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SENATE

P. S. Res. No. 944

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Introduced by Senator Manny Villar

RESOLUTION

URGING THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD OTHER APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEES TO DIRECT THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, THE BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY AND OTHER CONCERNED GOVERNMENT AGENCIES TO FORMULATE AND ESTABLISH MEASURES THAT WILL ALLOW EXPORT OF PHILIPPINE BANANAS TO THE AUSTRALIAN MARKET WITH THE END-IN-VIEW OF INSTITUTING QUARANTINE PROGRAMS THAT WOULD PREVENT SIMILAR BAN OF OUR EXPORT PRODUCTS IN THE FUTURE

WHEREAS, in the 05 March 2009 issue of the Manila Standard Today, it was disclosed that Australia's 1,270 chain of supermarkets will ban the entry of Philippine bananas amid fears of the presence of pests and contaminants associated with the Philippine fruit;

WHEREAS, the campaign against said importation will push through despite clearance issued by the Biosecurity Australia, a federal agency that provides science-based quarantine assessments and pest risk analysis;

WHEREAS, Mr. Joel Rudinas, chief of the Philippine's Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) said that despite the importation clearance issued by Australian authorities, local banana growers may still find it difficult to export their products due to the very stringent, expensive and trade restrictive risk-assessment measures affixed to the clearance;

WHEREAS, based on the final report on the import risk analysis conducted by Biosecurity, a number of quarantine concerns against importation of Philippine bananas have been raised including:

- (i) importation only from farms that show low pest prevalence;
- (ii) stringent measures that involve Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) inspectors being present even in the field and packing houses in the Philippines;
- (iii) detailed data and documentation to be provided by the Philippines for consideration by Australia prior to any export which will be used for verification and validation of quarantine measures undertaken by laboratory and field experiments and commercial trials.

WHEREAS, according to Department of Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap, export shipments of Philippine bananas could reach US\$21.70 million on the first year, once Australia opens its market;

WHEREAS, this may not be realizable in the near future putting into consideration the alleged difficulty in complying to the restrictive measures imposed by the Australian authorities as well as the insistence of its lobbyists and other parties to bar subject importation;

WHEREAS, the above enumerated measures may pose some difficulty for our government authorities to comply due to its strict or protectionist nature, but we are left with no recourse but to conform to these standards if we want to spur market access of our banana exports to Australia;

WHEREAS, our government has been seeking access to the Australian market for Philippine bananas since 1995 and these efforts must not be put to naught;

WHEREAS, the Philippines produces 1.5 million metric tons of bananas annually from some 30,000 hectares of plantations located in South Cotabato and Davao and exports around \$300 million worth of bananas annually to Japan, China, South Korea and the Middle East who would have product and importation standards as well;

WHEREAS, the Department of Agriculture through its Bureau of Plant Industry and other concerned government agencies must make an effort to find ways of meeting Australian standards in order to expand our export market for bananas;

WHEREAS, in order to prevent similar ban on our other merchandise exports in the future, our government must formulate and institute quarantine programs, with optimal level of quarantine activity, that will generally provide essential protection measures supportive of international standards, that will protect both consumers and producers from health concerns and pests and diseases that can destroy our local agricultural production and export potentials;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, to urge the Committee on Agriculture and Food and other appropriate Senate Committees to direct the Department of Agriculture, the Bureau of Plant Industry and other concerned government agencies to formulate and establish measures that will allow export of Philippine bananas to the Australian market with the end-in-view of instituting quarantine programs supportive of international standards, in order to prevent similar ban of our merchandise exports in the future.

Adopted,


MANNY VILLAR