

## PGMA reactivates El Niño task force

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has reactivated the El Niño Task Force and ordered the release of P1.7 billion to minimize the adverse effects of the El Niño phenomenon on the country's agriculture and fisheries sector.

She issued the directive during the January 26, 2010 meeting of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) in Malacañang.

Immediately thereafter, the task force chaired by Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap met in Malacañang to draft a comprehensive and integrated El Niño action plan.

For his part, Agriculture Undersecretary Bernie Fondevilla said the damage and losses to agriculture could reach P10 billion if there is no government intervention. If El Niño becomes severe, the damage could double, he added.

Fondevilla said the DA would realign portions of its 2010 budget to raise P1.7 billion to fund mitigating measures and keep losses at minimum levels.

The fund will be used to induce rains in drought-stricken areas via cloudseeding operations, construction of shallow tubewells, distribution of organic fertilizers to farmers, and installation of fish cages.

This year the DA targets to crop a total of 3.1 million hectares (2 million for rice and 1.1 million for corn).

The El Niño is projected to adversely affect more than 540,000 hectares of ricelands, more than 270,000 hectares of cornfields, and close threaten close to 17,000 hectares of fishery areas.

In its recent El Niño Advisory, the country's weather bureau or PAGASA (Phil. Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration) said "the current episode continues to persist across the equatorial Pacific Ocean and reached a moderate strength. It will likely influence the country's climate through June."

The DA has identified 23 El Niño prone areas.  
*(Pls turn to p11)*

## SRA sets sugar retail prices, warns profiteers

The Department of Agriculture through the Sugar Regulatory Administration (DA-SRA) has set a suggested retail price (SRP) for refined and brown sugar, at P52 and P44 per kilo, respectively.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap said this is to prevent overpricing by speculators and unscrupulous traders and retailers who are taking advantage of the current sugar situation.

The DA and the Department



*President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo urges business leaders and policy makers to come together and exhaust all efforts to preserve the 'coral triangle' -- the world's most important marine ecosystem, encompassing six countries, including the Philippines -- during the Coral Triangle Initiative Business Summit, January 19-20, 2010, in Makati City. Joining her are Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap and Dr. Lida Pet-Soede of the World Wildlife Fund Coral Triangle Programme. (Story on page 12)*

## FIELDS shifts to higher gear

To cope with the twin challenges of climate change and global free trade, and at the same time attain food security and sufficiency, the Department of Agriculture is intensifying the implementation of the FIELDS, President Arroyo's centerpiece food program.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur

Yap said that a major item in the DA's 2010 budget of P47.29 billion will be spent on the program's six major interventions: fertilizers; irrigation and other rural infrastructure like farm-to-market roads (FMRs); extension services and education for farmers; loans, crop in-

*(Pls turn to p10)*

### From Jan-April 2010

## NFA to buy 2.1M cavans of palay

The National Food Authority (NFA) targets to buy up to 2.1 million cavans (50 kilos each) of palay, from January to April 2010.

At the current buying price of P17 per kilo, this is equivalent to putting P1.785 billion into the pockets of hundreds of thousands of rice farmers nationwide.

NFA Administrator Jessup

*(Pls turn to p9)*

### *Typhoons trim '09 agri growth*

Philippine agriculture has made substantial gains during the first three quarters of 2009, but these were trimmed down by losses due to strong typhoons during the last quarter.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap said the overall farm and fisheries sector managed to grow by only 0.37 percent, as typhoons 'Ondoy' and 'Pepeng,' battered Metro Manila and the food-producing areas of Northern and Central Luzon in September and October last year.

The growth has remained positive thanks to the fisheries subsector, which

*(Pls turn to p10)*

of Trade and Industry (DTI), he added, will closely monitor retail prices of sugar in Metro Manila and major urban centers, and will not hesitate to padlock establishments or stores, and file appropriate charges against the owners caught selling beyond the SRPs.

Further, both the DA and DTI will monitor price movements across the supply chain, from the sugar mills to retail outlets,

*(Pls turn to p10)*

## ***Bracing up for El Niño, climate change, global trade***

Philippine agriculture has to remain resilient, as the world now more than ever is saddled by the persistent threats of a food crisis, crop and fishery damages due to El Niño and strong typhoons, and the challenge of surviving in the global trading arena.

Hence, government should continue to build on its food security and self-sufficiency program, particularly the FIELDS, to empower small farmers and fishers, and modernize the countryside.

