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BUSINESS

PCA adopts new coconut propagation technology

By Rainier Allan Ronda (The Philippine Star) | Updated January 31, 2016 - 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines – The Philippine Coconut Authority is adopting the coconut somatic embryogenesis technology (Cset), an alternative technique for mass propagation of coconut, to reinvigorate the industry.

Funded by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Cset involves the use of immature flowers, embryos and plumule.

Researchers found the plumule to be more responsive to in vitro manipulation for the micropropagation of coconut than immature flowers and leaves.

The protocol is currently being enhanced to attain as much as 1,000 seedlings per plumule by using explants from high-yielding tall and dwarf coconut varieties.

DOST Secretary Mario Montejo said there is a huge demand for coconut “plantlets” in view of the millions of senile, as well as typhoon damaged coconut trees in Eastern Visayas, Central Visayas, Western Visayas, and Region 4-B or the Mimaropa (Mindoro-Marindque-Romblon-Palawan).

Amelia Guevara, DOST Undersecretary for Research and Development, said the Cset program is all set for the mass cultivation of improved varieties of coconut seedlings, which in three to four years, are ready to bear fruit.

Started in 2014 with a budget of P215 million, the Cset program is projected to produce three million plantlets a year, Guevara said.

“The secret is doing a secondary cycle,” she added.

Guevara said the DOST currently has seven Cset laboratories where it can mass cultivate hybrid coconut seedlings. These are located in the Visayas State University in Baybay, Leyte, UP Mindanao, UP Los Baños College of Agriculture, UPLB National Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology, PCA Albay Research Center, PCA Zamboanga Research Center, and the Bicol University College of Agriculture and Forestry (BUCAF).

Guevara underscored the need to build more Cset laboratories to increase production capacity.

The coconut industry is the source of income of about 3.5 million farmers, providing economic support to the rural communities.

Through the years, it has exhibited good export performance of both traditional and non-traditional coconut products, earning its niche among the top 10 export produce of the country.

Popularly known as the “Tree of Life,” coconut generates a variety of products and by-products namely coconut meat, oil, juice, husk, pith, fiber, shell, charcoal, infloresence, hardy and durable woods.

The sector, however, faces a lot of problems, one of which is low productivity due to existing coconut stands predominantly with old and senile palms. About a third of the total bearing trees need to be replaced.

In addition to this, productivity levels remain low partly due to lack of information on appropriate technologies for coconut farming and the destruction caused by the coconut scale insect to various coconut plantations. This led to the cutting down of infested trees for lumber to mitigate losses.