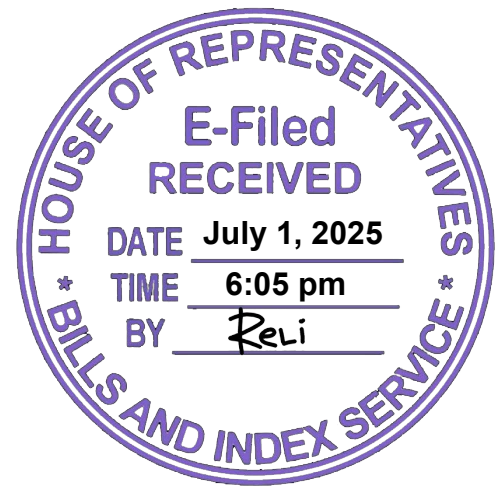


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH (20th) CONGRESS
FIRST REGULAR SESSION

House Bill No. **1024**



Introduced by
Rep. **ROBERT NAZAL**

AN ACT
TO CREATE PATHWAYS FOR ALL FARMERS IN ACHIEVING THEIR DREAMS FOR
A BETTER LIFE AND A BETTER COUNTRY THROUGH A PROACTIVE AND
INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT FOR AND AVAILMENT OF EXISTING GOVERNMENT
AGRICULTURE-RELATED PROGRAMS FOR THEIR EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT,
ENHANCED PRODUCTIVITY AND AGRICULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP,
AMONG OTHERS, PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The rising costs of fuel and other farm inputs, combined with the influx of cheaper imported agricultural products, have placed an even greater burden on the shoulders of our aging farmers. Many of them feel helpless and disadvantaged, despite the existence of several agriculture-related programs of the government intended to assist them.

While there is the “Go Negosyo Center” for those who want to engage in entrepreneurship, and the “Malasakit Center” for those seeking medical assistance, no equivalent one-stop assistance center exists for our farmers. Ironically, it is our farmers who are most in need of government assistance and yet are the least informed of what government programs are available to meet their specific needs (such as training opportunities, free seeds, irrigation support, or financial assistance).

Indeed, the government has numerous programs and projects aimed at uplifting the lives of farmers. These include agricultural trainings offered by the Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), irrigation projects through the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), loan and insurance facilities from government financial institutions like the Land Bank of the Philippines, scholarship programs under the Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST) and the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), livelihood and training initiatives such as JobStart and Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) under the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), entrepreneurship

assistance under the Department of Trade and Industry's Go Negosyo centers, and even digital livelihood programs like the Rural Impact Sourcing (RIS) and Tech4ED of the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), among others.

Unfortunately, these programs are scattered across various agencies and are often not disseminated to as many farmers as possible. As a result, farmers have fragmented knowledge of the assistance available to them. One has to hop from one government agency or financial institution to another to gather the appropriate information — even within a single agency, different offices or bureaus handle different programs. The bottom line is that many farmers are effectively deprived of an opportunity to improve their lot simply because they are unable to avail themselves of the appropriate government support or assistance.

Neither is there a single user-friendly website or mobile application that consolidates these programs in an accessible manner, particularly for those who do not have the educational background or training to sift through a myriad of information online (assuming they even have Internet connection). Perhaps in the near future, high-quality agricultural education from our state universities and trainings by the ATI can be rolled out via online courses to make quality education truly inclusive and open.

This situation underscores the persistent digital divide in rural communities, where many of our farmers remain without reliable internet connectivity and lack the requisite digital literacy to access essential online resources. There exists an urgent need to establish inclusive technologies and community-based digital access points to bridge this gap and ensure that farmers are equipped with the tools and information necessary to thrive in an increasingly digital economy.

Consistent with its longstanding advocacy to bring government services closer to the grassroots, the Bagong Henerasyon (BH) Party-list continues to champion the digital empowerment of marginalized sectors. Bridging the digital divide and empowering our farmers through accessible and farmer-friendly digital platforms are critical steps toward ensuring that public services are truly inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of the agricultural sector.

Under this bill, a center is created — the Magsasaka Center — which is tasked to collate information on all government agricultural programs, training opportunities, and forms of assistance, and to serve as a one-stop hub for farmers. Through its trained agricultural counselors, the Magsasaka Center will assess farmer-applicants, provide a customized plan of action, and recommend government programs suited to each applicant, with the objective of giving every farmer an opportunity to better his or her life through education, employment, training and/or agricultural entrepreneurship. In essence, the Magsasaka Center will serve as a farmer-first service delivery platform that brings together the various government services for farmers under one roof. To ensure the widest reach, the services of the Magsasaka Center will also be made available online and through mobile applications. By democratizing the government's agriculture-related programs and customizing their availment based on the unique

needs of each farmer, it is hoped that the growth of the country's agricultural sector will truly trickle down to disadvantaged Filipino farmers at the grassroots.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



Rep. ROBERT NAZAL
Bagong Henerasyon Party-List

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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 “Magsasaka Center Act.”

