

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

**TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session**

House Bill No. 2708



BY REPRESENTATIVE REBECCA MARIA "MIA" A. YNARES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The 1987 Constitution, Article 1, Section 21 provides: "The State shall promote comprehensive rural development and agrarian reform." Further, the Constitution mandates in Article XII, Section 1, paragraph 2 that the State shall promote industrialization and full employment based on sound agricultural development and agrarian reform, through industries that make full and efficient use of human and natural resources which are competitive in both domestic and foreign markets.

The Philippines is predominantly an agricultural country. The Philippine Statistics Authority reported that in 2024 the Philippines' value of production in agriculture and fisheries at constant 2018 prices contracted by 2.2% to 1.73 trillion, a reversal of the growth in 2023. The agricultural sector grew in the 1950s and its steady growth pace started in the 1960s and 1970s as new technologies such as the Green Revolution seeds were introduced. Bananas, pineapples, coconut and sugarcane were the country's export crops. But the growth in agriculture retracted in the 1980s and the 1990s. Although it recovered slightly in the 2000s, since 2010 its growth is around two percent (2%). According to the 2018 Family Income and Expenditure Survey, farmers, fisherfolk, and individuals residing in rural areas registered the highest poverty incidences among the basic sectors at 31.6, 26.2, and 24.5 percent, respectively.

The average age of a Filipino farmer is 57-59 years old. The total number of people employed in the agriculture industry went down from 2014 to 2018. In 2019, around 9.7 million people were recorded as employed in agriculture. Young farmers or those who are 39 years and below comprise 12.3% of the 12 million farmers in the Philippines. The number of farmers diminish at an average of 1.5% per year. (Bureau of Agricultural Statistics, 2015) From 12.47 million farmers in 2015, the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics reported that the number of farmers decreased to 11.84 million in 2016. Also, children of farmers more often choose to leave their parents' farms and turn their back from agriculture-related activities to pursue higher paying jobs in the urban areas.

As of July 2022, almost 46 million individuals belong to country's youth sector (15 to 40 years old), and according to the Labor Force Survey, the overall youth unemployment rate is 12.3%, which is higher than the national unemployment rate of 5.7%.

By challenging the youth to become farmers and/or fisherfolks, it is hoped that more jobs and opportunities will be created for Filipinos particularly for the youth which will reduce the unemployment of the youth sector and at the same time boost agricultural production and reduce the average age of Filipino farmers. In doing this, food security will be achieved. Hence, this bill.


REBECCA MARIA "MIA" A. YNARES
Representative
1st District, Rizal

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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. **2708**

BY REPRESENTATIVE REBECCA MARIA “MIA” A. YNARES

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

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

1 **SECTION 1. *Short Title.*** – This Act shall be known as the “*Young Farmers and*
2 *Fisherfolk Challenge Act*”.

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

8 **SEC. 3. *Young Farmers and Fisherfolk Challenge Program.*** – There is hereby established
9 a Young Farmers and Fisherfolk Challenge Program, hereinafter referred to as the Program, that
10 shall support and empower the young farmers and fisherfolk to be active partners in food
11 security and agricultural development and modernization. The Program shall encourage the
12 youth to pursue a career or engage in activities related to agriculture, ensure young farmers and
13 fisherfolk participation in policy formulation and program implementation, and provide

1 institutional support for agri-business and agri-entrepreneurship initiatives to fully realize the
2 role of the youth as agents and partners for development.

3 **SEC. 4. *Beneficiaries of the Program.*** – The Program is intended to support young
4 farmers and fisherfolks between 15 years old to 40 years old, who are engaged in
5 farming and fisheries activities, and are included in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in
6 Agriculture. The Department of Agriculture (DA) shall update its existing database to reflect
7 these indicators.

8 **SEC. 5. *Creation of a Special Lane for the Processing of Licenses and Permits.*** – The
9 Department of Trade and Industry, Food and Drug Administration, and the Intellectual
10 Property Office are hereby mandated to establish a special lane to facilitate the registration
11 and application of the projects/business enterprise of the Young Farmers and Fisherfolk
12 Challenge Program beneficiaries/awardees, to include the following: license to operate,
13 certificate of product registration, business name, and intellectual property rights.

14 **SEC. 6. *Creation of a Young Farmers and Fisherfolk Challenge Council.*** – There is
15 hereby created the Young Farmers and Fisherfolk Challenge Council, hereinafter referred to as
16 the Council, to provide the overall policy and direction of concerned agencies to ensure the
17 effective implementation of the Program.

