

PHILIPPINE FRUITS, HANDICRAFTS IN FOREIGN MARKETS

SMALL Filipino farmers have caught on with the administration's drive to expand the nation's exports. Fresh fruits, like mango, banana, papaya, guayabano and pineapple, have found markets in many southeast Asian and European capitals. So far the quantities have been limited but the potential for increasing their volume is great.

Even one-man cottage industries, mostly assisted by NACIDA, are now aware they can sell their products for a little bit more profit in foreign lands. Makers of leather shoes from Marikina, abaca bags and slippers from Bicol, woodworks from Laguna and Baguio, brass products from Mindanao and Sulu, capiz and shell processors from Visayas, have succeeded in finding their markets abroad.

There are many more Philippine products finding their own markets outside the country. These bring in dollars to help stabilize the foreign exchange reserves. In the previous year, for example, the country's income from exports amounted to 812 million dollars. Of course, 84 per cent of this were contributed by the ten principal exports of the country, namely, logs and lumber, copra, sugar, copper concentrates, coconut oil, desiccated coconut, copra meal or cake, plywood, abaca, and canned pineapple.

Lately, rice, as a result of the extensive production program of the administration, opened new and bright prospect for export development.

In all these, however, it is the food products that attract more interest because they reach out to the farmer tending small lots of fruit-bearing trees. Fruit farms do not require large amounts of money to establish. There are a few large plantations, like the Stanfilco in Mindanao which grows and export large quantities of bananas, mostly to Japan. Another grows pineapples for exports. But the great bulk

of producers are scattered all over the land. Large incomes stand by their small farms. What are these produce that command good markets abroad?

Mushrooms, for one. Mushrooms grow well in the Philippines. The country's climatic conditions are ideal for raising it. It has excellent export potential. Last year the United States alone had about 20 million dollar demand unfilled. Europe has more. Taiwan, a neighboring country with more or less similar climatic conditions as the Philippines, grows mushrooms. It exports 25 million dollars worth per year.



There is a growing mushroom farm near Baguio which, according to reports, tries to fill the local demand. It can expand to take advantage of the flourishing market for mushrooms in foreign markets.

If a local source of beans in appreciable quantity can be developed, there is a good potential for it abroad. Beans can be grown easily in the Philippines. One company has tried to export this item to Indonesia in small quantities. It has found that market promising great dividends.

There is a firm that now packs mango, papaya, guava and guayabano juices and has succeeded in exporting these products. Because of demand, this firm finds the irregular fruit supply a big problem. Small farmers might find it profitable to increase their yield and help fill the firm's re-

quirements. Some enterprising exporters have even tried successfully to ship bananas and mangoes to Japan and found the venture profitable.

Asparagus holds great promise. It is not at present grown in commercial quantity here but could be developed since climatic conditions are ideal. There is a large unfilled demand for asparagus in western Europe. Taiwan, which produces asparagus in fairly large quantities, exported 10 million dollars worth of canned asparagus in a previous year.

Besides fruits, there are other cottage industry items for export. These include frozen shrimps and tuna, other fish of all types, tomato paste, canned or frozen spinach, pickles. Many handicraft merchandisers have established outlets for their products abroad. Even children's clothing, hand tools like hammer and scissors, paintings and frames, chicken and chicken eggs, leather shoes and travel bags, have export potential.

There is now an opportunity for the country to reverse the trend in its trade imbalance. Heretofore the country has been buying more from other countries and selling less. With a more determined export drive, the country could sell more. The small businessman, farmer and cottage-industry operator, could be assisted to form a strong base for the nation's economy. Toward this end, the Marcos administration had drawn the framework for a breakthrough in foreign markets. Like establishing a national export commission which had reduced the more than 30 steps in the export licensing procedure of the government to a dozen or so. Organizing the institute for small-scale industries at the University of the Philippines to help train small operators in management and technical know-how. And strengthening and expanding the operations of Nacida. All these point to a concerted move. **PM**