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Tree farming to merge with high value crops

The Department of Agriculture (DA) will start integrating tree farming into the existing high value crops program as part of efforts to reshape the local agricultural landscape amid the threats posed by climate change.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol said the tree farming program would be implemented alongside other high value crops particularly coffee, cacao, and *abaca* in mountainous, sloping and undulating agricultural areas to help prevent landslides and soil erosion.

"Farmers who will intercrop trees with other high value crops will be given access to a P15,000-production loan per hectare and will be engaged in a marketing agreement with a paper and pulp company which will buy their harvested trees after five to eight years," he said.

"With an average density of 500 trees per hectare intercropped with other high value crops, a farmer could earn at least P1 million per hectare after five years and as much as P3 million after eight to 10 years," Piñol added.

High value crops such as coffee, cacao and *abaca* grow well with partial shading.

Planting these crops

under fast-growing tree species like *falcata*, *acacia mangium*, *eucalyptus* or *gemelina* have resulted in greater productivity.

The planting of trees as an income generating activity is already being practiced in some provinces but has been under the supervision of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Piñol said Duterte recently ordered improved coordination among DA, DENR and the Department of Interior and Local Government.

"Tree farming will now be differentiated from the simple tree planting program and categorized as an agricultural activity," Piñol said.

Bataan will serve as the first local government unit outside Mindanao to adopt tree farming as an agricultural activity after the province committed a 20-hectare pilot tree farm to be planted with *falcata* and coffee seedlings.

"Zambales will be next after Bataan. We will also introduce this in other provinces in Luzon and Visayas where landslides have been reported following typhoons," Piñol said. - Louise Maureen Simeon

* FARMING

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