

Save the Edible Fruit-Bearing Tree in the Forest

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The main objective of the National Food Production Campaign is the mobilization of all sources of food in quantity and quality, actual and potential with a view to providing every citizen three square meals a day, thus promoting and stabilizing peace and standard of living in every Filipino home at all times. Permit me, therefore, on this occasion to focus your attention on the extent and character of fruit-bearing trees, drawbacks and important measures taken towards their protection and conservation, and the role the Bureau of Forestry has taken to supplement the cultivated food resources of the country.

The number of Philippine tree species producing edible fruits depends to a considerable extent on the degree of culture and density of population. Where the population is dense and food scarce, many inferior plants are eaten. On the other hand, where the population is scarce, wild food plants are hardly utilized. Edible plants from neighboring and more densely populated countries include many which in the Philippines are not considered edible.

According to their use, these may be divided into palms, tubers, protein-containing plants, fruits and vegetables. Among the palms, the "buri" and "kaong" produce substantial substitute for rice in communities where they are found. Nipa and the rattans produce the "ubod" of fame. Next to the palms, are root crops which are rich in starch. Nami or "karot" and "ube" are typical examples. Protein-containing plants are the various kinds of edible mushroom fungi.

Wild fruits or nuts are generally of inferior quality or are borne in such small

numbers, or so high up in the trees as to make collection difficult. There are, however, some striking exceptions. The pili nut considered by most people as superior to almond, is abundant and is a staple article of commerce. The nuts are used considerably in the making of confection. One of the wild mangoes has a fine flavor and is sold in the market in regions where it is found. Mabolo, lanzon, guava, santol, durian, macopa, binayuyo, kalios, tamarind and kamanchile, to mention only a few, are commonly seen in the markets in various parts of the country.

By their nature, fruit-bearing trees and plants were not only protected and conserved, but were planted and cared near homes in orchards and in communal grounds, like plazas and elsewhere, during and even before the Spanish regime in our country. Fruit-bearing trees were included in the yearly planting since the inauguration of Arbor Day in 1906. By legislative enactment, Act No. 2812, prohibits the cutting in public forest or communal forest, of fruit bearing trees which can be used as human food. Four (4) out of 101 forest reserves during the years 1926-1938 were established for the conservation and protection of lanzones, buri, and anahaw in Cotabato, Davao, Nueva Ecija, Tarlac and Zamboanga containing an aggregate area of close to 10,000 hectares. These are among the early measures taken by the Bureau of Forestry to protect and conserve fruit-bearing trees and palms in various parts of the country.

Thanks to these early measures, to the zeal and vigilance of forest officers in pro-

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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.