-level policy study on Value Chain Analysis of Selected Pork-based Processed Products in Luzon, Philippines being conducted by the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), and discussed the forthcoming project activities.

The policy study’s initial findings based on the surveys and key informant interviews were presented by Mr. Cenon D. Elca, the lead researcher who is Assistant Professor at UPLB College of Economics and Management (CEM).

Mr. Lerey A. Panes, DA Assistant Secretary for Planning and Project Development and Special Projects and NSPC chair, noted the value of the NPSC’s inputs to provide guidance in project implementation at the national level. He thus enjoined the NPSC members to an active discussion of the study’s results and to make recommendations from the perspective of their respective agencies and institutions.

Project activities upon completion of the policy study were discussed by Mr. Jimmy B. Williams, ATMI-ASEAN Project Support Unit (PSU) Coordinator. These include policy roundtables and technical assistance activities to be organized for the development of the roadmap of pork-based processed products and the national strategic plan of action (N-SPA).

Grants like the ATMI-ASEAN project are meant to harvest knowledge products that will support the investments projects of IFAD, said Mr. Jerry E. Pacturan, IFAD Country Programme Officer for the Philippines and Myanmar. While pork—the chosen commodity for ATMI Philippines—is not among the priority commodities of other IFAD projects in the country, Mr. Pacturan said the experiences, processes, and approach in this project will contribute to the portfolio of IFAD Philippines.

At end of the meeting, Asec. Panes stressed the importance of Philippine government agencies to see eye-to-eye in view of the ASEAN integration and competition from other countries.

The Philippine NPSC is composed of representatives from the DA, specifically the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Project Development and Special Projects, DA-International Affairs Division, and DA-Policy Research Service; DA-Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI); DA-Agricultural Training Institute (ATI); DA-National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS); Philippines Department of Trade and Industry (DTI); Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF); UPLB; Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magasaka (PAKISAMA), a member of the Asian Farmers’ Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA); Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia (AsiaDHRRA); Grow Asia and its national platform Philippine Partnership for Sustainable Agriculture (PPSA).

The project implementers were represented by, Ms. Aniq Fadhillah, ATMI-ASEAN Policy Facilitator of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and Ms. Bernice Anne C. Darwin, SEARCA Program Specialist for Research and Development, together with the ATMI-ASEAN project team on behalf of SEARCA. (Report from LAMCarandang).
HANOI, Vietnam—SEARCA and Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD) co-organized a policy roundtable (PRT) and a national-level meeting of the project Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration in the ASEAN Region: Responding to Food Security and Inclusiveness Concerns (ATMI-ASEAN) held on 10 May 2019 in this city. ATMI-ASEAN is jointly implemented by SEARCA and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The PRT on “Pig Sector in the New Context: Some Policy Implications for Small Pig Households” focused on the rapid value chain study on swine being conducted by the IPSARD Center for Agricultural Policy (CAP) under ATMI-ASEAN. The PRT solicited inputs and recommendations from stakeholders in Vietnam’s swine sector for the completion of the policy study on the same subject.

Speakers invited by IPSARD discussed the status of the pig sector and share some policy implications in view of the recently passed Livestock Law of 2018 in Vietnam. The speakers were Ms. Le Thi Ha Lien, Vice Director of the Center for Agricultural Policy (CAP) of IPSARD; Mr. Nguyen Ngoc Son, Director of the Hanoi Animal Health Department; and Mr. Do Van Hoan, Deputy Chief of the Poultry and Small Livestock Division of the Department of Livestock Production, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Some of the research team’s experiences in carrying out the policy research were shared by Dr. Tran Cong Thang, IPSARD Vice Director General and ATMI-ASEAN focal point.

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, said to transform the ASEAN region into a major conglomerate in global agricultural trade requires institutions and stakeholders to step up and maximize the benefits of borderless trade.

