

GMA vows more agri funds for Isabela

By CHARLIE LAGASCA

TUGUEGARAO CITY – More funds are expected for Isabela after President Arroyo ordered their release in recognition of Isabela's role in the country's agricultural production over the week.

The additional funding was also intended to help thousands of farmers in the country's top rice and corn-producing province to sustain and further enhance their production capabilities.

The President's order for additional funds to be poured into Isabela and the rest of the region drew praise from leaders in the region, with Rep. Georgidi Aggabao of Isabela's fourth congressional district calling it "a welcome development."

Visiting here Thursday, the Chief Executive, in her speech during the peace and security assembly, indicated that the financial assistance to Isabela was part of a bigger sum of money intended for the whole Cagayan Valley in recognition of its having taken over from Central Luzon as the country's food basket.

This was especially since the closest equivalent to grand river systems irrigating vast areas of a country like the Mekong river in Indochina and the Chao Phraya in Thailand is the Cagayan river, saying that this river "could be the secret in our greater agricultural production."

The President added that the further development of rice production in the region, especially in Isabela, could be greatly enhanced at lower expense with the development of the Cagayan river as a major source for irrigation.

She said the bulk of the funds intend-

ed for the region are to be poured into Isabela in recognition of its being the country's biggest producer of corn and a close second largest rice producer behind Nueva Ecija.

Home to the Magat Hydro-electric and Irrigation Project, Isabela, she said, deserves to receive more technical and financial support to improve even more its rice production.

"The reason Nueva Ecija has been number one in production is that the government has been pouring aid into it ever since the beginning. But now Isabela deserves more assistance poured into it for its farmers," she said.

Agriculture officials noted that Nueva Ecija, despite being the country's top rice producer, only produced 124,429 metric tons of palay in the first quarter of 2008 as compared to Isabela's 272,001 metric tons.

Mrs. Arroyo, in announcing the additional funds for Isabela, also congratulated its governor, Grace Padaca for garnering another milestone for the province by being one of this year's winners of the Magaysay Awards.

Earlier, a day before the President was to deliver her 8th State of the Nation Address, Padaca said that she expects the Chief Executive would put agricultural development on top of her priority projects to strengthen her food production program.

"I inspect and I am sure the President will announce more programs for agricultural development. These are very important for the country's self-sufficiency toward food security) of which Isabela has a big role.