With continued access to modern and quality seeds and farm and fishery inputs, technologies, credit, and establishment of irrigation, farm-to-market roads, postharvest facilities, including market outlets such as bagsakan centers — Filipino farmers and fishers are better prepared and insulated from El Niño, typhoons and other natural calamities due to climate change, including after-shocks of fierce global competition.

Further, they could continuously produce and earn more, and provide consumers with adequate and affordable food.

Recent and looming events make the task of building on the gains of the FIELDS more urgent.

For instance, this month domestic sugar prices have soared to as high as P60 per kilo, largely due to tight domestic supply and high demand in the global market, driven by the aggressive purchases of drought-battered India.

At the latter part of 2009, typhoons *Ondoy* and *Pepeng* have demonstrated once again the destructive and distortive powers of weather extremes on food production and distribution systems, and worse they trimmed the modest advances made in previous months and years.

In the next few months, the Filipino nation must again prepare for the onslaught of the El Niño phenomenon, whose effects are now felt in some parts of the country.

It is projected to cause billions of pesos in agricultural losses in a worst-case, no-intervention scenario.

But government is not sitting idly.

President Arroyo and Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap are ensuring greater investments in the FIELDS program, along with other imperatives.

But their political will and guidance should be matched by the vigorous support and active involvement of all agri-fishery stakeholders, and local governments -- as they directly supervise and control the country's 'food army,' the thousands of provincial, city and municipal agriculture officers, technicians and extension workers nationwide.

With political will, increased investments and popular support, the country's agriculture and fishery sector will undoubtedly shield the country from the onslaught of climate change and global trade.

## **Agri sector has enjoyed better times under PGMA**

The agriculture sector and the countryside, in general, has seen better times--benefiting small farmers, fishers, their families, including the indigenous peoples (IPs) and the landless--during the nine year-term administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

In a report comparing her accomplishments versus three former national leaders (Corazon Aquino, Fidel Ramos and Joseph Estrada), President Arroyo has fared very well across several indicators.

These include irrigated areas, palay yield, palay support price, loans to farmers and fishers, agriculture infrastructure, farmlands distributed under agrarian reform, and ancestral domain granted back to IPs.

During the last nine years, government has distributed an additional 1.8 million hectares to the landless farmers and their families. From 1998 to 2000, it was only 523,000 hectares.

The previous three administrations had no record of distribution of ancestral domain, while the Arroyo administration has issued 141 certificates for 3.5 million hectares, and recently another batch of 238 certificates approved covering 12,000 hectares.

Interventions on rural infrastructure, technology and farm support have enabled farmers to be more productive, increasing their average palay harvest from 3.07 metric tons (MT) to 3.63 MT per hectare in 2009.

Farmers' incomes have increased with increase in palay support price from P8.50 per kilo in 2000 to P17 per kilo in 2009.

More farmlands were irrigated, at 1.8 million hectares, thus increasing crop production and farmers' incomes.

The Arroyo government has also encouraged self-sufficiency, and created more liveli-

hood opportunities by providing more capital through loans granted by Land Bank of the Philippines to farmers and fisherfolk, from P97 billion in 2000 to P150 billion, from 2001 to 2009.

She also built more farm-to-market roads (FMRs), from 3,044 kilometers (kms) in 1998 to 2000, to more than five-fold at 17,517 kms, as of December 31, 2009. (*Phil. Information Agency*)

## **Infra investments boost RP's image as agribiz hub**

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo said the Philippines is one of the world's top five agribusiness destinations because of government's commitment to invest in agriculture-related infrastructure.

In a speech at the Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU), at the launch of several agri projects in Ilocos region, the President said investments in various infrastructure projects nationwide -- such as irrigation systems to water 156,000 hectares, construction of more kilometers of roads and bridges than the last three administrations combined, the upgrading of airports and seaports, and flood control projects -- have all contributed to the stable agribusiness image of the Philippines.

She built more roads (other than FMRs), totaling 47,773 kms versus 34,327 kms during past three administrations; more bridges, spanning 289,944 lineal meters versus 274,747; 32 new and rehabilitated Roll-On, Roll-Off (RORO) ports; and three new airports, upgraded three others, improved 71 airports, and five are under construction.

She also cited the country's growing popularity in the Middle East as an agribusiness partner in food production.

"They (the Middle East) started doing this in 2008 when there was a food crisis. They made a decision that they would use their accumulated petrodollars to look at the Philippines where they can produce agribusiness products for export back to the Middle East," she added. (*Phil. News Agency*)

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# DA-BFAR okays shrimp imports

The Department of Agriculture is now allowing the import and culture of black tiger shrimps (*Penaeus monodon*).

