



All rise for rice!

by Tyrone Velez, June 17, 2017

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WE ARE a rice-loving people. Most of us have rice for breakfast, more rice for refueling at lunch and an optional rice in the evenings depending on your need to reduce carbs. Let's face it, we live and die with rice. That's why some love unli-rice. Some can even have rice topped with (target) toyo, asin or kamatis in hard times. So here comes Senator Cynthia Villar suggesting, with the good intention of helping us eat healthy, to cut down the consumption of well-milled white rice and unli-rice in fast foods. We are on a trend that going organic is healthier, and the well-polished rice we get from markets and fast-foods are just too polished and whitened with less nutrients and potentially harmful. But the problem is, the solution may not be good. As fellow Sunstar columnist Arnold Alamon points out, it's a suggestion without looking at the state of the Filipino table, or kitchen, or farms. Organic farming is good and it is trending among the middle class. But it is expensive, both for farmers producing and for consumers. Somehow the rice cartel and agriculture players are killing this. Multinationals and even the Department of Agriculture are promoting modified rice grains and commercial farming methods with herbicides and all that will harm organic rice and farmers and consumers. For all the boasting of the agriculture department, these things need to be checked. Our rice is being "commercia-riced" Besides that, the senator needs to look into food security. That means looking into why farmlands are being converted into plantations of export crops from bananas, pineapples, palm oil. If not, they are being converted into subdivisions, commercial complexes and highways. It doesn't help that the senator's family investments is into real estate and construction, and they have dislodged farmlands for this. A friend calls this unli-land conversion, which is really unhealthy. And there's more, in the hinterlands where farmers, lumads and indigenous peoples are being bombed no end, more so with the ongoing Martial Law and all-out war. Our fellow Filipinos in the countryside are being "milita-rice" "terro-rice" and "pulve-riced". But senators should look rather at the overall economic policies and agreements that make or un-break our agriculture sector. Did you know that the Philippines entered a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) with China, which in essence would drastically reduce rice production from this point up to 2022? The Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS)-funded study showed that this agreement would sink our rice production by 4% while rice imports will double from the current 2.2 million tons up to 4.4 million by 2022. The same study showed that the income of impoverished farmers will most likely dropped by 29% once this and the lifting of import restrictions will come into play. And our rice production has been dropping 1% yearly. Poor farmers might be eating "memo-rice" more. Perhaps, this is where the negative reaction comes from, when leaders rather decide what is on our table, but they just left the door open to greedy capitalism. And that is why, for the love of our food, our farmers and our land, let's stop these human "rice" violations! Let's rise for rice!

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