

The Role of the Bureau of Forestry in the Food Production Campaign

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One of the most vital problems facing this country after liberation was the problem of food supply. His Excellency, the late President Manuel Roxas, recognized the importance of this problem, so much so that in his message to Congress on June 3, 1946, he said among other things:

"Famine is a strong possibility; shortage of food is even now critical. We are immediately faced by a shortage—which will grow more critical within the next few months—in our staple food product—rice. In some sections of the country rice is not being planted because of the lack of carabaos and the threat of rats and locusts. In others, planting is diminished because of the absence of law and order and the fear that the harvest may be stolen. There is a world shortage of rice. Many nations of the earth are as unfortunate as we; in the case of our own shortage we can expect very little assistance from abroad. We are doing everything in our power to get as much assistance as we can. I fear that we must look to our own resources to supply a major part of our requirements even for the next critical six months."

Basing on the above Presidential message, the Secretary of Agriculture and Commerce issued Memorandum Circular No. 15 dated June 5, 1946, which enjoined the officials and employees of his department to redouble their efforts in the production of more food in order that starvation may be averted.

In conformity with the above-mentioned

Department Memorandum Circular, the Officer in Charge of the Bureau of Forestry issued Forestry Circular No. 7, dated June 13, 1946, urging Forest Officers to join in the all-out efforts of the Administration and of the Department of Agriculture and Commerce and to increase our food supply by having a family "anti-famine garden" and raise more food crops and vegetable, more poultry, animals and fish. The circular also urged every forest officer to use his personal and official influence in the community to make others take up the work by example and by explaining to the people the imminence of hunger so that they could be made to realize their duties to raise all the food they can and to help conserve the food supply. Finally, forest officers were urged to accommodate as many persons as possible with cultivable areas in such parts of the public forests where *kaiñgin* making will not prove prejudicial to forestry interests.

To give cognizance to the urgency and importance of the movement His Excellency, the President of the Philippines issued Proclamation No. 85, on August 2, 1948, declaring October 2, 1948, as "Food Production Day." In the celebration of the day, the President called upon all inhabitants and civic and religious organizations of the Philippines to undertake the production of more foodstuffs and to carry out effectively the aims of the Food Production Campaign being waged all over the country. All officials and employees of the national, provincial and municipal governments and government-owned or controlled corporations, particu-

larly, were called upon to lead in the practical observance of the day.

To supplement the Presidential Proclamation just mentioned, the Director of Forestry Memorandum Order No. 43, dated August 19, 1948, calling all forest officers to rally not only to preaching and urging the people to help solve the acute food problem, but also to doing individually and actually their share, whenever it is possible to do so. Forest officers and employees, particularly those in the field should cooperate with local officials in their respective jurisdictions for the success not only of the day but also of the campaign thereafter. In the campaign they should contact and enlist the cooperation of concessionaires and sawmill and logging operators who have hundreds of employees and laborers in their employ to help stimulate and intensify the raising of more food crops and animal products.

Since the beginning of this campaign in which the National Government took the lead, the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources did its part not only by enjoining the different bureaus under its supervision to undertake the task thru their cooperation with the provincial, city and municipal governments, but also by actually doing their best on what is possible within their means to achieve the vital aim of the campaign. Thus the Bureau of Forestry did its best in doing its share to carry on the program of the campaign into its full swing. Instructions thru memorandum orders and circular letters were issued to the field men to extend their full cooperation to other government entities and exert their official and personal influence on the public, especially the sawmill and logging operators who have under them a large number of employees and laborers who could contribute a great deal to the execution of the program of the campaign and show more tangible results in solving this national problem.

As a result of these efforts it could be seen that the public in general has responded

in a most favorable manner. Altho up to the present the problem of food shortage still exists, yet it can be said that it no longer stands as a threatening menace in the economic well-being of the nation. And as long as our government and our people stand hand in hand in keeping up the food production campaign not only for a day or a month but thruout the years to come, we as a nation will be proud to show to the whole world that we have by ourselves ultimately solved one of the most threatening problems underlying our nation's economic security.

The Bureau of Forestry in doing its share to carry on the program of this campaign, can show with pride that in some way or another it has contributed, altho how little, both tangible and intangible results to whatever success made by our government in this endeavor. Its field men not only have exerted efforts in preaching the gospel of food production and conservation to all either in group, community assembly, or individual with whom they have come in contact within their offices or in the fields especially in remote towns and barios within their respective jurisdictions in connection with their public relation work and field trips. Besides this there were eight (8) radio speeches delivered by ranking men in the Central Office.

The Bureau personnel in the field have extended their cooperation to provincial and municipal employees in the execution of the program of this campaign. They have likewise extended help to individuals desirous to make kaiñgins in portions of public forests for purposes of food production, as long as it was not contrary to the existing policy on forest conservation. The classification and delimitation of alienable and disposable lands within unclassified public forests had been enhanced to give more room for agricultural expansion and development throughout the country, particularly in Mindanao. During the last fiscal year (1950-1951) there were 36 Land Classification Pro-

jects certified to the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources with corresponding total areas of 89,892.8 hectares, which were declared agricultural lands. These areas are mostly found in Mindanao, Mindoro, Samar, Palawan and other undeveloped regions. The release of mangrove swamps more fitted for fishpond purposes had been made to accommodate individuals or corporations interested in raising cultured fishes. The last fiscal year report of the Bureau shows 382 applications for fishpond permits covering 8,781.4 hectares of mangrove swamps were certified to the Bureau of Fisheries as available for fishpond purposes. Besides, from the above, there were also a total of 896 miscellaneous permits covering 4,070.51 hectares granted or issued inside our public forest to accelerate food production.

