

Boracay eyed as site for agritourism dev't

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Think tank Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) is pushing for agritourism development in Boracay in the likes of Bali in Indonesia, Taiwan and Thailand.

SEARCA director Gil Saguiguit said agritourism would ensure that farmers would be able to maximize the hundreds of hectares of land that would be distributed by the government once President Duterte executes an order putting the country's popular beach destination under land reform.

About 15.5 hectares of agricultural land, without structures, could be converted for land reform, an official of the Department of Agrarian Reform earlier said.

To ensure sustainable development of agritourism, Saguiguit said the Philippines could pattern its agritourism business model after Thailand, Bali and Taiwan.

"The most important component would be to teach farmers of Boracay agritourism as an alternative source of income in the mold of Bali in Indonesia where there are paddy areas which attract tourists as much as the island's world-famous beaches," Saguiguit said.

"This is the best time to demonstrate sustainable agriculture practices to show that the invigorated farms would not only be economically viable but also environmentally sound. The importance of forest rehabilitation, re-planting, and protection will also be stressed with possibly significant involvement of indigenous people," Saguiguit said.

"Whatever farmers produce, they can sell right on the island. They don't have to bring out their produce. They can sell raw products to hotels and other tourist locations and explore possibilities for post-harvest processing. These are essentials in an island economy," he added.

Based in the Philippines, SEARCA maintained that Boracay is a prime location to demonstrate that farmers can earn from the tourism boom by providing opportunities for tourists to experience a rural farm setting in the Philippines without having to get away from Boracay.

"The plan is to involve the local government unit and private sector to ensure that the proposed agricultural and rural development initiative will be inclusive and sustainable," Saguiguit said.

SEARCA cited Taiwan's model which adopts "experience economy" to ensure that tourism is more attractive and salable to more urban people.

Taiwan has made its agritourism sector progressive. It now has 3,000 tourism farms. SEARCA has been pushing for aggressive agricultural tourism in the Philippines as a way to integrate operations of small and poor farmers into the national and even international farm economy.

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture (DA) is looking at Batanes as the next agritourism site in the country amid the area's potential for improved production and better tourist destination.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Pinol said the future of Batanes is now clearer with the appointment of former Undersecretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat as Tourism chief as programs will easily be coordinated.

“It is hard to handle Batanes from purely agriculture and fisheries standpoint because they need a lot of infrastructure like ports and roads. It is hard to justify because it requires a huge budget. But with tourism side by side, we can justify it,” Pinol said.

The DA is eyeing Batanes as one of the main sources of planting materials for garlic in line with the government’s goal to make garlic production sustainable in the country.

“Our target by year 2020 is to increase garlic production by 15 percent. I believe in the potential of garlic production in Batanes,” Pinol said.

“The Batanes Red is the best variety that we can grow in many provinces in the country,” he added.

For this year, the DA allotted P17 million for the procurement of garlic seedlings.

The DA aims to expand the area of production for red garlic in Batanes to 500 hectares from current 257 hectares.