

NAST AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES DIVISION and **SEARCHA** support the **COALITION FOR AGRICULTURE MODERNIZATION OF THE PHILIPPINES** in promoting local food systems during the COVID-19 pandemic



THE LOOMING FOOD CRISIS

Today, the nation is in a state of widespread confusion, fear, and feeling of helplessness in the face of deepening threat from COVID-19. Adding to our worries is the justified sense of food insecurity, caused by disruption in the food system. Farmers are afraid to leave their homes, traders are constrained from delivering farm inputs and buying farm products, retailers have to pass through many checkpoints before they are finally turned away, markets have limited hours and some food items are now scarce. We need an alternative and complementary food system, one that is decentralized, de-industrialized, local. We need to prepare for an extended quarantine; food must be secured.

Establishing this new system requires local action by barangay officials, civic-minded citizens, and individual households. We need to do two things:

- 1) establish a community-based food system: production, distribution, processing, waste recycling; and
- 2) enjoin every household to grow food.

Let us secure inputs at the local level: seeds, fingerlings, mushroom spawns, chicks, feeds, biofertilizers, biopesticides, water, land. This requires community effort led by the barangay government. Among the things they can do:

- 1) requisition/rent vacant lots and farms;
- 2) put up deep wells or other facilities for irrigation;
- 3) establish nurseries for plants, animals, fish; and
- 4) put up biofertilizer and biopesticide production facilities.

With inputs secured, the community can put up food production and processing facilities. Local manpower idled and quarantined in the community can volunteer and/or be paid to help. The able-bodied young adults can do the community farms and fishponds. Seniors can do food processing at home, or provide administrative support such as accounting, auditing, and communications. Young people who are less susceptible to COVID-19 can be utilized to distribute food by foot or on bicycles and motorcycles.





Let us set up a local food system that is quarantine compliant and waste reducing. Provide passes for vehicles and people delivering farm inputs (fertilizer, pesticides and seeds) and products. Provide guidelines as to when and where retailers can sell food, and provide local cold storage and processing facilities to minimize food waste. Let us share/sell excess food to needy households in neighboring barangays. Recycle food waste into fertilizer.

Support household food production efforts by providing free inputs to those who cannot afford. Production guides are everywhere, in the internet. Pots and discarded containers can be used if they do not have land. The weather is very favorable. There is enough manpower; utilize hours spent simply watching Netflix.

We call on the barangay officials to act NOW. Make a plan, execute the plan. Keep the virus away but keep the people mentally and physically healthy. The plan should not cost much money. But it requires committed leadership, volunteerism, and civic spirit.

We call on the mayors and governors to provide the needed coordination, financial, and moral support for their barangays.

We call on the national government to provide the policy and technical support and immediately release whatever financial support is already programmed for this purpose. Allocate additional funds if possible.

We call on individuals, organizations, and companies to donate funds and volunteer to help their own community establish this new food system, particularly during the initial phase when government funds are slow in coming.

We call on local people to share whatever food production assets they may have to the needy. These may include backyard patches of camote, malunggay, banana, papaya, cassava, tomatoes, onions, pechay, young edible leaves of various trees, seeds, fingerlings, cuttings.

**It is a time that calls for the Bayanihan spirit.
Please listen, survive.**