As direct contribution of the personnel of this Bureau in this campaign, the reports from field men show that as of May, 1950, a total of 500 hectares in various parts of the country were planted to rice, corn, bananas, tubers, vegetables and fruit trees by the personnel themselves. There were also raised pigs, chickens, carabaos, goats and ducks, particularly by the personnel of the Division of Forest Investigation, Bureau of Forestry at Los Baños. The personnel of the Manila Central Office maintain a community garden in an 80-hectare tract at Diliman, Quezon City, where mass planting had been started on May 13, 1950, led by Director and Mrs. Florencio Tamesis themselves. An area of about 800 square meters was planted to various kinds of vegetables and fruit trees, the seeds and seedlings of which were secured from the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources. With these activities, the Bureau of Forestry, both in its capacity as a government entity and in the individual efforts of its personnel, can humbly point out that it has contributed, however small, towards whatever success that has been attained in this campaign so far.

Up to the present, however, we can not really say that the problem of food shortage in this country had been thoroughly solved. Altho, as I have said, we have so far attained favorable results in this campaign of food production, yet, it seems to me that we have crossed only halfway the stream of the rushing current of this problem. And if we stop right where we are, we may be drifted and be carried along by the current that will surely bring us towards the yawning ocean of starvation, or otherwise drift us back to the shore where we have started at the very beginning of this campaign, a situation more precarious than ever before.

It behooves us, therefore, to redouble our efforts in our endeavor to produce more food, especially rice, corn, vegetables, poultry, meat and fish until at last we find ourselves standing on the solid ground of self-sufficiency in our food supply. Then and only then can we rejoice and look back with pride on our past struggles in the solution of this grave national problem.

One of the many obstacles that hinder us in solving this problem is the unfavorable peace and order situation existing in many parts of the country today. Our government, however, is doing its best in trying to eliminate this and other obstacles that block us from our final goal in this campaign. We must remember that in any undertaking dealing with the solution of our national problems, we cannot expect the government alone to carry all the burden of the task if we want to insure a successful solution of the problem. We need the full cooperation of the people. Let us then rally behind the wheel and push together so that with our collective efforts, no matter how grave the problem seems to be, enduring success will be easily attained. The Bureau of Forestry, as in the past, is always ready to perform its share in carrying out the program of this campaign until final success is fully attained which will be

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tecting and conserving these sources of food, our forests at the outbreak of the war became a refuge and substantial source of food for refugees and evacuees during the occupation, a time which gave opportunity to the guerrillas and other people who evacuated to the hills to appreciate the vast immense store of natural wealth hidden in the forest.

The depletion of these food resources was accelerated in recent years particularly during the Japanese Occupation. For "ubod" alone, various species of palms and rattans of various ages and sizes were cut for their tender buds, the rest, usually large trunks and long pieces of rattans were left in the forest to rot, in parks, forest reserves, communal forests and the vast unclassified public forest land. Some 40 years ago pure stands or blocks of buri numbering two million in Mindoro and nine million in the Rio Chico region of Pampanga and Nueva Ecija were found. The bulk of these forests is gone. Only few and scattered trees remain at the present time. There is more urgent need at the present time not only on the part of the government, but on the part of the people as well, to protect and conserve all available fruit-bearing trees in the forest, and to see to it that forest rules and regulations are strictly observed.

Forest lands could be availed of by enterprising entrepreneurs on a lease basis under Republic Act No. 121 for the cultivation of fruit-bearing trees in remote places in order to stave off food shortage and promote the standard of living of every Filipino family. A nation cannot endure when a portion of it is well-fed and another portion is starving. Let us then conserve all sources of food as it is available in our forest land to supplement our cultivated food crops so that everybody may be sufficiently fed at all times.

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manifested in the self-sufficiency of our food supply throughout the country.

The measure of our self-sufficiency in our food supply may be judged from the existing prices of commodities in the market. In the case of rice, if only we could produce more of it to flood the markets so that instead of its sky-high price of ₱1.15 a ganta nowadays, the same may be brought down to its pre-war level of ₱0.30 a ganta, then we can safely say that we are self-sufficient in our supply of rice. If the same could happen in the case of other foodstuffs, it will be indeed a gratifying indication that our efforts in this food production campaign is fully rewarded.

With the present critical world situation, our need for self-sufficiency in food supply is greatly aggravated. His Excellency, the President of the Philippines, in his recent message to Congress has sounded a call for preparedness to all people. We can do no better to respond to this call than by doing our share in bringing into its final success the food production campaign being waged by our government throughout the country. The Bureau of Forestry will always do its part for even before this campaign was launched its personnel in enforcing rigidly the provision of Act No. 2812 which prohibits the cutting or utilization of fruit trees and bushes in the public or communal forests without special permit by the Bureau of Forestry, in some way or another has contributed to the conservation of food supply, because of the fact that our forests abound with wild edible fruit trees, palms and shrubs, such as alupag, bulala, mabolo, guavas, barrios, balobo, durian, katmon and many others, on which the less fortunate people in remote places depend mostly for their supply of fruits, particularly during the war.