

## PRESS RELEASE

**Deped focuses on healthy - eating advocacy**

The Department of Education is set to work closely with the *Oh My Gulay!* advocacy of Senator Edgardo Angara to expand the department's vegetable garden project in schools called *Gulayan sa Paaralan* to address malnutrition which affects one in every three public school children.

According to DepEd Secretary Armin Luistro, one of the ironies in our society is the fact that children go hungry when food can be grown here year round. "Wala sanang bata na undernourished kung lagi tayong nagtatanim at kumakain ng gulay at prutas na madami dito sa atin," said Luistro.

Luistro recently made a presentation on the thrust of DepEd in support of the *Oh My Gulay!* campaign spearheaded by Senator Edgardo Angara.

Luistro said children who are not properly nourished are physically and mentally weak, susceptible to infection and diseases and cannot cope with school work. "At sa kanilang paglaki, hindi rin makapagtrabaho ng maayos," added Luistro.

At present, there are some 6,000 public elementary and high schools involving 1.8 million students to the gulayan project. "While 6,000 seem like a big number, it only represents 15% of all public schools in the country," noted Luistro.

The *Gulayan sa Paaralan* needs more pro-active collaboration with stakeholders from the government and the private sector especially in the area of a more aggressive social marketing. Studies have shown that among South East Asians, Filipinos rank lowest in vegetable consumption at 40 kilograms per head each year. This is in contrast to China whose consumption is 250 kilos per head each year.

Latest figure from the Food and Nutrition Research Council showed that **26** in very 100 children (*6-10 years old – 25.6%*) or about 1.8 million school children are underweight for their age; **33** in every 100 children (*6-10 years old – 33.1 %*) or about 1.2 million school children are stunted or short for their age and **20** in every 100 school children (*6-12 years old – 19.8%*) are anemic

"Paano natin papalaganapin ang kaugnayan ng masustansiyang pagkain sa kanilang pag-aaral at sa pagtatrabaho sa di-kalaunan? Paano natin maipaparating sa mga bata at sa kanilang mga magulang ang kabutihang dulot ng regular na pagkain ng prutas at gulay?" Luistro asked.

Luistro noted that the advocacy on healthy diet focused on eating more vegetables and fruits are drowned out by a more aggressive advertising campaign of fast food chains which push for more meat consumption.

"Sa totoo lang kaagapay din sila sa edukasyon pero ang sinasabi natin sana mabalanse ang kampanya at mabigyan ng patas na importansiya ang pagkain ng gulay at prutas," Luistro emphasized.

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One of the future plans of DepEd is to scale up *Gulayan sa Paaralan* and make it an institutional advocacy in schools and not just a passing fancy. It also envisions more activities on environmental protection, waste composting in schools and to work closely with the organizers of *Oh My Gulay!* on healthy eating advocacy.

Based on DepEd estimates, it costs an initial P50,000 to start a school garden to cover seeds, fertilizer, garden tools and farm implements, farmer's hut, nursery and fencing.

"Maliit na halaga lang ito kung tutuusin kapalit ng napakalaking benepisyo sa buong komunidad ng gulayan sa paaralan," quipped Luistro.

DepEd's goal is to establish a sustainable vegetable garden in all of the country's 42, 076 public elementary and secondary schools nationwide.

Luistro reiterates that he envisions the *Gulayan sa Paaralan* not just a one-shot deal but a year-round activity. "Until such time that we are able to bring back to the consciousness of our youth that eating fruits and vegetables is best for our health and best for the family budget," said Luistro.

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