Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

NINETEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

House Bill No. 9927

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Introduced by Representative Midy N. Cua
*Lone District, Quirino*

**AN ACT**
**ESTABLISHING THE YOUNG FARMERS AND FISHERFOLK CHALLENGE PROGRAM, CREATING FOR THE PURPOSE THE YOUNG FARMERS AND FISHERFOLK CHALLENGE COUNCIL, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

The aging population of farmers in the Philippines is a significant concern for the agricultural sector and the country's food security. Many farmers in the Philippines are getting older, and there's a notable lack of young people entering the profession. Several factors contribute to this such as youth migration from rural to urban centers; lack of interest in agriculture among the youth; limited access to resources such as land and capital; and the lack of knowledge about modern farming techniques, among others.

This measure seeks to promote the attractiveness of farming as a viable career option among the youth through the establishment of a Young Farmers and Fisherfolk Challenge Program and the creation of a Young Farmers and Fisherfolk Challenge Council. These initiative shall provide the youth with support through capacity-building and livelihood programs, access to credit, access to marketing services, mainstreaming of agriculture in education curricula, scholarship and tuition subsidies, and introduction of modern farming technologies, among others.

In view of the foregoing, approval of this measure is earnestly sought.

**MIDY N. CUA**
***Representative***
**Lone District, Quirino**

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*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:*

**SECTION 1.** ***Short title.*** This Act shall be known as the "Young Farmers and Fisherfolk Challenge Act."

**SEC. 2.** ***Declaration of Policy.*** It is hereby declared the policy of the State to ensure that the rights of young farmers and fisherfolk are recognized, protected and promoted. Pursuant to this, the State shall involve the youth in nation building and rural development, providing for this purpose access to knowledge, information and education, access to land, new sources of financial services and capital, green jobs, access to new and niche markets, and participation in policy dialogue.

**SEC. 3.** ***Young Farmers and Fisherfolk Challenge Program.*** There is hereby established a Young Farmers and Fisherfolk Challenge Program, hereinafter referred to as the Program, that shall support and empower the young farmers and fisherfolk to be active partners in food security and agricultural development and modernization. The Program shall encourage the youth to pursue a career or engage in activities related to agriculture, ensure young farmers and fisherfolk participation in policy formulation and program implementation relative to the agriculture sector, and provide institutional support for agri-business and agri-entrepreneurship initiatives of the youth to fully realize their role as agents and partners for development.

**SEC. 4.** ***Beneficiaries of the Program.*** The Program is intended to support young farmers and fisherfolk between fifteen (15) to forty (40) years of age, who are engaged in farming and fisheries activities, and are included in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA). The Department of Agriculture (DA) shall update its existing database to reflect these indicators.

**SEC. 5.** ***Creation of a Young Farmers and Fisherfolk Challenge Council.*** There is hereby created the Young Farmers and Fisherfolk Challenge Council, hereinafter referred to as the Council, to provide the overall policy and direction of concerned agencies to ensure the effective implementation of the Program.

The Council shall be administratively attached to the Department of Agriculture and shall be composed of the following:

a. Secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), as Chairperson;
b. Secretary of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), as Vice- Chairperson;
c. Secretary of the Department of Education (DepEd), as member;
d. Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), as member;
e. Secretary of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), as member;
f. Secretary of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), as member;
g. Commissioner of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), as member;
h. Director-General of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
i. (TESDA), as member;
j. Representative of a national organization of young farmers' cooperative or association, provided that the representative shall be between fifteen (15) to forty (40) years of age, as member;
k. Representative of a national organization of fisherfolks' cooperative or association, provided that the representative shall be between fifteen (15) to forty (40) years of age, as member;
l. Representative of a farmers' women organization or cooperative, provided that the representative shall be between fifteen (15) to forty (40) years of age, as member;
m. Representative of a national organization for agritourism, as member; and
n. Representative of a national organization for food, restaurant, and business sectors, as member.

The government sector representatives in the Council may appoint an official alternate with a rank of an Undersecretary or its equivalent. The official alternate shall possess the same powers as the Heads of the above-named government agencies and whose acts shall be considered as acts of the heads of office being represented.

Representatives from the private sector shall be appointed by the DA Secretary from among the officers and members of their existing national organizations and associations. They shall serve for a period of two (2) years. When a vacancy arises due to the resignation, removal for cause, death or incapacity of a member, a replacement shall be appointed who shall serve for the remainder of the representative's term of office.

Government sector representatives shall not be entitled to compensation in the discharge of their functions in the Council but they shall be entitled to reimbursement of any reasonable expenses incurred in the performance of their functions. Private sector representatives shall be entitled to honoraria or allowances for the expenses incurred in the discharge of their functions as members of the Council.

The Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF) shall serve as its Secretariat.

