

Agrarian reform: Progress report



Sec. C. F. Estrella

Land reform is an important issue throughout most of Asia. Here in the Philippines we have a short history of land reform legislation and an even shorter history of land reform results. Most of the progress made in the battle for agrarian reform has been achieved since 1972, and while Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) officials are legitimately proud of what they have done so far, they know much work remains. Below The Republic talks to DAR Secretary Conrado F. Estrella about past accomplishments and future plans.

The Republic: President Marcos recently announced a new government policy for the disposition of certain tenanted plantation lands. There appears to be some misconceptions about it in a number of circles. Would you please clarify the policy for us.

Secretary Estrella: The new policy, announced on the fifth anniversary of agrarian reform last October 21, 1977, provides that tenanted plantation lands devoted to sugar, banana and the like, with areas of 25 hectares, shall be covered by the agrarian reform program. Under this new policy, the President said, "The tenants shall immediately become the co-owners of these particular lands through a corporation, and they shall immediately be given participation in the form of equity and participation in the profits on the basis of such sharing in the ownership of such funds."

There are three basic conditions for the implementation of this policy: (1) the land must be tenanted; (2) it must have an area of more than 25 hectares; and (3) the tenants therein will become co-owners through a corporation. I have already directed the speedy listing of plantations other than rice and corn for purposes of implementing this policy. The plantations will not be divided, as in the case of rice and corn lands, but will be maintained by the landowners, to take advantage of their management expertise. Under the program, landowners would be required to sell stocks on their lands to their tenants and the tenanted plantations converted into corporations to enable tenants to be co-owners of the lands."

Q: There have been some reports on an apparent slowdown in the organization of compact farms, a measure meant to benefit small farmers. Is this true?

A: Yes, there was a slowdown, but this was due to the emphasis given to Operation Land Transfer, where the greater bulk of the field personnel were concentrated. We've begun picking up again. During the past year, 12 compact farms were organized, bringing the overall total of farms organized in the five years since the start of the program to 330, covering 16,660 hectares and involving 10,180 farmer-members. In these farms the average palay production per hectare is 70 cavans.

Q: Just what is a compact farm and what particular benefits does it afford its farmer-members?

A: Compact farms are essentially voluntary groupings of farmers organized to enable them to properly combine and utilize their energies and resources for greater productivity and efficiency. Cultivation, harvesting and other farm activities including marketing are supervised and directed in accordance with a carefully prepared farm plan and budget. Sharing in the costs and returns of production is pro-rated among the farm members according to their individual farmlots.

Compared to family-operated farms, compact farms are larger and can better achieve economies of scale in production. They were established primarily for greater productivity. They are farm units of contiguous or adjacent farmlots with approximately equal productive capabilities, fully irrigated by gravity or by pump, grouped for purposes of consolidating separate individual resources, methods and activities, and cultivated under a single management. Compact farms can be expected to gain significance as they emphasize the concept of "cooperative cultivatorship" and spread the economic view that farming is a business enterprise.

Q: A related project of DAR is land consolidation. How much has been accomplished along this line?

A: Land consolidation, as you know, involves the concentration and restructuring of farmlots which are comparatively irregular, small, fragmented, or scattered, for better management and efficiency of farm operations and production. Such farmlots whose physical shape and structure are unfavorable to modern farming need to be consolidated.

Land consolidation was started on a pilot basis as early as 1974. The DAR initially launched in succession three consolidation projects covering lands earlier acquired for the purpose. It is now consolidating 587 hectares comprising Hacienda Leet in Sta. Barbara, Pangasinan; 1,500 hectares of Hacienda Yulo in Floridablanca, Pampanga; and three landed estates in Bula and Binalabag, Camarines Sur.

Q: What progress has been made in leasehold operation and land transfer?

A: By law, all of the 622,972 tenant farmers in the country are under the leasehold system of tenancy. What the DAR has been doing is assisting the lessees toward perfecting their leasehold status into written and registered contracts. In 1977, some 44,207 farmers were assisted by the DAR in this regard, bringing the number of tenant-farmers with perfected contracts to 304,315, or 48.8 percent of the total number, at the end of five years.

On the other hand, as of February, 1978, DAR had completed the documentation of the transfer of 676,988 hectares to 383,962 tenant-farmers. These figures represented 89 percent of the total hectareage involved in landowner-to-tenant land transfers and approximately 95 percent of the total number of tenant-farmers involved in such transfers. The total number of Certificates of Land Transfer (CLTs) issued during the period was 261,037, or 64.4 percent, working on 450,000 hectares, or 59.2 percent of total hectareage involved.

In addition, some 1,153 hectares tilled by 1,250 tenants are now covered by 1,933 emancipation patents. This number includes the agrarian reform beneficiaries who have accelerated and accomplished full payment of their lands before the end of the 15-year repayment deadline.

Q: How is agrarian reform faring in the South?

A: Last year, DAR concentrated its efforts in the resettlement of evacuees and ex-rebels in Mindanao. Emphasis was on the continuing development of ten newly proclaimed settlements, six of which are in



Financial help in the field from PNB staffer.

Mindanao and Tawi-Tawi. These are part of the development package for the restoration of peace and order and the rehabilitation of rebel-returnees in Mindanao. Last year, some 204 families were resettled, bringing the number of rehabilitated families between 1972 and 1977 to 9,416. DAR now administers a total of 40 settlements with an aggregate area of 709,263 hectares and a population of 48,248 settler-families.

Q: Outside of the projects and programs that DAR has already undertaken, what new programs have been adopted, if any, to complement on-going projects and activities?

A: DAR has recently launched several projects to support the main objective of land tenure improvement. Among these are:

□ **Intensive farming project.** This concerns a new system of rice culture, now operational in the 12 regions of the country, designed to provide year-round employment to small farm family members while at the same time maximizing production and income per unit area.

□ **Integration of agrarian reform into the school system.** This project was undertaken in collaboration with the Department of Education and Culture and the University of the Philippines. Learning materials on agrarian reform were prepared for the different educational levels: posters for kindergarten, readers in Filipino for the first three elementary grades, and lesson plans for teachers in the rest of the elementary and secondary classes, dealing with subjects like communication arts, social studies, history, youth development, etc.



The Filipino farmer: new pride in hard work.

□ **Small farmer development field action project.** This is a new project aimed at developing and strengthening the capacity of small farmers and landless agricultural leaders to "receive" and government agencies to "deliver" services in the rural areas.

□ **Agrarian reform communications unit.** This is a joint project of DAR with the National Media Production Center and USAID to provide information-education-communication support for Operation Land Transfer, particularly in the provinces of Nueva Ecija, Camarines Sur, Iloilo and Leyte. This project also provides support to the information needs of DAR in other areas where its manpower and resources are required.

Q: Can you give a capsule summary of what the agrarian reform program has accomplished thus far in improving the lot of the average Filipino farmer and of the Filipino people in general?

A: The program has gained much headway toward changing for the better the social, economic and political life of a dynamic sector of society. It has given dignity to the tillers of the soil and, with government help, placed into their hands the opportunities to work out for themselves a destiny worthy of the Filipino race. And it has challenged the landed gentry to get into the mainstream of economic activity by actively participating in the industrial development of the country.