

**MANIFESTO OF THE FEDERATION OF FREE FARMERS (FFF)
AND THE FEDERATION OF FREE FARMERS COOPERATIVES (FFFC)**

JUNK VILLAR!

During its recent annual national meetings, the National Convention and National Policy Board (NPB) of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) and the General Assembly and National Board of Directors of the Federation of Free Farmers Cooperatives (FFFC) unanimously resolved to aggressively campaign against the candidacy of Senator Cynthia Villar who is running for re-election to the Senate.

The FFF and FFFC have taken note of the series of actions of Senator Villar which have been seriously detrimental to the interests of the millions of small farmers in the country, to wit:

- 1) Senator Villar was the principal author and proponent of the Rice Tariffication Law (RA 11203). The country was obliged under our commitments to the World Trade Organization (WTO) only to remove the quantitative restrictions (QRs) on rice imports and replace them with tariffs. Senator Villar however pushed for a law which also deregulated and liberalized the rice industry and removed most of the powers of the National Food Authority (NFA) to monitor and regulate the industry, thus making it easier for smugglers and unscrupulous grains businessmen to take advantage of both consumers and farmers. The Rice Tariffication Law also clipped the functions of the NFA both in terms of supplying cheap rice to poor consumers and providing farmers with a support price in case farmgate prices go down drastically. The law further removed the option of the government under WTO rules to reimpose quantitative restrictions on imports when needed, not only for rice but for all other crops.

Even before the Law could take effect, palay prices have already gone down to as low as P14 per kilo, or P6 per kilo lower than their levels last year. If this trend continues, farmers will end up losing P75 billion in 2019 alone for the palay they sell to the local market. Once the tariffication law takes effect, more imports are expected to come in and further depress prices, resulting in even more losses to farmers who are already reeling from the effects of the El Nino drought.

Poor consumers are also expected to suffer because of the Tariffication Law provision that NFA's buffer stocks can only be released during calamities and emergencies. Additionally, NFA will now be required to sell at at least break-even prices, and will probably auction its stocks to the highest bidders. This means that the P27 NFA rice will most probably disappear from the market and poor consumers will now have to spend more to buy rice in the open market.

Senator Villar is directly responsible for the harm that the Rice Tariffication Law will surely bring to consumers and farmers. During the Senate hearings, she refused to listen to the concerns of farmer representatives and heed their advise on how to cushion the effect of rice tariffication on rice farmers.

- 2) As Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Senator Villar was also responsible for sitting on the consolidated Senate Coconut Levy bill during the 16th Congress and then the crafting of the revised Coconut Level bill in the current 17th Congress which President Duterte eventually vetoed. This has led to further

delays in the utilization of the coconut levy funds for the benefit of coconut farmers, all of whom have been suffering from the extremely low prices for copra and raw coconut.

- 3) Senator Villar has also failed to conduct any substantive hearing on various bills filed in the Senate to legislate important land use policies, particularly those that will govern the conversion of agricultural lands into non-agricultural uses. In comparison, the House of Representatives had approved and passed on third reading their own version of the Land Use Act in previous years.
- 4) Senator Villar has also blocked initiatives to increase the capitalization and enlarge the scope of the crop insurance program despite the fact that such a program is critical to protect farmers from recurring calamities and damages from pest and diseases. Without crop insurance, farmers' loans will remain unpaid and farmers will not be able to immediately recover from calamities and crop damage.

Senator Villar has managed to secure the chairmanship of three critical Senate Committees that have a significant impact on Philippine Agriculture – the Committee on Agriculture, the Committee on Agrarian Reform and the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. Her record shows that her leadership of these committees has often resulted in anti-farmer and anti-agriculture outcomes in the Senate.

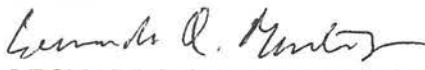
Worse, it is widely known that Senator Villar comes from the Villar Group of Companies which is among the country's largest real estate developers. Her companies often buy land from farmers and even agrarian reform beneficiaries, or are able to have public lands converted into private properties, for development into subdivisions, housing projects, malls, and related projects. It is not unreasonable to expect that Senator Villar can and could use her position in the Senate to enact laws, or to block proposals, that would impact on the investments and business activities of her family.

A glaring example is her provision of P700 million each year for the next six years under the Rice Tariffication Law to the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to conduct agricultural training and extension. While TESDA does not have any special expertise in the field of agriculture extension, the key agencies within the Department of Agriculture that are responsible for these activities; namely, the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), the Philippine Rice Research Institute (Philrice) and the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech), were allotted only P100 million each under the law. A cursory research will reveal that TESDA has been a primary partner of the Villar Group of Companies in running their SIPAG farm schools. The disproportionately large allocation given to TESDA under the Rice Tariffication Law may have been the result of this connection.

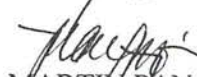
Based on the foregoing, the FFF and FFFC deem Senator Cynthia Villar to be patently anti-farmer and anti-agriculture. The FFF and FFFC consider her continued stay in the Senate, much less her chairmanship of key agriculture-related committees in the Senate, as extremely dangerous to the livelihood and welfare of millions of small farmers in the country.

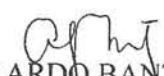
The FFF and FFFC therefore call on all its members and their families and sympathizers nationwide to JUNK VILLAR in the coming election and campaign so that she does not return to the Senate and do even more harm to farmers.

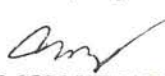
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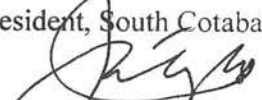

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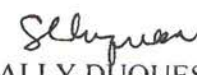

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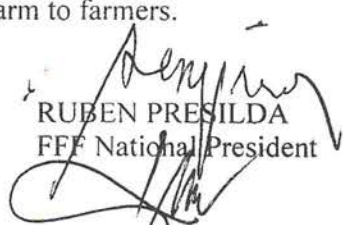

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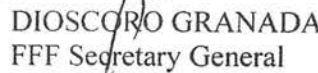

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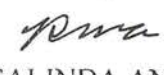

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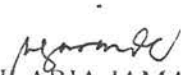

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