**SEC. 6.** ***Powers and Functions of the Council.*** The Council shall have the following powers and functions:

a. Formulate the Program, in consultation with research institutions such as the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA), Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD), University of the Philippines - Los Baños (UPLB) and other relevant state universities and colleges (SUCs);
b. Identify and streamline access to relevant capacity-building and livelihood programs across the different departments and agencies of government, including on-the-job trainings, job fairs, employment in farm tourism and agro-industrial zones, and other employment-bridging initiatives;

c. Identify and streamline access to possible sources of credit across the different departments, agencies, and instrumentalities, including access to start-up capital;
d. Monitor initiatives in emerging best practices in agriculture such as smart farming, farm tourism in compliance with RA 10816 or the "Farm Tourism Development Act of 2016," agroponics, aquaponics, hydroponics, and organic and boutique vegetables;
e. Improve and facilitate access to marketing services such as through product packaging, promotions including branding and advertising, networking events, provision of subsidies to enable participation in trade fairs and exhibits, and linkage with media;
f. Coordinate with local government units (LGUs) in providing subsidized rental rates for public retail areas and public markets to farmers and fisherfolk;
g. Serve as a conduit between stakeholders and national and international leaders including Congress and the private sector in formulating policies directly addressing the concerns of young farmers and fisherfolk;
h. Propose subjects related to agriculture and agribusiness such as gardening, backyard farming, urban farming, reforestation, agricultural appreciation, agricultural entrepreneurship, smart farming, farm tourism, and coastal management in all pertinent levels of the DepEd's K-12 system with the end goal of increasing enrollment in the technical-vocational track in Senior High School in courses related to agriculture, CHED, including the National Service Training Program (NSTP) and TESDA;
i. Ensure scholarships and subsidized tuition fees for young farmers and fisherfolk in SUCs;
j. Provide on-the-job training programs for young farmers and fisherfolk in areas such as "green jobs", reforestation, coastal management, fisheries, and other rural-based jobs, through DOLE's Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES) and other livehood and training programs;
k. Explore and facilitate the extension of short-term leases for public land to young farmers and fisherfolk, providing free or subsidized land for cultivation and for aquaculture, and developing other packages such as, lease-to-buy schemes that would allow young farmers and fisherfolk to use available or unutilized agricultural land or fishing ground for the purposes of said Program;
l. Expedite the leasing, distribution, and award of agrarian reform land to qualified beneficiaries;
m. Facilitate the use of excess land holdings of SUCs and PEIs for agricultural training and developmental processes;
n. Foster the formation of new ideas and technologies by assisting agricultural enterprises of qualified young farmers and fisherfolk entrepreneurs, pursuant to Republic Act No. 11337, otherwise known as the "Innovative Start-up Act of 2018";
o. Initiate social partnerships and rural development initiatives in partnership with the private sector;
p. Optimize existing loan guarantee funds administered by various government entities to increase the credit worthiness of young farmers and fisherfolk experiencing difficulty in obtaining loans from banks due to lack of acceptable collaterals, credit knowledge and credit track record; and
q. Accept donations, contributions, grants, bequests or gifts, in cash or in kind, from various sources, domestic or foreign, for purposes relevant to the functions of the Council. Said donations shall be deemed automatically appropriated for purposes specified by the donor or in the absence thereof, for the programs and projects as may be approved by the Council subject to the usual accounting and auditing rules and regulations: Provided, That cash donations shall not be used to fund the personal services requirements of the Council.

**SEC. 7.** ***Tax Exemption on Donations.*** All grants, bequests, endowments, donations, contributions made to and used actually, directly and exclusively by the Council shall be exempt from donor's tax and the same shall be considered as allowable deduction from gross income for purposes of computing the taxable income of the donor, in accordance with the provisions of the National Internal Revenue Code of 1997, as amended.

**SEC. 8.** ***Waiver of Government Fees and Charges.*** Subject to the exceptions provided in Section 8 of Republic Act No. 11261, otherwise known as the "First-Time Jobseekers Assistance Act", all government agencies and instrumentalities, including government-owned and controlled corporations, LGUs, and government hospitals shall not collect fees or charges from young farmers and fisherfolks who are first-time job seekers: Provided, That such fee or charge is in connection with the application for and the granting of licenses, proofs of identification, clearances, certificates or other documents usually required in the course of employment locally or abroad: Provided further, That the benefit provided shall only be availed of once.

**SEC. 9.** ***Annual Report.*** The Council shall submit to the President and to both Houses of Congress, not later than the 30th of March of every year following the effectivity of this Act, a report giving a detailed account on the effective implementation of this Act, and recommended legislation where applicable and necessary.

**SEC. 10.** ***Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DA and DAR shall, in coordination with the DOST, DOLE, DENR, DepEd, CHED, Land Bank of the Philippines, and National Youth Commission, issue the necessary rules and regulations for the implementation of this Act.

**SEC. 11.** ***Appropriations.*** The funds necessary to carry out the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current year's budget of the Department of Agriculture. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for the continued implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

**SEC. 12.** ***Separability Clause.*** If any provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the other provisions not affected by such declaration shall remain in full force and effect.

**SEC. 13.** ***Repealing Clause.*** All laws, executive orders, administrative orders, and rules and regulations inconsistent with this act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

**SEC. 14.** ***Effectivity Clause.*** This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspapers of general circulation.

*Approved,*