

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 2790



Introduced by **REP. JAVIER MIGUEL L. BENITEZ**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Philippines remains an agricultural nation, with nearly one in four Filipino workers engaged in farming, forestry, or fisheries. Despite their critical role in food production and rural development, farmers remain among the poorest sectors in the country. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2023), poverty incidence among farmers remains disproportionately high, with many families earning below the official poverty threshold.¹ This persistent economic condition perpetuates a two-fold problem: first, the children of farmers are often unable to pursue higher education due to financial constraints; and second, fewer students are drawn to agriculture-related courses, perceiving limited opportunities and long-term insecurity in the field.

This challenge is compounded by a deepening generational gap in agriculture. The 2022 Census of Agriculture and Fisheries reveals a sharp increase in aging agricultural operators: those aged 65 and above rose by 75.3% from 2012 to 2022. In contrast, the number of young agricultural operators aged 15 to 24 declined over the same period, with particularly steep drops among male youth.² Without strategic action, this shift threatens the sustainability of the country's agricultural sector, its food systems, and its rural workforce.

This bill seeks to respond to these challenges through the establishment of a Kabataang Magsasaka Scholarship Program—a national scholarship and return service initiative targeted specifically at students in agriculture and allied fields who are children or dependents of farmers. By providing comprehensive financial

¹ Philippine Statistics Authority, *PRESS RELEASE: Fisherfolks and Farmers Remain to Have the Highest Poverty Incidences Among the Basic Sectors in 2021* (March 24, 2023), [https://psa.gov.ph/system/files/phdsd/Press%20Release_5%20%281%29.pdf] (Date last accessed: July 29, 2025).

² Philippine Statistics Authority, *2022 Census of Agriculture and Fisheries Agricultural Households and Operators* (December 28, 2024), [<https://psa.gov.ph/content/2022-census-agriculture-and-fisheries-agricultural-households-and-operators>] (Date last accessed: July 29, 2025).

support and aligning education with sectoral needs, the measure aims to cultivate a new generation of technically trained, socially rooted, and publicly accountable leaders in Philippine agriculture.

Under the proposed measure, eligible scholars will receive free tuition and other school fees, monthly stipends, educational materials, support for field immersion and research, and reimbursement for board exams and review fees. The program will cover undergraduate, master's, and doctoral studies in Commission on Higher Education ("CHED")-identified agriculture and allied degree programs, offered through State Universities and Colleges ("SUCs"), Local Universities and Colleges ("LUCs"), accredited private Higher Education Institutions ("HEIs"), and selected partner institutions abroad.

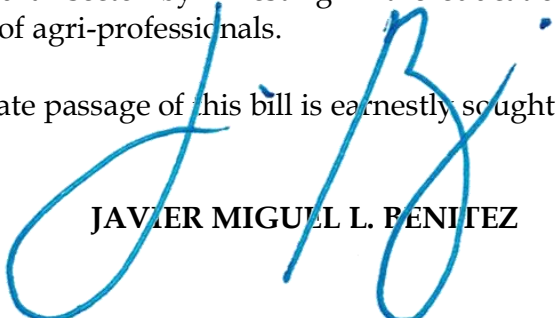
To ensure that this public investment yields long-term national benefit, the bill requires all graduates to render a return service obligation in the agriculture sector. This may take the form of government service, academic or research work, or Department of Agriculture ("DA")-endorsed agribusiness ventures that directly contribute to rural development. The return service mechanism is designed to be flexible but accountable, grounded in service and impact.

The measure also mandates the modernization of agricultural curricula and training systems. CHED and the DA are directed to update academic programs to reflect evolving sectoral demands, including climate-resilient farming, farm mechanization, agri-business, and digital agriculture. Support for research, faculty development, and partnerships with Local Government Units ("LGUs") and rural enterprises will ensure that learning remains grounded in practical realities and responsive to development goals.

This proposed measure affirms the State's duty to support inclusive access to quality education and to promote a sustainable, future-ready agricultural workforce. It responds directly to the structural decline in youth participation in farming and provides concrete opportunities for the children of farmers to advance their lives and communities.