The DA through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) recently issued three administrative orders that set out the conditions and guidelines for the import and culture of the "broodstock and post-larvae of specific pathogen-free/specific pathogen resistant *Penaeus monodon*."

First, only shrimp hatcheries accredited by the BFAR shall be allowed to import SPF or SPR *Penaeus monodon* broodstock and postlarvae.

Moreover, only shrimp farms certified by the BFAR are allowed to culture the crustacean.

BFAR-accredited Pacific White Shrimp (*Penaeus vannamei*) hatcheries are allowed to import and breed black tiger shrimps, provided that they allocate separate hatchery facilities to handle the breeding and fry production of the latter and subject to BFAR inspection.

The agency also said the "broodstock and/or post-larvae" of black tiger shrimps to be imported must only come from disease-free facilities originating overseas.

Further, the facility "must have a minimum two years disease-free status, as certified by competent authority from the country of origin."

In addition, the facility shall likewise submit its disease history for the period covering its commercial establishment to the present.

Upon arrival at the facility, the broodstock and/or post-larvae shall be confined in designated holding tanks for quarantine and subsequent maturation and breeding purposes, BFAR said.

The directives were issued by Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap upon the recommendation of BFAR Director Malcolm Sarmiento and Assistant Agriculture Secretary Salvador Salacup, who is officer-in-charge of the Office of the DA Undersecretary for livestock and fisheries.

The BFAR only allows imports of broodstock and post-larvae from broodstock facilities originating from the United States of America (USA) and any other country that can show clear and verifiable capacity in producing

broodstock and/or post-larvae that are SPF and/or SPR, and must have well documented breeding program of *Penaeus monodon*.

The BFAR said violators will be penalized, and will serve a prison term of 8 years and a fine of P80,000. Further they will be banned from engaging in fishery-related business in the country.

For his part, BFAR Assistant Director Gil Adora said the bureau also lifted the ban on the importation and culture of Pacific White shrimp or *Peneaus vannamei* three years ago, in a bid to revive the country's once-robust shrimp industry.

Adora said the high selling price of black tiger shrimps in the domestic market will encourage local growers to raise the crustacean.

Black tiger shrimps sell for about P700 to P800 a kilo while Pacific white shrimps sell for about P300 to P400 a kilo.

In January 2007, Secretary Yap issued FAO 225 lifting the ban on the culture and importation of live shrimps and prawns in all stages of development, effectively paving the way for the entry of Pacific white shrimp brood stocks into the country.



DA Ass't. Sec. Dennis Araullo (3rd from right) awards to Ariel Mañalac, Administrator of the Sentrong Pamilihan ng Produktong Agrikultura ng Quezon Foundation, Inc. (SPPAQFI) the certificate for a brine immersion freezer (inset), in Sariaya, Quezon. With them are (from left to right) Quezon Congressman Proceso Alcala, a SPPAQFI director, DA-NABCOR President Alan Javellana, and DA-BPRE Director Ricardo Cachuela.

## Farmers, fishers get modern brine-immersion freezers

The Department of Agriculture's National Agribusiness Corp. (DA-NABCOR) has formally turned over a modern, multifunctional brine-immersion freezer (BIF) to small farmers and fisherfolk in Sariaya, Quezon.

They are members of the *Sentrong Pamilihan ng*

*Produktong Agrikultura ng Quezon Foundation, Inc.* (SPPAQFI), led by Ariel Mañalac. The BIF, designed and invented by Dr. Hernando Decena, can instantly freeze and preserve fish, fruits, meat and non-leafy vegetables--without the need for ice.

He said "small fisherfolk who have to shell out extra to buy ice to help preserve the quality of their catch will benefit from this new technology. And consumers, of course, because they can buy two-day or three-day old stored fish that looks as fresh and tastes as good as newly caught ones."

Manalac thanked the DA and NABCOR for the equipment. "*Malaking pakinabang ito para sa aming maliliit na magsasaka at mangingisda,*" he added.

For his part, Quezon Representative Proceso Alcala threw his support behind the modern freezer, saying that it would help farmers and fisherfolk command better prices for their produce because the technology would help them preserve the freshness and quality of their harvest for longer periods of time compared with conventional ice-making machines, especially during times of calamities.