Ms. Fadhilah also reiterated the importance of research studies and discussions on value chain competitiveness in moving toward the establishment of a common market, and to achieve a competitive ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). As a knowledge sharing platform, the ATMI-ASEAN project offers research opportunities focusing on smallholder farmers and small-scale rural producers (SSRPs), that are in line with ASEAN’s priorities.

In support of the project’s objectives and overall goal, events such as this PRT are organized by SEARCA and IFPRI at both the national and regional levels. This PRT will usher in the national TA activities of the ATMI-ASEAN Project for Vietnam. Dr. Gregorio and Ms. Fadhilah then enjoined everyone to participate in the discussions to further improve the outputs of the study and possibly sharpen the focus of the national TA.

The 3rd meeting of the National Project Steering Committee (NPSC)-Vietnam discussed the proposed project activities that comprise the technical assistance package for Vietnam. It also identified potential research proposals that may be developed as offshoots of the pig value chain study and other projects that IPSARD is currently working on. (Report from LAMCarandang)
HANOI, Vietnam—SEARCA was invited to advise on a book titled “Compendium of Climate-resilient Agriculture Technologies and Practices in the Philippines” to be published by the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security in Southeast Asia (CCAFS SEA). Dr. Pedcris M. Orencio, Program Head for Research and Development, represented SEARCA in the consultation workshop convened by CCAFS SEA in January 2019.

Other participants were from the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) Philippines, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), UP Visayas (UPV), and the Philippine Departments Agriculture (DA) and Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

They evaluated the assessment methods and grouping of the climate-resilient agriculture (CRA) interventions and web-based applications on agriculture.

The book is intended as a reference for climate action in the Philippines, especially for its adaptation and mitigation initiative in agriculture.

The discussions included a critical evaluation of the assessment methods and groupings of the CRA interventions. For instance, several participants shared that they modified indicators to properly assess the interventions. Since several practices followed the same principles, proposed new categories of interventions include agroforestry, crop diversification, and soil and water conservation measures.

Aside from CRA interventions, the participants also assessed web-based applications on agriculture. These included the Rice Crop Manager, Smarter Pest Identification Technology, the Individual Tangible Response to Ecosystem Enhancement, Water Management Decision Support System and the Smarter Agriculture Enhanced Agricultural Monitoring System.

The participants lauded the integration of web technologies in climate actions. Nevertheless, they stressed that web developers must look for crop suitability assessments, maps, and other sources in developing agriculture-based applications.

According to Dr. Leocadio Sebastian of CCAFS SEA, the Philippines must transform its agriculture sector to thrive under climate change conditions. The need for an agricultural transformation arises from the complexities of climate change, which traverses the environmental, economic, and socio-political landscapes. The steps he mentioned were grouped into actions and strategies.

The actions refer to the steps that the country must take to achieve agricultural transformation. These include evaluating suitability of technologies and practices, providing relevant climate information services, mapping climate risk and crop suitability, implementing low-emission initiatives, mechanizing farms, diversifying crops and livelihoods, improving access to credit

Discussions at this year’s program focused on communicating biotech in the Philippines, the country’s biosafety regulations for biotech crops, insect resistance management program, the current status of agri-biotech in each country, and plant breeding innovations.

SEARCA was represented by Ms. Danellie Joy O. Medina, Project Associate, SEARCA Biotechnology Information Center (BIC). (Report by DJOMedina)
SEARCA and the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) jointly organized the Program Development Workshop on Sustainable Water Resources Management for Food Security in Southeast Asia held on 26-28 June 2019. In particular, the UPLB Interdisciplinary Studies Center for Water (IdSC Water) and College of Engineering and Agro-industrial Technology (CEAT) worked with SEARCA.

The workshop aimed to contribute to sustainable water resource management systems for food security in Southeast Asia in three ways. One is stocktaking of research, policy, and other initiatives. Another is by identifying gaps that can be addressed through research and development, capacity building, and knowledge management. The workshop also intended to develop an umbrella program that will provide a platform for coordination and strengthen it, networking, and collaboration in research and development, capacity building, and knowledge management among key stakeholders.

