

TWENTIETH CONGRESS)
OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
First Regular Session)



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

House Bill No. 9761

Introduced by Representative KARL FERNANDEZ LEGAZPI

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Philippines is home to a rich variety of indigenous and climate-resilient crops, many of which remain underutilized despite their strong potential to improve food security, nutrition, and rural livelihoods. Crops such as malunggay (*Moringa oleifera*), sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), and cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata*) are widely available in many communities, yet they continue to receive limited support in terms of production, processing, commercialization, and research.

At a time when the country continues to face challenges in hunger and malnutrition, promoting these crops has become increasingly important. Recent studies and nutrition reports show that millions of Filipinos still experience food insecurity and lack access to affordable and nutritious food. Food insecurity in the Philippines has also been aggravated by rising food prices, climate-related disasters, and disruptions in agricultural production.

These underutilized crops are highly nutritious and can serve as affordable sources of essential vitamins and minerals. Malunggay is known for its high levels of vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and protein, making it an effective supplement against malnutrition. Sweet potato, including its leaves, is rich in beta-carotene and other nutrients important for child development and overall health. Cowpea, meanwhile, is a good source of plant-based protein and iron that can help address micronutrient deficiencies and support food accessibility in vulnerable communities.

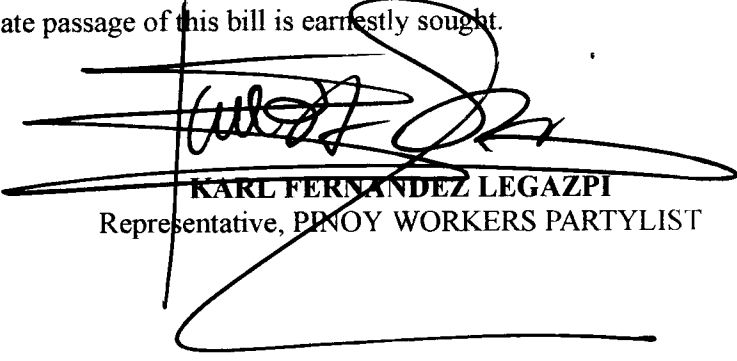
Beyond nutrition, these crops also present significant economic opportunities for farmers and small enterprises. Encouraging the cultivation, processing, and commercialization of these crops can help create new products, generate jobs, and increase the income of rural communities. The development of local food industries and agri-based micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) can further strengthen local economies while promoting agricultural innovation and sustainability.

The measure is likewise timely given the continuing challenges faced by the agriculture sector. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, agriculture remains a major source of livelihood

for millions of Filipinos, accounting for more than 20% of total employment in 2025.¹ However, the sector continues to face problems such as low productivity, limited diversification, and climate vulnerability. Supporting resilient and underutilized crops can help diversify agricultural production while improving farmers' adaptability to changing environmental conditions.

Moreover, promoting agricultural diversity contributes to the country's long-term goals on food security, sustainable development, and poverty reduction. It encourages the use of locally available resources, reduces dependence on imported food inputs, and supports more sustainable farming systems.

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



KARL FERNANDEZ LEGAZPI
Representative, PINOY WORKERS PARTYLIST

¹ Philippine Statistics Authority. (2025, November 6). *Participation in the labor force in September 2025 decreased to 51.56 million Filipinos aged 15 years and over*. <https://psa.gov.ph/content/participation-labor-force-september-2025-decreased-51.56-million-filipinos-aged-15-years-and-over>

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House Bill No. **9761**

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**AN ACT PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT, UTILIZATION,
COMMERCIALIZATION, AND CONSERVATION OF UNDERUTILIZED AND
INDIGENOUS CROPS, ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL UNDERUTILIZED CROPS
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, AND PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR**

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 “Underutilized and Indigenous Crops Development Act.”

SECTION 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote agricultural diversity, food security, nutrition, climate resilience, and sustainable rural development through the research, development, utilization, commercialization, and conservation of underutilized and indigenous crops. The State shall support farmers, cooperatives, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), researchers, and local communities in maximizing the economic, nutritional, and environmental potential of these crops.

SECTION 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act:

(a) Underutilized and Indigenous Crops refer to crops with nutritional, economic, cultural, or environmental value that remain inadequately cultivated, researched, marketed, or supported despite their potential contribution to food security and agricultural sustainability;

(b) MSMEs refer to micro, small, and medium enterprises as defined under Republic Act No. 9501, otherwise known as the “Magna Carta for MSMEs”;

(c) Value-Added Products refer to products processed or developed from underutilized and indigenous crops intended for commercial, nutritional, pharmaceutical, industrial, or other productive uses.

SECTION 4. *Establishment of the National Underutilized and Indigenous Crops Development Program.* – There is hereby established a National Underutilized and Indigenous Crops Development Program, hereinafter referred to as the “Program,” to be administered by the Department of Agriculture (DA), in coordination with the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), National Nutrition Council (NNC), and other relevant agencies.

The Program shall formulate and implement a national strategy for the identification, propagation, production, utilization, processing, commercialization, and conservation of underutilized and indigenous crops throughout the country.

SECTION 5. *National Underutilized Crops Database and Information System.* – The DA, through the Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR) and the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), in coordination with the DOST and state universities and colleges (SUCs), shall establish and maintain a National Underutilized Crops Database and Information System.

The database shall contain information on crop varieties, production areas, yield performance, nutritional composition, market potential, pest and disease management, climate resilience, germplasm conservation, research studies, value-added products, and other relevant information necessary for policy development, investment promotion, and agricultural planning.

The database shall likewise include region-specific production data and regularly updated information to support farmers, researchers, local government units (LGUs), cooperatives, MSMEs, and policymakers.

SECTION 6. *Research, Development, and Innovation Support.* – The DA, through the Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR), Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), and Regional Field Offices, in coordination with the DOST, CHED, and SUCs, shall prioritize research and development activities relating to underutilized and indigenous crops.

Research support shall include, but not be limited to:

- (a) Development of climate-resilient and high-yielding crop varieties;
- (b) Improvement of farming systems and post-harvest technologies;
- (c) Product development and food innovation;
- (d) Nutritional analysis and utilization studies;
- (e) Seed banking, germplasm conservation, and propagation initiatives; and
- (f) Technology transfer and extension services for farmers and cooperatives.

SECTION 7. *MSME and Farmer Support Incentives.* – The DTI, in coordination with the DA and the Board of Investments (BOI), shall establish an incentive and support program for farmers, cooperatives, and MSMEs engaged in the production, processing, marketing, and commercialization of underutilized and indigenous crops.

Such support may include:

- (a) Access to concessional financing and credit assistance through government financial institutions;
- (b) Technical assistance, training, and product development support;
- (c) Market linkage and promotion assistance;
- (d) Shared service facilities and processing equipment; and
- (e) Eligibility for fiscal and non-fiscal incentives under existing investment and enterprise promotion laws.

SECTION 8. *Capacity Building and Extension Services.* – The DA, TESDA, LGUs, and SUCs shall conduct training programs, extension services, and community-based capacity-building activities for farmers, cooperatives, MSMEs, and rural communities on sustainable farming practices, processing technologies, entrepreneurship, and value chain development for underutilized and indigenous crops.

SECTION 9. *Role of Local Government Units.* – Local government units are encouraged to integrate the promotion and development of underutilized and indigenous crops into their local agriculture and food security programs, subject to existing laws, rules, and regulations.

SECTION 10. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act. The DA and other participating agencies may likewise utilize available funds from existing programs, grants, and other lawful sources for the implementation of this Act.

SECTION 11. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DA, in coordination with the DOST, DTI, CHED, TESDA, NNC, and other concerned agencies, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

SECTION 12. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the remaining provisions not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force and effect.

SECTION 13. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

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

Approved,