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Editorial

Agriculture...Chapt. 4893

While we appreciate the concern, and the viewpoint of Democratic gubernatorial candidate Joaquin Arriola on agriculture, we frankly doubt that the main solution to inflation on Guam would be a strong agricultural program, although it could help.

Arriola pointed out that thousands of acres of good farmland lies idle, while the island imports its produce and meat from outside sources. He noted that Guam imported some \$3.278 million worth of fruits and vegetables and \$6.63 million worth of meat last year. Indeed, that is a lot of money that could conceivably be staying on the island.

Arriola suggests the temporary importation of farm workers, presumably from the Philippines, Taiwan, or Korea, and the establishment of a marketing agency to maintain a steady interest in agriculture. He's probably right there. He's also right when he says that the marketing phase of farming on Guam is haphazard and chaotic. He suggests that the agency would seek and establish buyers for the farm produce, locally as well as off-island, and would even seek off-island markets for tropical produce that can be grown here.

The gubernatorial candidate said that this program would "substantially lower prices and guarantee a constant supply of fresh produce." We're not so sure about this. It has been our experience over the years that whenever a product is grown, or manufactured on Guam, the price just doesn't come down. We're thinking about such things as beer, eggs, clothing, soft drinks, or even the amount of locally grown produce, or meat now available on the island.

Land prices, labor prices, and the price of fertilizer and feed, and farm equipment are so high that we're doubtful whether, in fact, that Guam can really compete with the mass production of many vegetable and fruit items from the mainland or from other countries.

It seems incredible to us, for instance, that bananas, grown in Central America, can be shipped to the U.S., then brought to Guam, at about the same prices the local farmer charge. The same is true with egg production to a slightly lesser degree.

Agriculture—or our lack of it—is certainly a worthy subject for a campaign, but we doubt whether the picture is as easy, or as cheap as it has been painted. JCM.