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, noted four exigencies of the times. One, food security faces challenges from diminishing water supply. Two, food demand is on the rise despite limited water resources. Three, intensified industrialization affects water demand. Lastly, it is crucial to link sustainable water resources with food security.

The potential gaps and issues that the workshop needed to address were tackled by Engr. Ir. Abdullah Isnin, Director-General of the Department of Irrigation and Drainage of the Malaysian Ministry of Water, Land, and Natural Resources and the current Chair of the ASEAN Working Group on Water Management. He said about 90% of people in Southeast Asia are exposed to unsafe drinking water, deteriorating water quality and pollution leads to environmental issues and public health threats, and that water resource fragmentation is a major concern.

Country reports on the state of water resources and planning were presented by the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Lao PDR, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

The Philippines included in its presentation the plans of government to create a department solely for water resource management—the Department of Water.

Vietnam talked of its National Action Plan for Efficient Water Resource Management, Protection, and Use, which is nearing completion and approval.

Thailand reported on the government’s four-pillar masterplan, their risk management measures, and on their National Water Resource Committee that acts as a single chain of command during big crises, among its other pivotal roles.

Lao PDR stressed that 90% of the Lao population are located along the Mekong River, which makes their Integrated Water Resource Management strategies are crucial to their development plans.

Malaysia’s National Water Balance System innovatively makes forecasts, warnings, and reports for certain climate situations through a WhatsApp group, a website, and local government authorities.

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Technical sessions covered managing high variability of water supply in agriculture; the challenges and cooperation in integrated river basin management; modernizing agriculture for improved crop and water productivity; and policy support to water security in agriculture for database management, investments, and governance.

Drawing from the technical sessions, the first workshop was conducted to determine priority areas and gaps in research and development. The second workshop came up with the themes for the Umbrella Program for Sustainable Water Resource Management for Food Security in Southeast Asia. (Report from RBBantayan)
Researchers learn media production under IKM Mentorship Program

Technical and information officers from regional offices of the Philippine Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) and other DA-attached agencies learned how to do on video editing and online media production at SEARCA on 24-26 April 2019.

They gained the new skills during their third face-to-face (F2F) session under the Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) Mentorship Program: Communicating Agriculture and Fisheries Research for Inclusive and Sustainable Development (CAFRISD). The 16 learners are the second batch of IKM Mentorship Program participants.

A capacity-building project funded by DA-BAR, the IKM Mentorship Program aims to facilitate improved agricultural and fisheries research reporting and knowledge management. It employs a blended learning approach that combines online and face-to-face learning tools and methods.

“Video production skills are very useful especially at this time when technology has changed how people, including our farmers and fisherfolk, access information,” said Dr. Fernando C. Sanchez Jr., Chair of the SEARCA Governing Board, in his welcome remarks delivered by Ms. Nancy M. Landicho, Program Specialist and Officer-in-Charge of SEARCA Project Development and Technical Services (PDTS).

Meanwhile, Ms. Julia A. Lapitan, Head of DA-BAR's Applied Communication Division, delivered the opening remarks on behalf of Dr. Nicomedes P. Eleazar, DA-BAR Director. In his speech, Dr. Eleazar highlighted the role of the learners as communicators.

“As communicators, you have a big role to fill so we can achieve the goals that were set before us. IKM does not only focus on the technology, but more on people and processes. Its role transcends to bring people together, creating an enabling, encouraging environment, in our case, for our farmers and fishers and their communities,” he said.

Mr. Joseph Lydio R. Roble III and Mr. Antoni Kristofer R. Lim, both video production specialists from the UPLB College of Development Communication, led the lectures and hands-on exercise on video production and editing.