18 The Council shall be administratively attached to the DA and shall be composed of
19 the following:

- 20 (a) Secretary of the DA, as Chairperson;
- 21 (b) Secretary of the Department of Trade and Industry, as Vice-Chairperson;
- 22 (c) Secretary of the Department of Education (DepEd), as member;
- 23 (d) Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), as member;
- 24 (e) Secretary of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), as member;
- 25 (f) Secretary of the Department of the Interior and Local Government, as member;
- 26 (g) Commissioner of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), as member;
- 27 (h) Director-General of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
28 (TESDA), as member;
- 29 (i) Representative of a national organization of young farmers' cooperative or
30 association, as member;
- 31 (j) Representative of a national organization of fisherfolks' cooperative or association,
32 as member;
- 33 (k) Representative of a women farmers' organization or cooperative, as member;
- 34 (l) Representative of a national organization for agritourism, as member; and
- 35 (m) Representative of a national organization for food, restaurant, and business sectors,
36 as member.

1 *Provided, however,* That the members of the Council under subsections (i), (j) and (k) shall
2 be between fifteen (15) to forty (40) years of age.

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

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

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

17 The Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries shall serve as its Secretariat.

18 **SEC. 7. Powers and Functions of the Council.** – The Council shall have the following
19 powers and functions:

20 (a) Formulate the Program, in consultation with research institutions such as the Southeast
21 Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture, Philippine
22 Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development,
23 University of the Philippines - Los Baños and other relevant state universities and
24 colleges (SUCs);

25 (b) Identify and streamline access to relevant capacity-building and livelihood programs
26 across the different departments and agencies of government, including on-the-job
27 trainings, job fairs, employment in farm tourism and agro-industrial zones, and other
28 employment-bridging initiatives;

29 (c) Identify and streamline access to possible sources of credit across the different
30 departments, agencies, and instrumentalities, including access to start-up capital;

31 (d) Monitor initiatives in emerging best practices in agriculture such as smart farming, farm
32 tourism in compliance with Republic Act No. 10816 or the "Farm Tourism Development
33 Act of 2016," agroponics, aquaponics, hydroponics, and organic and boutique vegetables;

34 (e) Improve and facilitate access to marketing services such as product packaging, promotions
35 including branding and advertising, networking events, provision of subsidies to enable
36 participation in trade fairs and exhibits, and linkage with media;

- 1 (f) Coordinate with local government units (LGUs) in providing subsidized rental rates for
2 public retail areas and public markets to farmers and fisherfolk;
- 3 (g) Serve as a conduit between stakeholders and national and international leaders including
4 Congress and the private sector in formulating policies directly addressing the concerns
5 of young farmers and fisherfolk;
- 6 (h) Propose subjects related to agriculture and agribusiness such as gardening,
7 backyard farming, urban farming, reforestation, agricultural appreciation, agricultural
8 entrepreneurship, smart farming, farm tourism, and coastal management in all pertinent
9 levels of the DepEd's K-12 with the end goal of increasing enrollment in courses related to
10 agriculture in the technical-vocational track in Senior High School, CHED, the National
11 Service Training Program and TESDA;
- 12 (i) Ensure scholarships and subsidized tuition fees for young farmers and fisherfolk
13 in SUCs;
- 14 (j) Provide on-the-job training programs for young farmers and fisherfolk in areas such as
15 "green jobs", reforestation, coastal management, fisheries, and other rural-based jobs,
16 through Department of Labor and Employment's (DOLE) Special Program for
17 Employment of Students and other livelihood and training programs;
- 18 (k) Explore and facilitate the extension of short-term leases for public land to young farmers
19 and fisherfolk, providing free or subsidized land for cultivation and for aquaculture, and
20 developing other packages such as, lease-to-buy schemes that would allow young farmers
21 and fisherfolk to use available or unutilized agricultural land or fisheries management
22 areas for the purposes of said Program;
- 23 (l) Expedite the leasing, distribution, and award of agrarian reform land to qualified
24 beneficiaries;
- 25 (m) Facilitate the use of excess land holdings of SUCs and private education institutions for
26 agricultural training and developmental processes;
- 27 (n) Foster the formation of new ideas and technologies by assisting agricultural enterprises of
28 qualified young farmers and fisherfolk entrepreneurs, pursuant to Republic Act No.
29 11337, otherwise known as the "Innovative Startup Act";
- 30 (o) Initiate social partnerships and rural development initiatives in partnership with the
31 private sector;
- 32 (p) Optimize existing loan guarantee funds administered by various government entities to
33 increase the credit worthiness of young farmers and fisherfolk experiencing difficulty in
34 obtaining loans from banks due to lack of acceptable collaterals, credit knowledge and
35 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. 8. *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. 9. *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. 10. *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. 11. *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, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, DepEd, CHED, Land Bank of the Philippines, and National Youth Commission, issue the necessary rules and regulations for the implementation of this Act.

SEC. 12. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the budgets of the departments and agencies concerned in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 13. *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. 14. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, executive orders, administrative orders, and rules and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

1 **SEC. 15. *Effectivity*.** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in
2 the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,