

## Bamboo sustainability could be biggest draw; regulations pose a hurdle

By Vincent Mariel P. Galang – January 20, 2020

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THE BAMBOO industry is well-positioned to become an alternative building material with a growing niche because of its sustainability, and very little capital and time needed for farmers who intend to grow the crop, a former agriculture department official said.

“The market is big, so *para sa akin, kailangan lang ‘yung produkto natin i-place kung saan mong niche gusto* (the product can fill any niche you want),” former Agriculture undersecretary for policy and planning Segfredo R. Serrano told BusinessWorld in an interview.

There are 62 species of bamboo has 62 species, 21 of which are endemic to the Philippines. Bamboo grows three to six inches per day and takes two to three years to reach harvestable height. Bamboo eventually regenerates, eliminating the need to replant. Its main applications include furniture, building materials, and agricultural use in fishpens.

Mr. Serrano said demand for organic materials is also increasing, providing an opportunity for growers. It can substitute for wood.

“There is species of bamboo for virtually every purpose. Construction, composites,” Mr. Serrano said, noting that bamboo is underexploited.

Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) Research Fellow Roehlano M. Briones said bamboo could be an export product if proper regulation is in place.

“If we can solve the regulation issue, *malaki* ang potential (the potential is large),” he said in a text message.

He cited permits to cut bamboo as a possible hurdle to the sector’s growth.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) requires bamboo farmers to obtain a cutting permit under the Revised Forestry Administrative Order No. 11, dated Sept. 14, 1970. Its regional offices issue the permits. Bamboo inside tree plantations and private land covered by title or tax declarations are exempt from having to obtain permits.

The DENR also monitors the transport of bamboo. Shippers need to be able to provide a Certificate of Non-Timber Forest Products Origin (CNFPO) under DENR AO no. 59, issued Sept. 30, 1993, except for those planted inside titled and tax-declared land.

The Philippine Bamboo Industry Council (PBIC) is planning to convert 19,000 hectares of land, with 13,000 hectares located in the Western Visayas, to bamboo plantations this year. The Department of Trade (DTI) will be providing shared service facilities for processing bamboo.

Bamboo production and processing is entitled to tax incentives under the DTI’s Strategic Investments Priorities Plan.