

# Farmers buck new twist in new CARP

by MICHAEL LIM UBAC  
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Trouble is again brewing in Congress amid a plan by a congressional panel to exclude lands newly converted to sugar and coconut plantations from the coverage of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

The proposed exemption is unacceptable to farmers, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr. said last April 1, expressing fears that such controversial move would only fuel the restiveness and discontent in the countryside.

In a statement, the senator said this congressional plan would defeat the purpose of land reform since it would greatly reduce the land areas to be distributed to tenant-farmers.

Leaders of Task Force Mapalad composed of agrarian reform beneficiaries contacted Pimentel recently to voice their objection to the reported recommendation of a Senate-House panel tasked to draft the measure extending the program for another five years.

"They feel that the exemption of vast tracts of land being converted to sugar and coconut lands will render meaningless the provision on compulsory

acquisition and distribution of lands which the Senate and House of Representatives have agreed to restore," he said.

In December, Congress approved Joint Resolution No. 19 temporarily extending the Carp for six months, or until June 30, 2009 while the legislature is still hammering out the new law extending the program for a longer period.

But the joint resolution disallowed new acquisition of lands.

If extended for five more years, it will cost P147-billion in taxpayer's money, Sen. Gregorio Honasan had said.

Honasan, chair of the Senate agriculture committee, had said that Catholic bishops were supportive of Senate Bill No. 2666.

Reforms include a very strong oversight mechanism, payment of all obligations and then consolidation of sorely outdated database, according to Honasan.



A farmer tends to his field

# No time left to change Charter—Villafuerte

by GIL C. CABACUNGA, JR.  
Inquirer.net

MANILA—The lead proponent of the constituent assembly (Con-ass) last April 1 admitted that there was not enough time to amend the Constitution before 2010.

Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte last April 1 said that the primary goal of their initiative was to get a definitive Supreme Court ruling that the constituent assembly could be convened by a three-fourths vote of all members of Congress with the House of Representatives and the Senate voting as one and not as separate chambers.

Villafuerte said the convening of the constituent assembly was just the first step in changing the Constitution and with only 13 months left before the May 2010 election, there was not enough time to make any amendments before the elections.

"We have to explain to the public that convening Con-ass was different from changing the Constitution. I only want to implement the exact language of the Constitution through an SC ruling before 2010. We can do Cha-cha (Charter change) after 2010," said Villafuerte in a radio interview.

Villafuerte chastised Speaker Prospero Nograles for muddling the Con-ass and Cha-cha issues by proposing to hold a plebiscite before the 2010 elections to get the public's pulse on the amendments.

"Speaker Nograles is putting the cart before the horse. We only need to pass the Con-ass now. Let's not talk about a plebiscite because we do not need that now, it's already too late," said Villafuerte.

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