“I liked the hands-on activity the most. It’s my first time to use a video editing software in a computer. I’ve realized that there’s so much more to explore to make your video more interesting and appealing to the eye,” said Michelle E. Javier, a participant from the DA-Bureau of Plant Industry.

The three-day session also featured an introduction to online media writing and production. Ms. Rikki Lee B. Mendiola, Online Learning Specialist, facilitated an exercise in which learners examined trending topics on Twitter and Facebook and discussed successful online initiatives related to agriculture and fisheries.

At the end of the F2F session, the learners’ showed their draft audio-visual presentations featuring a specific research or technology of their respective institutions.

The session was co-facilitated by Ms. Mendiola and Asst. Prof. Elaine DC. Llarena, Asst. Prof. Pamela Joyce M. Eleazar, and Asst. Prof. Edmund G. Centeno, all of UPLB-CDC. They actively mentored the learners in developing their modular outputs and kept track of their progress. The Final Assessment and Testimonial Ceremony of the Batch 2 learners is slated on August 2019. (SPPasiona)

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and insurance, promoting entrepreneurship to farmers, engaging the private sector, building climate-proof infrastructures, and training the youth in agri-entrepreneurship.

Strategies on how these actions can be implemented in the Philippines include adopting integrated landscape approaches, empowering farmers and farmer organizations, digitalizing the agriculture sector, mainstreaming low-emission development, improving access to financial platforms, enhancing social inclusion, and educating consumers and producers. (Report from PMOrencio)
SEARCA leads youth and gender inclusion session in Asia-Pacific meet

INCHEON, South Korea—SEARCA organized the session on Youth and Gender Inclusion in Forestry of the Asia Pacific Forestry Week 2019 (APFW 2019) held in this city on 17-21 June 2019.

APFW 2019 was jointly organized and hosted by the Korea Forest Service and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

SEARCA manages the ASEAN Working Group on Social Forestry (AWG-SF) Strategic Response Fund (ASRF) and has drawn from this experience for its participation in APFW 2019.

In the session overview, Dr. Pedcris M. Orencio, SEARCA Program Head for Research and Development, said the experiences from countries in the Asia-Pacific region show the transformative impacts of empowering men, women, youth, and indigenous communities to manage forest and natural resources, resulting in substantial benefits such as capital formation and improvements in livelihood and food security.

Dr. Kalpana Giri, Focal Point of the Center for People and Forest (RECOFTC), presented “Forests, power and exclusion: What it takes to include women and youth in forest landscapes?” She highlighted that representation, resources, and rights are the key entry points for inclusion.

Ms. Bharati Pathak and Mr. Suvas Devkotta, Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) and Dr. Ei Ei Swe Hlaing of Myanmar presented their country’s experiences on the role of men and women in forest decision-making. Dr. Ei Ei highlighted that women, both young and old, are empowered through the income, minimal as it is, that they get from NTFP and are able to contribute to household expenses.

Ms. Oindrila Basu, IFSA Representative, talked about “Youth Inclusion in Decision-making for Sustainable Forest Management.” Ms. Basu underscored that youth inclusion in decision-making not only recognizes and encourages their voice and action, but also instills in them a sense of responsibility to the cause of the planet and accountability towards the decisions taken.

The session on youth and gender inclusion in forestry brought together voices of youth and women champions who have led the way to meaningful participation towards sustainable forest management (SFM). It identified gaps and interventions towards streamlining youth and women’s participation in forestry decision-making and their implications for SFM.

The session was facilitated by Ms. Carmen Nyhria G. Rogel, Program Specialist, while Mr. Xyrus Godfrey B. Capiña, ASRF Project Associate, served as rapporteur. (Report from XGBCapiña)
Consumer preference survey on Oriental Mindoro calamansi products done

SEARCA led a consumer preference survey on calamansi concentrate produced in Oriental Mindoro, Philippines.

