ENGAGING EVERYONE IN AGRICULTURE- KEY TO SURVIVAL

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For a country known for its bountiful natural resources, the Philippines has been pretty occupied importing food to sustain the needs and thus insure the survival of its people. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, almost half (49.85%) of total rice stocks inventory on July 2018 were from households, 47.47 percent from commercial warehouses, and the remaining 2.68 percent were from NFA deposits wherein the latter was comprised of 48.78 percent imported rice.

Some would point out that geography plays a crucial role on why we cannot produce enough rice for our people. Unlike Thailand and Vietnam, which are the world’s top 2 rice exporters, we do not have major river channels as we are a nation of islands (Dawe, Moya & Casiwan, 2018). Adding to the geographical constraints, many of our agricultural lands were now lost and had become commercial or residential lands. What is mostly alarming however is that we are losing our farmers. They are getting old but a lesser number of young farmers are surfacing to take the soon-to-be vacant positions.

A saying goes like this: ‘If you like to eat, then you have to like agriculture.’ Yet, the number of enrollees in agricultural schools is not promising. The digits could not compete to the list of who dream to be engineers, lawyers and more. The government was even forced to grant free tuitions through Republic Act (RA) 10391 just to shore up enrolment in agriculture courses.

Our kids hold the future of agriculture and they are expected to be the next generation who will be feeding our country. It is our responsibility to educate the youth and consumers about agriculture. Farming First publication (2013) encourages that
agriculture in the curriculum should be included by school systems across the world at all grade levels. The hands that will feed us in the time to come should be prepared to take on that responsibility.

The task, of course, is big as the competition between agriculture and other areas of specialization is not favorable to the former. Agriculture certainly is not the favorite. This presents challenges to schools as agriculture should be in the mainstream of education even at the lowest levels. Agriculture could be integrated in math, science, language and other subjects. The industry is much bigger than just producing foods, cultivating land and nurturing earthworms. There is so much misinformation about agriculture that has to be corrected and it is the responsibility of everyone to have it corrected.

Our country is bound to starve if we continue to traverse the narrow path we are currently taking. Food is an integral part of our history and culture and we should start to realize the need to strengthen skills and appreciation of agriculture among ourselves specially to our youth. Amidst the confusion and ruckus that comes with globalization and the digital age, getting our hands dirty in tilling our lands would prove to be mostly essential for the survival of our race.

References: