

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

**TWENTIETH CONGRESS**  
*First Regular Session*

House Bill No. 9960



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**Introduced by Representative JEFFREY SORIANO**

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**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

This bill seeks to provide free tertiary agricultural education in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) to the dependent children of qualified indigent farmers, along with educational support mechanisms to boost participation in agricultural careers and strengthen the country's food security.

Agriculture employs millions of Filipinos yet remains plagued by an aging workforce, youth disinterest, and deep rural poverty. The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), recorded a 27% poverty incidence among farmers in 2023 which goes well above the national average. This reality limits the ability of many farming households to send their children to college. Meanwhile, low enrollment in agriculture-related programs has created a shortage of professionals vital to the sector's modernization.

Although Republic Act No. 10931, otherwise known as the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, covers free tuition and other school fees in SUCs, many children of indigent farmers continue to encounter financial constraints. These constraints include but are not limited to transportation, books, instructional materials, daily subsistence, and other educational expenses. As a result, many farming families remain trapped in a cycle of poverty and limited economic mobility.

This measure seeks to empower farming households by providing targeted educational assistance to the dependent children of qualified indigent farmers who choose to pursue agriculture and related fields. The end goal is to aid harmer households to produce agriculturists, veterinarians, and agribusiness professionals that the country needs.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey Soriano", with a long, sweeping underline.

**HON. JEFFREY SORIANO**

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**AN ACT**  
**PROVIDING FOR FREE TERTIARY AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND**  
**OTHER RELATED COURSES TO THE DEPENDENT CHILDREN OF**  
**QUALIFIED INDIGENT FARMERS, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR,**  
**AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

*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 “*Free Agri-Education for Farmers’ Dependents Act.*”

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote and protect the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and to take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all. Recognizing the pivotal role of agriculture in national development and food security, and the socio-economic challenges faced by indigent farmers, the State shall prioritize the empowerment of the agricultural sector through human capital development. Towards this end, the State shall provide free tertiary agricultural education and other related courses to the dependent children of qualified indigent farmers, thereby ensuring a continuous supply of skilled and knowledgeable professionals and practitioners in agriculture, promoting sustainable farming practices, and enhancing the overall productivity and competitiveness of the Philippine agricultural sector.

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

a. Dependent Child refers to a legitimate, illegitimate, legally adopted, or stepchild of a qualified indigent farmer, who is twenty-one (21) years of age or below, unmarried, and not gainfully employed, or if over twenty-one (21) years of age, is suffering from a disability that renders them incapable of self-support;

b. Free Tertiary Agricultural Education refers to the waiver of tuition fees, miscellaneous fees, and other mandatory fees, as may be determined by the

Commission on Higher Education (CHED), in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) offering agricultural education and other related courses;

c. Indigent Farmer refers to a natural person engaged in farming, whether personally or through a farm worker, whose family income falls below the poverty threshold as determined by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), and who is registered with the Department of Agriculture's Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA) or any equivalent official registry;

d. Qualified refers to a dependent child who meets the eligibility criteria set forth in this Act and its Implementing Rules and Regulations;

e. Related Courses refer to academic programs closely related to agriculture, such as, but not limited to, agricultural engineering, food technology, veterinary medicine, forestry, fisheries, environmental science with agricultural focus, and agribusiness management, as may be determined by the CHED, in consultation with the Department of Agriculture (DA); and

f. State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) refer to public higher education institutions established by law and are fully supported by the national government.

SEC. 4. *Coverage.* – This Act shall cover all qualified dependent children of indigent farmers who are enrolled or shall enroll in tertiary agricultural education and other related courses in any SUC in the Philippines.

SEC. 5. *Entitlements.* – A qualified dependent child of an indigent farmer shall be entitled to the following benefits:

a. Exemption from the payment of tuition fees, laboratory fees, library fees, athletic fees, computer fees, cultural fees, and all other miscellaneous and mandatory fees, as may be determined by CHED, throughout the duration of their tertiary agricultural education or related course in an SUC; and

b. Subject to the availability of funds and the guidelines to be prescribed in the Implementing Rules and Regulations, qualified beneficiaries may be granted a monthly stipend, book allowance, transportation allowance, and such other educational assistance as may be necessary to support the completion of their studies.

SEC. 6. *Qualifications of Beneficiaries.* – To qualify for the benefits under this Act, a dependent must:

1. Be a dependent child of an indigent farmer as defined in Section 3 of this Act;

2. Be a Filipino citizen;
3. Have passed the entrance examination or admission requirements of the SUC where they intend to enroll or are currently enrolled;
4. Maintain the academic standards and good moral character as required by the SUC and the provisions of this Act; and
5. Not be a recipient of any other scholarship grant or financial assistance from any government agency or private institution that covers the same entitlements provided under this Act, unless the other grant is insufficient to cover all expenses and only the uncovered portion is claimed under this Act.

*SEC. 7. Responsibilities of Beneficiaries.* – Beneficiaries of this Act shall:

- a. Maintain the academic performance required by the SUC for their course. Failure to meet the academic requirements may lead to the forfeiture of the scholarship, subject to the policies of the SUC and the Implementing Rules and Regulations;
- b. Complete their chosen course within the prescribed period; and
- c. Upon graduation, render service to the agricultural sector in the Philippines for a period equivalent to the number of years they enjoyed the scholarship, in a manner and capacity to be determined by the DA in consultation with the CHED. This may include working in government agricultural agencies, engaging in farming, or contributing to agricultural research or extension services. The Implementing Rules and Regulations shall provide the specific guidelines for this service requirement.

*SEC. 8. Implementing Agencies.* – The CHED and DA shall be the primary implementing agencies of this Act. They shall:

- a. Formulate and issue the necessary Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act;
- b. Develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system to ensure the effective implementation of this Act;
- c. Coordinate with State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) to ensure the smooth admission, enrollment, and support of qualified beneficiaries; and
- d. Establish a robust database of qualified indigent farmers and their dependent children, in coordination with relevant government agencies and local government units.

SEC. 9. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act. The CHED and DA shall jointly prepare the necessary budget proposals for this purpose.

SEC. 10. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the CHED, in consultation with the DA, the Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges (PASUC), and other relevant stakeholders, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

SEC. 11. *Separability Clause.* – If any portion or provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, other provisions hereof shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 12. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

SEC. 13. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen days (15) after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a national newspaper of general circulation.

*Approved,*