

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DepEd assures transparency in feeding program review

In response to concerns raised over the Department of Education's school feeding program, Education Secretary Jesli Lapus assures transparency in the program review he had earlier ordered undertaken by the department in coordination with independent experts.

"The Department of Education is serious about good governance and our track record will show that we have been gaining in our reform efforts in this huge agency," Lapus said.

Early this week, Lapus ordered the deferment of the procurement contract with the winning bidder to give way to investigations.

"This thorough review will enable us to further streamline and resolve the issues in our school feeding program," he added. "We should let this work take its own course."

The Secretary assures a credible review panel which will include industry experts on noodles, nutrition and freight.

DepEd officials earlier submitted documents explaining concerns and questions regarding pricing, product specifications, and bidding procedures to the Senate Committee on Education. On the overpricing issue, a market price survey of the various leading commercial brands in the targeted 13 food-poor provinces was submitted. The prices also differed in different parts of the country from P8.00 for 55 grams or equivalent to P15.00 for 100 grams to a high of P20.75 at 35 grams or P59.00 for 100 grams.

DepEd Undersecretary Ted Sangil pointed out that these noodles are shipped mainly to island municipalities and food-poor provinces in Visayas and Mindanao, with 74% of beneficiary schools located in Mindanao. A leading noodle manufacturer formally declined to participate because it said it was incapable of meeting DepEd's drop-off point requirements, especially in Mindanao.

Meanwhile, Assistant Secretary Thelma Santos stressed that the School Feeding noodles are rich in protein, vitamins and minerals, since they are fortified with eggs and malunggay. Eggs are known to be the best source of protein, while malunggay is widely recognized for being rich in key vitamins and minerals.

The nutritional content of the noodles were analyzed and certified by Societe General de Surveillance (SGS), a laboratory accredited by the

Bureau of Food and Drug (BFAD). Their test results were validated by BFAD.

She added that the type of instant noodles used in the program is practical for school-based feeding because it is easy to transport, easy to prepare and requires less manpower for cooking. She noted that eggs were added to the noodles since it would be impractical to transport fresh eggs to the beneficiary schools.

The department's School Feeding Program using fortified instant noodles will be provided is implemented by DepEd to address the nutritional needs of school children as part of the government's hunger mitigation initiatives in 13 food-poor provinces.

Fortified instant noodles will be provided daily to 373,440 pre-school and Grade 1 pupils for 104 days this school year. This represents a 30 percent increase from previous years' 80 days of in-school feeding.

Through this program, acknowledged as a successful flagship program in health and nutrition, there had been marked increase in weight among school children, decrease in the number of malnutrition cases and improved school attendance. In 2008, for instance, the incidence of undernutrition dropped from 22 percent to 16 percent.

"Our concern here is to make sure that we provide our students with the educational services that they need," Lopus added. "The department's school feeding program is widely recognized as an effective priority intervention and should therefore be supported and sustained."

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