

## Correspondence

### Food sustainability in Covid-19 pandemic

To the Editor

In a recent correspondence, Kahambing<sup>1</sup> presented the need for a basic sustainable healthy diet that can be addressed through the use of cruciform ethics where one's self-emptying habits lead to a nutritious way of eating not only for oneself but also for others. He mentioned the need 'curiosity about the nutritional value is a must in food intake. Reading the food labels means focusing on some important nutrients, such as fiber, sugar and salt. It is recommended that 50% of the diet should be fruits and vegetables since healthy and sustainable food can make up for a fit living. Educating oneself and others about the nutritious way to eat by changing habits for the planet makes choosing food more conscious'.<sup>1</sup> Everyone must really do this. However, not everyone can practice these things, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some individuals cannot afford to eat, much more have a healthy diet.

A survey by the Social Weather Stations, Philippines, in 2020, placed hungry Filipinos nationwide at 21.1%, with Metro Manila having the highest incidence of hunger at an estimate of 780 000 families.<sup>2</sup> This is caused by different factors, such as unemployment and underemployment. In March 2021, there were 7.1% or 3.4 million jobless Filipinos. A month later, it worsened to 8.7% or 4.14 million Filipinos. Underemployment, on the other hand, is 18.2% or 7.9 million individuals.<sup>3</sup>

Financial difficulties led Filipinos to rely on government's dole outs or on local community pantries. Even though they know that they are supposed to eat fruits, vegetables, protein and other nutritious foods that their bodies need, they cannot afford to do so. They cannot even pick the canned goods and read its labels, as majority of the items are pre-selected by the government staff or private donors. These individuals have no choice but to eat the shelf-stable items and, at times, fresh produce when possible.

This is where cruciform ethics of sustainability must come in. The government officials assigned with food assistance and relief goods must be conscious of what they prepare and from where they get it. They must keep in mind the importance of adequate and proper nutrition. Awareness of the nutrients contained in foods in relation to its significance in

body maintenance, growth, reproduction, health and disease prevention of an individual is needed.<sup>4</sup> They must also pay attention to where they source the products from. Knowledge of these things leads to intelligent choices allowing Filipinos to benefit from government's assistance while attaining a healthy lifestyle amidst the pandemic. Same things can be said for those who donate to community pantries.

Some local chief executives are able to accomplish these by combining both healthy food and promoting support and sustainability to local farmers and producers. A mayor from Maguindanao bought dressed chicken from the local poultry farms and freshly harvested vegetables sourced from the local producers. He distributed it to his constituents.<sup>5</sup> In Bulacan, a local government unit supported local farmers from far-flung provinces by buying their fresh harvests of vegetables and smoked fish to be part of the relief goods in his area of governance.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the Office of the City Agriculturist in Isabela, Basilan, gave seeds and seedlings to different barangays to help residents start food production in their own backyards.<sup>7</sup>

Cruciform ethics is a good starting point to awaken the community, but there is a need to come up with effective and well-planned programs to address the growing number of Filipinos who are in need of sustainable food assistance.

## References

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