

## **Variety exchange yields promising results**

*July 2006*

*PHILSURIN Update (Official PHILSURIN Newsletter)*

The future looks brighter for thousands of cane growers in the Asian region who are set to reap the benefits of a large scale variety exchange program conducted among 5 key sugar producing countries.

The most important accomplishment of the 5-year CFC/ISO/20: Sugar Variety Improvement in Southeast Asia and the Pacific project is the successful exchange of 56 cane varieties of diverse genetic background among Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. The region's sugarcane planters stand to benefit from the importation of new varieties which is deemed to be more cost effective than breeding.

"While it takes 8 years to breed local varieties, imported varieties may be released after only 5 years," PHILSURIN Deputy Director General and CFC/ISO/20 Deputy Project Manager Dr. Ramon M. Cu said. Aside from accelerating the development, introduction and adoption of improved sugarcane varieties, he added that bringing in sugarcane varieties from other sugarcane growing countries helps enrich the genetic base for hybridization.

CFC/ISO/20 member-countries commenced exchanging varieties in 2001. Collaborating agencies Bangladesh Sugarcane Research Institute, Indonesian Sugar Research Institute, Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute, PHILSURIN, and the Office of the Cane and Sugar Board of Thailand each shared a number of varieties. These varieties underwent yield performance trials, as well as stringent pest and disease evaluation process, in several sites.

"Promising canes have been identified in each of the countries," PHILSURIN Director General and CFC/ISO/20 Project Manager Leon M. Arceo said. A notable finding, he says, is that our local varieties such as VMC 84-549, VMC 87-95 and VMC 73-299 are top yielders in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Thailand. Locally, varieties received from Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia comprise the top 10 high-yielding cane varieties.

Also, there are varieties which registered outstanding performance in several countries. This demonstrates that there can be a universal variety suitable to conditions in many locations.

The participating countries were given property rights to the varieties, allowing them to adopt canes that are suitable to their environment. In the Philippines' case, Mr. Arceo says that PHILSURIN will be in a position to commercialize some of these varieties in a year's time.

According to Dr. Cu, the entrance of cane varieties with higher production potential is vital to further boosting CFC/ISO/20 member-countries' productivity. The Philippine experience has shown that the upward trend of productivity over the recent years was largely because old varieties were replaced by new high yielding varieties of cane. Owing to PHILSURIN's massive distribution of HYVs, the country achieved self-sufficiency in 2002.

The variety exchange component of CFC/ISO/20 gave member countries the opportunity to enhance their respective germplasm collections, and utilize the shared varieties in the national hybridization program. Moreover, it enabled them to evaluate their varieties against the existing commercial varieties of each

country. "The project also enhanced quarantine regulatory support by providing the necessary facility and training quarantine personnel to detect exotic diseases using molecular techniques," Dr. Cu said.