SECTION 2. DECLARATION OF POLICY.

The State shall provide every Filipino farmer who has the dream and desire to improve his or her life circumstances with access to all available government agricultural programs that will enable the farmer to obtain necessary training, education, employment, livelihood, or agricultural entrepreneurial opportunities suited to his or her needs. Access to appropriate government programs, education, training, and other assistance shall be ensured and promoted through the integration or collation of information on existing government programs for farmers, made available through the centers established herein or via online or mobile applications.

SECTION 3. STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES.

This Act shall have the following objectives:

- A. To collate and integrate information on all government agricultural programs, projects, and services in order to make them easily accessible to farmers;
- B. To provide free assessment and counseling services to farmers through trained agricultural counselors, thereby matching farmer-applicants with appropriate government programs based on their unique circumstances, abilities and interests;
- C. To facilitate the availment by farmers of existing government programs for education, training, employment, livelihood, and agricultural entrepreneurship opportunities;
- D. To utilize digital technology (such as websites and mobile applications) as well as on-site services to ensure inclusive and widespread access to Magsasaka Center information and services; and
- E. To empower farmers at the grassroots level to improve their productivity and quality of life by delivering government services and support through a farmer-centric, “one-stop shop” platform.

SECTION 4. DEFINITION OF TERMS.

As used in this Act, the following terms shall mean:

- A. Magsasaka Center - refers to a centralized one-stop hub established under this Act, attached to the Department of Agriculture (DA), which consolidates government agricultural programs, provides farmer assessments, and assists in program availment through on-site and digital means.
- B. Farmer - refers to any natural person who is directly and personally engaged in crop production, livestock or poultry raising, aquaculture, or any other agricultural activity, and whose primary source of income is derived therefrom, whether as owner, tenant, lessee, or laborer.
- C. Magsasaka Counselor - refers to a trained individual stationed at the Magsasaka Center who is responsible for assessing farmer-applicants, preparing individualized plans of action, and recommending appropriate government programs based on each applicant’s needs, abilities, and goals.
- D. Magsasaka Peer Counselor - refers to a volunteer youth assistant, with appropriate training, who helps farmer-applicants navigate and avail of the services and programs recommended in their individualized plans of action.
- E. Government-Assisted Programs - refers to any form of government support, including scholarships, training, livelihood assistance, credit facilities, or

entrepreneurship support, administered by national government agencies, local government units (LGUs), or government-owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs), intended to support the agricultural sector.

- F. Digital Platform - refers to any online or mobile-based application or portal that delivers Magsasaka Center services, including access to consolidated government programs, submission of applications, and access to online learning resources.

SECTION 5. ESTABLISHMENT OF MAGSASAKA CENTER.

A Magsasaka Center is an office where any Filipino farmer can avail of free assessment and agricultural assistance counseling. It shall provide customized recommendations of government programs appropriate to the applicant's unique circumstances, abilities, or interests, and offer assistance in the availment of such programs. The Magsasaka Center shall be attached to the Department of Agriculture (DA) for purposes of policy and program coordination.

Magsasaka Centers shall be established in the following locations:

1. Within regional and/or provincial offices of the DA; and
2. In other local government units (LGUs), as may be necessary or beneficial to local constituents.

SECTION 6. MAGSASAKA COUNSELOR AND MAGSASAKA PEER COUNSELORS.

Every Magsasaka Center shall have a Magsasaka Counselor and appropriate staff who possess the necessary training for the assessment of farmer-applicants and the recommendation of appropriate government program(s) suited to each applicant's circumstances. The Magsasaka Counselor is a trained agricultural counselor who shall assess the applicant and create a customized plan which may include one, some, or all of the available government programs included in the consolidated information on assistance programs under Section 6 of this Act. A Magsasaka Peer Counselor is a volunteer youth counselor with appropriate training to assist applicants in the availment of the services and programs indicated in the respective Magsasaka plan of action for each farmer.

SECTION 7. CONSOLIDATED INFORMATION ON GOVERNMENT-ASSISTED PROGRAMS.