The survey is part of the market study of the project “Upgrading the Calamansi Value Chain towards Improving the Calamansi Industry of Oriental Mindoro,” a joint undertaking of SEARCA with the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) and Tokyo University of Agriculture (Tokyo NODAI) with funding from the Philippine Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR).

The survey was carried out on 7-12 May 2019 in three Laguna sites: the UPLB campus, a company canteen in Carmelray Industrial Park in Calamba, and a public resort in Los Baños.

Information collected included the consumer preference and acceptability of the calamansi concentrate from the Matulatula Agrarian Reform Community Cooperative (MARCCO), the Victoria Kalamansi Farmers Federation (VKFF), and the Pakyas Rural Improvement Club (PARIC).

The survey also aimed at identifying the product which would most likely be preferred by the consumers, and the characteristics of the product they seek.

The survey meant to elicit the buying behavior of the consumers, the usage, and the reason(s) for consuming the calamansi concentrate. The respondents were asked to taste all the products and to rate how well the products satisfied the following attributes: sweetness, bitterness, dilution, color, aroma, price, pulp bits, packaging, and label. The willingness to pay and buying price of the respondents were also asked in the survey. The Market Study component is led by Dr. Julieta A. Delos Reyes, Associate Professor of the UPLB College of Economics and Management (UPLB-CEM) and Market Specialist of the project and Dr. Matilde V. Maunahan, University Researcher II of the UPLB Postharvest Horticulture and Training Research Center (UPLB-PHTRC) and Study Leader. (Adelaine C. Arganda)

Project stakeholders tour calamansi farms, processing facilities in Northern and Central Luzon

Stakeholders of the SEARCA-led project titled Upgrading the Calamansi Value Chain towards Improving the Calamansi Industry of Oriental Mindoro joined an educational tour organized by SEARCA and the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB). The project is funded by the Philippine Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR).

The tour participants were calamansi farmers and the representatives of the local government units of Naujan, Pola, and Victoria as well as the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist of Oriental Mindoro.

They visited the citrus germplasm collection in Nueva Vizcaya State University (NVSU) and the calamansi farms and processing facilities in Nueva Ecija and Tarlac on 24–27 June 2019.

The farmers also had the chance to see actual demonstration of massive pruning to enhance production and the use of mist blower for the application of pesticides and/or fertilizers.

The marketing channels and distribution of calamansi products among provinces were also discussed during a focus group discussion (FGD). The farmers also learned from each other’s experiences on calamansi production and processing of products such as calamansi concentrate and ready-to-drink juice.

The tour was carried out under the project component on Improving existing production management for increased yield and off-season fruiting. (Report from AGCVallez)
Survey of calamansi pests and diseases completed

A baseline survey of pest and diseases in calamansi farms and plant nurseries accredited by the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) in the province of Oriental Mindoro was carried out on 10-12 April 2019 by SEARCA. The survey is part of the project titled “Upgrading the Calamansi Value Chain towards Improving the Calamansi Industry in Oriental Mindoro.”

The project team for the promotion and dissemination of integrated pest management strategies component of the project conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) with the Victoria Kalamansi Farmers Federation (VKFF) in the municipality of Victoria as well as Matulatula Agrarian Reform Community Cooperative (MARCCO) and the Matulatula Fruits and Citrus Growers Association (MFCGA) in the municipality of Pola.

The FGDs provided the project team with a better understanding of the crop protection practices of farmers in handling pests and diseases. The discussions revealed that the farmers use pesticides with Cypermethrin as the active ingredient. Due to the repeated use of the same chemical in the past years, the chemical is losing its effectiveness in controlling the pest populations. The farmers were introduced to new formulations of insecticides as a substitute to Cypermethrin. Additionally, they were also advised to adopt biological control practices such as the use of predators (lacewings) and parasitoids like Trichogramma.

