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PHIL 8839: THE MING RAMOS VARIETY

The answer to the problem of improving farm profitability lies on the proper culture and adoption of a good variety. For quite sometimes, planters has been scouring all sources for new varieties, both local and foreign-bred, in order to improve the level of productivity of their farm. With the availability of necessary inputs and high yielding varieties (HYVs), planters will be able to overcome stiff competition brought about by the forecasted globalization of the sugar industry in the next century. The obsession of every planters to acquire new HYV's is overwhelming, for it is a solution to bail them out of their present misery caused by the slump in sugar prices.

The varieties that are presently cultivated commercially are about 10-20 years old. Its continued cultivation lead to yield decline of the variety due to the breakdown of crop's disease resistance and other debilitating factors that influenced productivity. The yearly survey conducted by the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) indicated that old varieties like Phil 6607, Phil 56226 and Phil 58260 still dominated the variety picture of Panay and Negros region.

Like other varieties of the past, Phil 8839 was also developed through a series of intensive evaluation by sugarcane breeders who continuously explore and pursue all possible ways to produce varieties adaptable to the planter's field. Phil 8839 passed through several stages of testing before it was recommended for commercial release. After eight years of uninterrupted screening, Phil 8839 was finally selected as a potential variety to replace the old and deteriorating ones. It was officially launched as a commercial variety during the anniversary celebration of SRA held in Manila last June 6, 1996. Phil 8839 was named *Ming Ramos Variety*, in honor of the First Lady of the Philippine Republic.

The *Ming Ramos Variety* (Phil 8839) bred at SRA, La Granja Agricultural Research & Extension Center (LGAREC), is a cross between VMC 71-39 and Phil 6607. It has an erect to recumbent habit of growth. The variety is a medium grower and non-flowering. It is a semi-self trashing variety with few trichomes in the leaf sheath. The inner auricle of the leaf sheath is long and arching either upward or downward. The topmost leaves are erect to tip and the succeeding leaves which are medium in size are curved at the center.

The stalk of Phil 8839 is medium in size about 2.5-3.0 cm. in diameter, waxy and purple in color. It is slightly barrel to cylindrical in shape and corky patches are present in matured canes. Aerial roots maybe present on the stalk. One of the prominent identifying marks of this variety is the presence of double bud on the node of matured stalks.

Based on the Ecologic test result, Phil 8839 has a potential yield of 2.24 Lkg. per ton cane and 120 tons of cane per hectare. Other test conducted in Bais by the Department of Soils and Plant Nutrition indicated that Phil 8839 can reach a yield level of 324 Lkg. per hectare if given the right fertilizer requirement. Phil 8839 showed a high degree of resistance to sugarcane smut, downy mildew, leaf scorch and yellow spot, the four major diseases of sugarcane.

Today, the SRA's Department of Breeding and Genetics at LGAREC is embarking on a massive multiplication of Phil 8839 through a rapid micropropagation technique to meet the increasing demand for planting materials by planters nationwide.

There are five micro-propagation laboratories (Microlab) now operating to serve the needs of the planters. These laboratories under the auspices of SRA were established in Negros (LGAREC Microlab and First Farmers Microlab), Panay (Passi Microlab), Luzon (Tarlac Microlab) and Mindanao (BUSCO Microlab). These laboratories are tasked to produce plantlets of Phil 8839 and other promising sugarcane varieties to be made available to interested parties. Planters in these areas are advised to inquire with the said laboratories for their plantlet requirements. /glr

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