

Known for its wide range of crops, livestock, and marine resources, the Philippine agriculture sector serves as the backbone of the economy, providing vital employment opportunities and laying the groundwork for the industry and services sectors. However, the extent of its potential has yet to be fully realised. In the face of ongoing global food crises and various external pressures, addressing underlying challenges in the sector is imperative. This entails increasing productivity; creating high-quality employment; boosting trade and investments; and promoting inclusive growth and development, benefiting smallholder farmers, consumers, businesses, and the public at large.

Today, there is an urgent need to enhance food production and ensure a stable food supply across the nation to sustain the rapidly growing population and increasing demand for food. The Chamber believes that the **pursuit of agricultural value chain development is paramount for the Philippines to address the challenges of food insecurity, poverty, and rural underdevelopment.**

Recognizing the essential role of innovation and digitalization in addressing the numerous challenges facing the industry, the ECCP advocates to **promote and strengthen the use of sustainable and climate-smart agriculture practices, innovation, and digitalisation in the sector.** Relatedly, the ECCP calls key stakeholders to further **invest in sustainable agriculture infrastructure** as this is particularly critical in our country which is highly susceptible to the impacts of climate change characterised by extreme weather events.

One key aspect of agricultural value chain development in the Philippines is the promotion of inclusive growth and equitable distribution of resources. Hence, we urge the government to **facilitate easier access to finance for agriculture stakeholders.** On another note, the ECCP also believes increasing agricultural productivity and achieving food security requires the involvement of different segments of society including the youth sector. As such, we reiterate our support to the government to **boost efforts to encourage youth participation and promote gender equality in the agricultural sector.**

In past years, the livestock and poultry sector continued to face the threat of highly communicable diseases, including the outbreaks of the African Swine Fever (ASF), which impeded the country's food supply and significantly contributed to the increase of prices of food commodities. With this, **the Chamber supports the initiative of the current administration to increase productivity, address challenges, and revitalise the sector.** The Chamber looks forward to the upcoming rollout of the ASF vaccines<sup>1</sup> and welcomes the release of the guidelines on the avian flu vaccination last November 2023<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, the Chamber supports the promotion of ease of doing business by **pursuing a sound, transparent, efficient, and science-based regulatory framework.** In relation to this, the ECCP advocates to **modernise, streamline, and maintain science- and risk-based regulations for fertilisers and pesticides.** The ECCP also reaffirms its support for the **transfer of the regulatory jurisdiction over animal disinfectants from the Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority (FPA) back to the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI).** By implementing such an arrangement, the Chamber is optimistic about its ability to efficiently serve the livestock and poultry sectors. It can be recalled that the BAI had transferred the said jurisdiction to FPA in accordance with the FPA Memorandum Circular No. 11 series of 2021<sup>3</sup>. To add, we recommend **for animal health products to be under the jurisdiction of BAI while health products should be within the remit of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).**

<sup>1</sup> ASF vaccine available by yearend, March 3, 2024

<sup>2</sup> USDA The Philippines Issues Guidelines for Avian Influenza Vaccination, USDA, November 13, 2023

<sup>3</sup> FPA Memorandum Circular No. 11, Series of 2021

Furthermore, the ECCP urges the government to **rationalise the grant of budgetary support for various crops, especially high-value Crops, across the entire country**. Embracing a more inclusive and diversified approach to crop production enables the agricultural sector to broaden its production base, lessen dependence on a limited number of crops, and bolster resilience to climate change, pests, and diseases. Likewise, we are monitoring developments in the **implementation of commodity roadmaps**, eagerly anticipating further information on how we can collaborate to advance our shared advocacy.

As one of the Chamber's long-term advocacies, we reiterate our call to **amend Republic Act No. 7308 or the Seed Industry Development Act (SIDA)**. We emphasize the need for seed regulation standards characterized by a uniform approval process, as well as clear implementation and compliance with science-based regulation. These measures are necessary to consistently harness the benefits of new crop technologies and safeguard their longevity from illegal seeds.

To **facilitate a smoother flow of agricultural products**, the ECCP welcomes and calls for the full implementation of the recently released implementing rules and regulations on the suspension of local government units' imposition and collection of illegal fees and taxes relative to the transport of goods and products. Further, the ECCP welcomes the **continued implementation of the special agricultural safeguards (SSG) on imported coffee and coffee products** in line with the government's thrust to improve local production and reduce reliance on importation, and to ensure a level playing field between importers and local manufacturers. The ECCP has likewise actively advocated for policies that will help **increase domestic and foreign direct investment (FDI) in the Philippines' food and agriculture sector**.

The ECCP and its Agriculture Committee look forward to contributing to this important discussion. We are committed to fostering close collaboration with the government as we work towards our shared goal of helping the Philippines achieve food security, improved farmer incomes and livelihoods, and environmental sustainability.