All appropriate government agencies and government financial institutions shall submit to the Magsasaka Center relevant information, forms, and, whenever practicable, application procedures for all current and available government assistance programs, including but not limited to:

- A. Scholarships through the Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST), the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), and other appropriate government agencies;
- B. Training through programs implemented by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) of the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT);
- C. Livelihood programs through the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and DA, among others;
- D. Entrepreneurship opportunities and training for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) through the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)'s Philippine Trade Training Center (PTTC);
- E. Loan facilities or credit access; and
- F. Social services through the DSWD.

Additional programs may be added to the above list as deemed necessary by the Magsasaka Center's Executive Director, in accordance with relevant policies and issuances. It is the role of the Magsasaka Center to assess each farmer-applicant and recommend the appropriate government programs that will help the applicant achieve his or her goals. The Magsasaka Center shall likewise assist the applicant in availing of the recommended programs.

SECTION 8. COOPERATION AND COORDINATION WITH GOVERNMENT AGENCIES.

Government agencies that provide academic programs, scholarships, trainings, livelihood or entrepreneurship programs, loan facilities and other financial assistance – such as, but not limited to, the DA, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the Department of Education (DepEd), the DOST, TESDA, ATI, DICT, DOLE, DTI (including the PTTC), and the DSWD – shall allocate at least five percent (5%) of their respective program allotments for use by the Magsasaka Centers to support farmer-beneficiaries identified under this Act.

SECTION 9. PRIORITY IN GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS.

Insofar as the government programs and projects covered under this Act are concerned, farmer-applicants served by the Magsasaka Centers shall be given priority in the granting of assistance and in the rollout of the programs enumerated under

Section 6. When qualified, such farmer-applicants shall likewise be given priority in relevant government hiring or employment opportunities.

SECTION 10. PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATION.

Subject to the policies and guidelines issued by the Executive Director, private individuals or institutions may establish duly accredited Magsasaka Centers in approved locations, as may be determined in coordination with the Department of Agriculture and concerned local government units.

SECTION 11. ONLINE OR COMPUTER-BASED EDUCATION AND TRAINING.

Each Magsasaka Center shall endeavor to provide access to existing online or computer-based learning resources for farmers, including but not limited to the DA's Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) online programs, the Department of Information and Communications Technology's Tech4ED program, and online training courses offered by TESDA. Other government agencies shall likewise coordinate with the Magsasaka Centers to effectively roll out existing free online training and courses for the benefit of Magsasaka Center applicants. Within two (2) years from the effectivity of this Act, the ATI, the University of the Philippines (UP), and other state universities and colleges (SUCs) shall develop and offer free, open online or video-based agricultural courses that shall be made available to Magsasaka Center applicants.

SECTION 12. USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY TO DELIVER SERVICES.

To ensure the widest and most inclusive access, the services and programs under this Act shall, as far as practicable, also be delivered through online means such as official websites and mobile applications. The Magsasaka Center's mobile application shall integrate the free online or app-based courses offered by TESDA, the PTTC of the DTI, the ATI of the DA, and other similar government agencies or offices, for easy access by farmer-applicants.

SECTION 13. ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (DICT).

The DICT shall develop, set up, and maintain the necessary website, mobile application, and other ICT systems to implement the provisions of Sections 10 and 11 of this Act. It shall also provide technical assistance to the Magsasaka Centers and concerned agencies to ensure the full and effective implementation of this Act.

SECTION 14. PILOT MAGSASAKA CENTERS.

During the initial implementation of this Act, pilot Magsasaka Centers shall be established first in areas identified to have the highest numbers of farmers or agricultural students, in order to prioritize communities that can immediately benefit from the program.

SECTION 15. PRIORITY FOR ASSISTANCE.

Should there be a disproportionately high number of applicants in a particular Magsasaka Center at any given time, the following shall be the order of priority in processing applications and providing assistance:

1. Farmers classified as indigent who are not yet covered by the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) of the DSWD;
2. Those farmers who are covered under the Modified Conditional Cash Transfer (MCCT) program;
3. Those farmers who are covered under the regular Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program; and
4. All other applicants.

SECTION 16. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.

The overall operations of the Magsasaka Centers shall be headed by an Executive Director who shall be appointed by the President of the Philippines upon the recommendation of the Secretary of Agriculture.

The Executive Director shall serve a term of six (6) years from the date of appointment, unless sooner removed for cause, or separated by reason of death or resignation.

