

MORE THAN A MARKET

By AL CUENCA, JR.

THERE are more or less 67 major public markets in Manila and suburban cities and municipalities.

What passes for markets, however, are merely marginal buildings housing stalls where agricultural produce, meat and dairy products are haphazardly sold.

The premises are congested, disorganized, unsanitary and they lack adequate storage, refrigeration handling facilities. They also do not have enough parking space and facilities for shippers, truck operators and travelling merchants. Even more reprehensible is the existence of undesirable elements who prey on the traders and customers.

Growing Needs

Crammed in some 38.3 square kilometers of land, these markets can hardly cope with the growing needs of the more than 2 million consumers living in the area.

Studies show that starting this year, people living in the area will be consuming 589,213 metric tons of fruits, roots and vegetables comprising 18.25 per cent of the total Philippine supply of that food group; 548,412 metric tons of cereals comprising 8.5 per cent of the country's total cereal supply; 101,066 metric tons of fish, or 11.83 per cent of the total fish supply; and 61,211 metric tons of meat which is 22.76 per cent of the total supply. Should the present natural population growth and migration continue, there will be 3,109,000 people in the Greater Manila area by 1970 and 4,452,000 by 1982. The country therefore has to expand its marketing facilities to cope with this population growth.

Then there is the role of agriculture in the overall economy to consider.

Agricultural Sector

The agricultural sector in 1966 contributed 38.8 per cent to net domestic products compared with 18.6 per cent contributed by the manufacturing sector, and 25.8 per cent contributed by services. The 10 principal exports are agricultural products and it is estimated that two-thirds of the population is dependent on agriculture, with 57 per cent of the labor force engaged in it. More than one-half of the agricultural activities are devoted to raising food crops and livestock.

These factors have led to low incomes for farmers and producers, depriving them of the incentives to produce more, thereby perpetuating the imbalance responsible for the spiraling of prices as population growth outpaces production.

Vast Storage

The Greater Manila Terminal Food Market, Inc., hopes to solve this chaotic condition and provide an immediate answer to the marketing requirements of the people in the greater Manila area.

Occupying 120 hectares of the Fort Bonifacio reservation the farmers' market will also be an entrepot — a vast storage and wholesale distribution center for the produce of, initially, some one million farmers from 27 principal supplier-provinces in Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao.

DBP Aid

The DBP is at present negotiating with a foreign firm to supply equipment and materials for the construction of the market structure through or jointly with a local contractor, install the necessary equipment and provide technical services on either a long term or deferred payment plan.

Not too long ago, Liberal Senator Juan Liwag charged that the establishment of the market com-

plex was a "cover up" for a land-grab of 120 hectares of choice land, and that the establishment of a subsidiary corporation was a violation of the DBP charter and the Anti-Graft Law.

Teehankee Ruling

Responding to the charges, then Justice Secretary Claudio Teehankee ruled that Senator Liwag's opinion "is plainly untenable," and that the provision of the Constitution, which the Senator cited to have been violated, was a prohibition directed against Congress and not at other government agencies like the DBP.

The provision, argued the justice secretary, does not "preclude other methods of organizing a government owned or controlled entity, such as, for instance, by the acquisition of all or a majority of the shares of an existing private corporation to be owned or controlled by the government or its subdivision or instrumentality."

FM Proposal

Notwithstanding this ruling of the justice department, President Marcos, to resolve the issue once and for all, proposed recently in his State of the Nation message that Congress pass a law to define guidelines for the creation of private corporations for a public purpose to erase all doubts as to the legality of these corporations, such as the Greater Manila Terminal Food Market and the National Housing Corporation, and to enable the executive department to plan freely and systematically the set-up of such corporations.

The market complex will provide for the first time a central and systematic marketing and distributing center for agricultural and other food products, with the aim of stabilizing prices, standardizing quality, and increasing the income of producers by removing middlemen. **PM**