This bill is filed as a counterpart to a measure introduced by Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson in the Senate, and is consistent with similar proposals in the 20th Congress aimed at addressing the aging agricultural workforce and the persistent poverty among farming families. Its filing affirms a shared legislative commitment to strengthening the country's agricultural sector by investing in the education and public service of the next generation of agri-professionals.

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



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**AN ACT ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP AND RETURN
SERVICE PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS IN AGRICULTURE AND
ALLIED FIELDS WHO ARE CHILDREN OR DEPENDENTS OF
FARMERS, TO BE KNOWN AS THE KABATAANG MAGSASAKA
SCHOLARSHIP ACT, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

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

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* - This Act shall be known as the “*Kabataang
Magsasaka Scholarship Act.*”

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* - It is hereby declared the policy of the State
to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of scholarship grants, student
loan programs, subsidies, and other incentives designed to support deserving
students in both public and private educational institutions, with particular
emphasis on assisting underprivileged individuals.

The State is committed to promoting inclusive access to quality education
in agriculture and allied fields, especially for children or dependents of farmers.
This initiative aims to advance food security, foster rural development, and
enhance the professionalization of the agricultural sector. To achieve these goals,
the State shall implement a scholarship and return service program that supports
qualified students who pledge to serve in the government agricultural sector
upon completion of their studies.

SEC. 3. *Coverage and Eligibility.* - The Kabataang Magsasaka Scholarship Program shall be granted exclusively to eligible children or dependents of farmers, subject to compliance with the following conditions:

(a) The applicant must be enrolled in, or accepted into, an undergraduate degree program in agriculture or allied fields identified by the CHED and the DA;

(b) The scholarship shall also be open to those pursuing master's or doctoral degrees, as well as post-baccalaureate certificate or diploma programs in the same fields. The minimum qualification standards, including academic and other merit-based requirements, shall be determined by CHED and the DA through guidelines to be issued in relation thereto, taking into account the academic rigors of the program, equitable access, and alignment with national agricultural development priorities;

(c) The applicant must be enrolled in, or accepted into, any of the SUCs, LUCs, or CHED-accredited partner private HEIs in the Philippines, or in CHED-accredited partner institutions abroad for those pursuing graduate-level studies or training; and

(d) the applicant must be certified as a child or dependent of a farmer by the municipal or city agriculture office, or through other certification mechanisms as may be determined by CHED and the DA, including but not limited to the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture.

SEC. 4. *Scholarship Benefits.* - Qualified scholars shall be entitled to the following benefits:

(a) Free tuition and other school fees in accordance with Republic Act No. 10931 or as otherwise provided under this Act for those enrolled in non-public partner institutions;

(b) Allowances and support for prescribed books, uniforms, equipment, and instructional materials;

(c) A monthly living stipend, as determined by CHED and the DA;

(d) Expenses for internships, fieldwork, field immersion, capstone projects, research, and other academic requirements as may be determined by CHED and DA; and

(e) Reimbursement or direct funding for licensure or board examination fees, including board review courses for applicable programs, shall be extended for the first attempt, subject to limitations prescribed by CHED and DA. Any succeeding attempts shall be undertaken on a self-funded basis.

SEC. 5. *International Graduate Training Track.* – To further enrich the graduate scholarship component of the Program, the CHED and the DA shall identify select scholars for short-term certificate training, graduate diploma programs, or full graduate studies in partner institutions abroad, particularly in areas where local expertise or programs remain limited. These international opportunities shall be aligned with national agricultural goals and subject to screening, availability of funding, and return service requirements.

Scholars under this track shall be entitled to all applicable benefits provided under this Act, including allowances and support at rates commensurate with the tuition fees and cost of living in the host country.

SEC. 6. *Retention Policy for Undergraduates.* – Undergraduate scholars shall remain in the program for as long as they are enrolled in good standing. Academic deficiencies shall not automatically disqualify a scholar, and CHED and the DA may provide academic support to help ensure completion of the degree.

SEC. 7. *Partner Higher Education Institutions.* – The Kabataang Magsasaka Scholarship Program shall be implemented primarily through SUCs and LUCs that offer degree programs in agriculture and allied fields, as identified by CHED and the DA.