No person shall be appointed as Executive Director unless such person possesses at least a master's degree in agriculture, economics, business, public administration, management, law, or any related or equivalent field, and has at least ten (10) years of relevant experience in said field or fields. The Executive Director must likewise have been a resident of the Philippines for a period of at least five (5) consecutive years immediately preceding the date of appointment.

SECTION 17. POWERS AND DUTIES OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.

The Executive Director shall have the following powers and duties:

- A. To direct and manage the affairs of the Magsasaka Center;
- B. To call and preside over meetings of the Magsasaka Center, and to ensure that its policies, programs, and rules and regulations are implemented properly;
- C. To identify solutions to key issues and concerns related to the Magsasaka Center's mandate, taking into account relevant risks, affected parties, and impacts, in coordination with concerned government agencies and key stakeholders;
- D. To advocate the Magsasaka Center's programs and services among various concerned sectors and stakeholders;
- E. To request any agency, organization, local government unit, or community group to assist in addressing issues and concerns relating to the implementation of the Magsasaka Center's programs, projects, and activities;
- F. To supervise the monitoring of, and ensure the timely implementation of, Magsasaka Center-related programs, projects, and activities;
- G. To establish security and regulatory measures to prevent the abuse of the availment of government services covered by the Magsasaka Center;
- H. To accept, on behalf of the Magsasaka Center, donations, contributions, grants, bequests, or gifts – in cash or in kind – from foreign governments, international agencies, private entities, or individuals, for purposes that will help achieve the functions of the Magsasaka Center;
- I. To supervise the administrative operations of the Magsasaka Center, including the disbursement of its funds (subject to the usual accounting and auditing rules and procedures), and to submit periodic reports thereon;
- J. To appoint all employees of the Magsasaka Center, and to remove or discipline such employees for cause, in accordance with the Civil Service laws, rules, and regulations;
- K. To coordinate with the DICT for the roll-out of the Magsasaka Center's services via online and mobile application platforms;
- L. To represent the Magsasaka Center in all dealings with other offices, agencies, and instrumentalities of the government, as well as with private persons or entities;
- M. To sign agreements and contracts on behalf of the Magsasaka Center, including those for expert or consultant services and other arrangements necessary to carry out the Center's mandates; and
- N. To perform such other functions as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act, or which are incidental to the proper performance of the duties of the Executive Director.

SECTION 18. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE.

The Executive Director shall have the authority to determine the organizational structure, staffing pattern, and compensation scheme of the Magsasaka Center, subject to existing civil service laws, rules and regulations, and pertinent compensation laws.

The Executive Director shall likewise have the authority to reorganize the Magsasaka Center and to create, merge, or abolish such divisions, units, or branches as may be

necessary in the interest of efficiency, effectiveness, and economy, and as the exigencies of the service may require.

SECTION 19. MERIT SYSTEM.

All officials and employees of the Magsasaka Center shall be selected and appointed on the basis of merit and fitness in accordance with Civil Service laws, rules and regulations. The recruitment, transfer, promotion, and dismissal of personnel, including any temporary workers, shall be governed by a merit system to be established by the Magsasaka Center in compliance with existing laws, rules and regulations.

SECTION 20. TAX INCENTIVES.

All donations made to the Magsasaka Center shall be exempt from the donor's tax and other applicable national or local taxes. Such donations shall likewise be considered allowable deductions from the gross income of the donor for purposes of computing taxable income under the National Internal Revenue Code of 1997, as amended: Provided, That the allowable deduction shall be equivalent to one hundred fifty percent (150%) of the value of such donation.

In the case of donations not made in the form of money, the valuation thereof shall be based on the acquisition cost of the donated property, subject to depreciation in cases where the property has been previously used.

SECTION 21. APPROPRIATIONS.

The funds necessary to carry out the initial implementation of this Act shall be sourced from the unprogrammed funds in the current General Appropriations Act (GAA). Thereafter, such amounts as may be necessary for the continued implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual GAA.

SECTION 22. IMPLEMENTING RULES AND REGULATIONS.

Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Magsasaka Center, through its Executive Director and in consultation with concerned stakeholders, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act. Such rules and regulations shall be published in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation and shall take effect fifteen (15) days after publication.

Provided, That the failure to promulgate the said rules and regulations shall not prevent the implementation of this Act upon its effectivity.

SECTION 23. SEPARABILITY CLAUSE.

If any provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 24. REPEALING CLAUSE.

All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules, and regulations, or parts thereof, which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SECTION 25. EFFECTIVITY.

This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or at least two (2) national newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,