

# GMA signs law extending CARP

By PAOLO ROMERO and DINO BALABO

PLARIDEL, Bulacan — President Arroyo signed into law yesterday a measure extending the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) for another five years beginning July 2009 and allocating P1.5 billion for its implementation.

She said the law,

which will implement the CARP with Extension and Reform (CARPER), is a continuation of the efforts of her father and the late former President Corazon Aquino to complete agrarian reform in the country.

Mrs. Arroyo signed

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Republic Act 9700 or the CARP Extension Law in simple ceremonies on the stage of the Don Ceasario San Diego Gym here that had a black and white picture of her father, the late President Diosdado Macapagal signing Agriculture Land Reform Code 46 years ago.

The signing was witnessed by Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile, Senators Gregorio Honasan, Aquilino Pimentel, Deputy Speaker Amelita Villarosa, House Majority Leader Arthur Defensor, and Reps. Rodolfo Antonino and Junie Cua as a crowd of over a thousand residents, farmer-beneficiaries, and government employees cheered.

"Agrarian reform should not merely subdivide...it must raise living standards. Ownership raises the farmer's productivity that will keep him on his feet," Mrs. Arroyo said.

"So we expect this Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension Law will help achieve our goal of productivity that will keep the emancipated farmer on his feet and raise living standards," she said.

The President also announced that she ordered the drafting of a bill that would condone the principal of the debts of farmer-beneficiaries owed to government financial institutions, particularly the Land Bank of the Philippines.

She cited Mrs. Aquino for her efforts at agrarian reform and the CARPER was her administration's way of showing "our solidarity with the late former President Corazon Aquino in our dream of liberating our farmer-beneficiaries from the claws of poverty."

She recalled that the entire Macapagal family witnessed the law signed by her father in 1963 that began the country's program for agrarian reform.

Under the law, CARPER would provide a P150-billion budget distributed over five years, 40 percent of which would go to support services to make

rural infrastructure lands more productive, while the rest will be used for land acquisition and distribution.

"This law that he (Macapagal) signed abolished tenancy and prescribed a program for transforming the farmer tenants into lessees and then into owner-tillers," the President said.

She pointed out that with the larger allocation of P150 billion, the CARP would be able to provide for the funding needs of farmer beneficiaries and further strengthen support services that would greatly help in increasing the productivity of their acquired land.

She noted that in her State of the Nation Address last year, she stressed the importance of improving the productivity of lands under CARPER.

"We must curb the recklessness that gives land without the means to make it productive," she said. "This law (CARPER) thus provides the means to not only equitably distribute land but also make it productive by undertaking entrepreneurial activities such as agri-business."

Agri-business, she said, are activities "that has something to do with agriculture with the farmer undertaking them not for subsistence but for generation of income."

Seed growers who sell their products to fellow farmers and those involved in agricultural processing such as converting jatropha plants into bio-diesel fuel or ethanol are examples of agri-business activities, which farmers may use to increase productivity of their land, she said.

### Solidarity with Aquino

Mrs. Arroyo said extending the program anew is one way of showing solidarity with former President Aquino in liberating farmer beneficiaries from poverty.

The President also sent a strong signal to all stakeholders of the CARP that she really means business when she distributed 10,853 hectares of agricultural lands to agrarian reform beneficiaries.

She led the switching on of a man-sized board bearing the sites of various

rural infrastructure projects, which include 18 farm-to-market roads and 10 communal irrigation systems, among others.

These projects will be implemented in Aurora, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, and Zambales.

Anastacio Isidro, 81, the second farmer here to receive a land title from Marcos, commented that President Arroyo's program is mere politics.

He said most politicians today are scions of landlords in the past.

However, Isidro said that land reform in the time of the elder Macapagal was more meaningful, noting that farming then was also easier.

He said that the government cannot blame local farmers for selling their land after receiving the title as they can hardly make their land productive.

Isidro said that the riceland awarded to him by Marcos was later sold to the government as it was sliced by a pass road project in this town.

-With Evelyn Macairan



President Arroyo signs the CARP extension with reform law at the Don Jose Mariano park in Plaridel, Bulacan yesterday. Among those witnessing the ceremony are Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile and Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman.

WILLY PEREZ