During an interview with Ms. Lorna A. Cepillo, Officer-in-Charge of the Plant Quarantine Services of the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) in Oriental Mindoro, regarding disease indexing protocols as well as certification and quarantine regulations for calamansi planting materials, it was found that there is no accredited nursery in Oriental Mindoro that produces disease-free seedlings. The local BPI office uses the Iodo-starch test for disease indexing. Leaves showing symptoms of a disease are tested. However, the test has a particularly low sensitivity to the pathogen and will not easily be detected in earlier symptoms on the leaves.

This project is funded by the Bureau of Agricultural Research of the Department of Agriculture (DA-BAR). The project team is headed by Dr. Flor A. Ceballo and Dr. Filomena C. Sta. Cruz, Associate Professors of the University of the Philippines Los Baños-Institute of Weed Science, Entomology and Plant Pathology (UPLB-IWEP). (Report from JADAd/AGCVallez)

Demo farm sites in Oriental Mindoro selected

SEARCA’s project “Upgrading the Calamansi Value Chain towards Improving the Calamansi Industry in Oriental Mindoro” identified possible areas for the establishment of demonstration farms to improve the existing production management for increased yield and off-season fruiting on 23-24 May 2019.

The project team selected three demonstration farms from each of the municipalities of Victoria, Naujan, and Pola, where the best practices in calamansi production will be showcased. These practices include the use of proven technologies and practices in irrigation, integrated pest management, correct fertilizer application, canopy management, off-season fruiting, and post-harvest handling.

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World Food Prize-winning seedsman a champion of ISARD

“It was all about creating added value for the farmer. And this is really the heart of the matter for serious seeds people: how can we create added value for the farmers?”

These were the words of Dr. Simon N. Groot, the 2019 World Food Prize laureate, at his commencement address during the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) graduation rites held on 22 June 2019 where he was also conferred an honorary Doctor of Laws degree in recognition of his outstanding achievement in his field and exemplary service to his fellowmen.

The World Food Prize is an international award that recognizes the achievements of individuals who have advanced human development by improving the quality, quantity or availability of food in the world. Dr. Groot will formally receive the award, also known as the “Nobel Prize for Food,” on 17 October 2019 at Iowa State Capitol in Des Moines, United States.

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, said the life’s work of Dr. Groot producing seeds revolutionized vegetable farming and transformed the lives of millions of smallholder farmers.

“He is a champion of SEARCA’s strategic thrust on inclusive and sustainable agricultural and rural development (ISARD)” said Dr. Gregorio, who counts it a privilege to have worked with Dr. Groot at East-West Seed from 2015 to 2018.

Dr. Groot is the founder of East-West Seed, a company that develops tropical vegetable seeds that help farmers grow better crops. A sixth-generation Dutch seedsman, Dr. Groot came to the Philippines in 1982 and started East-West Seed with Benito Domingo, a Filipino seed trader.

More than 35 years later, East-West Seed prides itself in having grown from a five-hectare lot in Lipa City, Philippines to offices and production sites in seven countries, serving more than 18 million farmers in 60 countries.

Speaking from his six decades of experience in the seed industry, Dr. Groot said “in general, small farmers with some basic farmer extension support and good seeds can jump their income from vegetable farming compared to rice farming. And we have proven that thousands of times in this country, and we will continue to do so.”

He stressed that “seedsmanship needs to be backed up by solid applied science…. but primarily it takes passion for farmers, big and small. And that’s the lessons I learned in 60 years of very intensive seedsmanship.”

During his commencement address at UPLB, Dr. Groot also shared that “one of the many letters of congratulations upon my World Food Prize 2019 said: ‘You have helped small farming communities move from subsistence farming to horticultural entrepreneurship’ and that quotation made me very proud.”

Indeed, Dr. Groot is a remarkable champion of ISARD! (LLDDomingo)

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The SEARCA project is funded by the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR) and jointly implemented with the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB). (AGCVallez)

The project team from UPLB visited selected calamansi farms in Oriental Mindoro for the establishment of demo farms.