CHED, in coordination with the DA, may also accredit private HEIs in the Philippines with demonstrated capacity, qualified faculty, appropriate facilities, and relevant academic programs as partner institutions for both undergraduate and graduate levels.

For purposes of graduate training or programs, CHED and the DA may likewise accredit foreign HEIs, whether public or private, subject to guidelines and alignment with national agricultural development priorities.

SEC. 8. *Administration and Implementation.* – The Kabataang Magsasaka Scholarship Program shall be jointly administered by CHED and the DA, which shall:

- (a) Formulate the implementing rules and guidelines of the Program;
- (b) Establish regional selection and screening committees to ensure fair and needs- sensitive implementation;
- (c) Maintain and update a centralized scholarship database for effective tracking of scholars and return service compliance; and
- (d) Coordinate with partner HEIS, LGUs, and other agencies for scholar support and monitoring.

SEC. 9. *Modernization of Agricultural Education and Training.* - To ensure that scholars gain knowledge and skills relevant to today's agricultural needs, the CHED, in coordination with the DA and partner HEIs, shall:

- (a) Include updated and practical topics in the curriculum, such as climate-resilient farming, agri-business, farm mechanization, and the use of modern tools and digital technology in agriculture;
- (b) Provide students with access to demonstration farms, laboratories, and equipment to support hands-on training in modern agricultural practices;
- (c) Promote partnerships with research institutions, experts, private organizations, and agri-technology providers to support student learning and exposure to new developments in the field;
- (d) Offer continuing learning opportunities and training programs for graduates to help them stay informed about current trends and innovations in agriculture; and
- (e) Support the development of master's and doctorate programs in SUCs and qualified LUCs. This includes assistance for curriculum development, faculty training, research facilities, and partnerships with local governments and agri-based industries to ensure relevance to rural development needs.

The CHED and the DA shall issue the necessary guidelines to implement this section effectively.

SEC. 10. *Return Service Requirement.* - Graduates of this Program shall be required to render return service in the government for a minimum period equivalent to the length of time they benefited from the scholarship, subject to the following conditions:

(a) Return service shall be rendered in a government agency, government-owned or controlled corporation, LGU, or public educational or research institution involved in agriculture or allied sectors, as determined by CHED and DA;

(b) Return service shall commence within one (1) year after graduation or completion of mandatory licensure requirements;

(c) In the event that no suitable return service opportunity is available in the government, as verified and certified jointly by CHED and DA, graduates may fulfill their service obligation through alternative placements. These may include:

i. Accredited non-government organizations, cooperatives, or private sector entities directly engaged in agricultural development, extension services, agribusiness, or research;

ii. Start-up ventures or enterprises in the agricultural or allied sectors, provided these are endorsed by DA and monitored for compliance; and

iii. Academic or research contributions, such as teaching or conducting DA/CHED-approved research in agriculture-related fields in public or private institutions.

(d) In lieu of employment-based return service, graduates may apply to fulfill their obligation by establishing an agricultural or allied-sector enterprise that demonstrably contributes to local or national development. Subject to CHED and DA approval, such graduates may be eligible to receive seed funding or startup support, provided that:

i. The proposed enterprise is aligned with the objectives of the program;

ii. The graduate submits a business plan and implementation timeline for evaluation;

iii. The enterprise must operate for a minimum period equivalent to the return service requirement, during which it shall be subject to regular performance monitoring; and

iv. Failure to sustain the enterprise without valid reason, or deviation from approved activities, shall result in mandatory reimbursement of both scholarship benefits and startup funds received.

SEC. 11. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary to implement this Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of CHED and the DA. Thereafter, such amount as may be necessary for the continued implementation shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 12. *Non-Duplication of Benefits.* – Nothing in this Act shall be construed to duplicate the benefits provided under Republic Act No. 10931 or the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act. Where applicable, the benefits under this Act shall be complementary to those provided under existing laws and shall supplement, not supplant, other scholarship grants or support programs for the agricultural sector.

SEC. 13. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – The CHED and the DA shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations to implement the provisions of this Act within ninety (90) days from its effectivity.

SEC. 14. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the remaining section/s of the Act or any provision/s not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 15. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, executive orders, rules and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 16. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after the completion of its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,