

DepEd to Prioritize Family Farm Schools

By: *Elsa S. Subong*

CHILDREN of farmers will soon find a school right in their farms as the Department of Education is bent on establishing family farm schools.

DepEd-6 Assistant Regional Director Corazon Brown said that Secretary Armin Luistro has given them the marching order to put up family farm schools to encourage students to pursue studies in agriculture courses, a priority thrust of government now.

Brown said the big challenge now for the agency is to plan for special programs in agriculture that will answer the needs of children of farmers and of those who have no farms but are interested in the course.

"It is a fact that children, and even farmer-parents do not even want their children to become agriculturists," Brown said.

Meanwhile, Technical Skills Development Authority (TESDA)-6 Regional Director Florencio Sunico Jr. said that TESDA offers various scholarships for agriculture courses but it is difficult for them to find enrollees.

"We have prioritized courses in Agriculture with the additional stimulus fund on scholarships of the Aquino administration, and slots are open," Sunico said.

Education Specialist Dr. Rex Casiple of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in the region, said the total enrolment in Agriculture for the last four years have been fluctuating, with 6,073 in 2008, 4,762 in 2009, 5,224 in 2010 and 4,920 in 2011 in public tertiary schools.

CHED records also showed that private schools' enrolment in 2008 was 320, in 2009 there was 227, in 2010, 163 and in 2011, only 158.

Casiple said these figures were far behind those in the courses in communications technology, business and medical related.

The DepEd said it will partner with the TESDA and the Department of Agriculture in implementing the family farm schools.

Brown said they were inspired by the experience of the Dingle Family School which they find replicable because of the many families of farmers who have children in vocational and academic courses.

"The recent developments and advances in technology make agriculture courses easier now," Brown added.

Sunico, on the other hand, said TESDA in its thrusts on career advocacy can provide guidance to where the market is, as agriculture, being a priority thrust, the country will have jobs available for the graduates.