"*Hindi na rin magmamadali sa pagbenta ang mangingisda ng kanilang mga huli dahil sa takot na ito ay mabilasa dahil maari na nila itong ilagay sa loob ng bif freezers ng matagal na panahon nang hindi nababago ang*

(Pls turn to p9)

## Quedancor offers condonation, incentives to delinquent borrowers

To effectively collect unpaid loans of its delinquent borrowers, the DA's Quedan and Rural Credit Guarantee Corporation (Quedancor) is offering settlement packages that provide better payment option.

Newly-appointed Quedancor President and CEO Federico A. Espiritu said as part of the package the agency will condone penalties and surcharges, reduce interest, and extend loan term.

These will be carried out through three respective programs: account remediation, loan modification, and small claims.

The first two are the agency's in-house settlement schemes to entice interested borrowers who either have arrears or past-due accounts.

The Small Claims Program is a legal remedy utilizing court mediation processes.

Quedancor has been striving to keep itself afloat after years of engaging in direct lending that almost caused its financial collapse.

Under the guidance of the present Governing Board, headed by Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap who is the agency's ex-officio Chairman, Quedancor stopped its direct lending operation in September 1, 2008 and refocused on its principal guarantee mandate.

Espiritu said Quedancor is fine-tuning three major guarantee products to unlock the vast financial resources of the private sector into the agri-fishery sectors that badly need credit guarantees and financing in cooperation with rural banks, cooperative banks and private financial institutions. (*Business Mirror*)

## From the Bureaus, Agencies

Selected developments on agriculture, fisheries, and agribusiness as reported by the DA-Bureaus, Attached Agencies and Corporations, and those published in national publications.

# NIA to fast-track P2.4-B irrigation project

The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) has accepted the challenge of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to fast-track the completion of the P2.4-billion Banaoang Pump Irrigation Project in Ilocos Sur.

The President made the challenge when she visited the project on Jan. 27, 2010, after coming from Ilocos Norte, where she inaugurated the P576.8-million Sarrat Bridge across the Laoag-Pagsaan River.

NIA Administrator Carlos Salazar reported to the President that the Banaoang project is 87 percent complete.

He said they will do everything they can so that it will be completed on April 5, the Chief Executive's birthday.

In her visit to Ilocos Sur, President Arroyo was joined by Secretary Hermogenes Esperon of the Presidential Management Staff (PMS) and was welcomed by Deputy National Security Adviser Luis Chavit Singson, Governor Deogracias Victor "DV" B. Savellano and Rep. Ronald V. Singson (1st District of Ilocos Sur).

"We need to fast track the

completion of this pump irrigation project because this will address the perennial problem of agriculture sector on insufficiency of water for growing crops," President Arroyo said.

She said the project will also mitigate the effects of the El Niño in the province.

Salazar disclosed that even if the pump irrigation is not yet finished, it is already irrigating more than 1,000 hectares of farmland due to its impounded water coming from rainfall and small creeks.

Construction of the Banaoang Pump Irrigation Project started in March 2003, more than two years of the presidency of Mrs. Arroyo.

The source of fund for the project is a loan from the People's Republic of China and is being implemented by the China Agricultural Machinery Import/Export Company (CAMCI).

The irrigation project will service about 6,312 hectares of agricultural lands, covering the towns of Bantay, Sta. Catalina, San Ildefonso, Caoayan, Magsingal, Sto. Domingo, San



*Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap (2nd from left) hands a 'Hall of Fame' award to Salvador R. Merino, former Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) quarantine service chief, during the 80th BPI anniversary, where he challenged officials and staff to develop more 'climate change-ready' crops. Flanking them are DA Undersecretary Segfredo Serrano (right) and BPI OIC-Director Larry Lacson.*

Vicente and Vigan City. It will benefit 5,334 farm households.

The pump irrigation project has the following features: seven electric-powered pumps, 1.4-kilometer tunnel; 87-kilometer main and lateral canals; 310-kilometer main and supplementary farm ditches; 87-kilometer

operation and maintenance roads; and 170-kilometer drainage canals.

The project will boost the production of 72,900 metric tons of rice annually from seven towns and one city in the first district of Ilocos Sur, Salazar said. (Phil. News Agency)

## Eat brown rice!

As it is nutritious, advised experts who wrote a book, *About Brown Rice*.

The authors, who call themselves *Brown Rice Advocates* (BRADS) said brown rice production and consumption prevents certain diseases, maximizes rice harvest, lowers per capita consumption, and more efficient use of energy.

The BRADS intends to impart knowledge about different aspects of brown rice with the hope that this information can be passed on to a wider community, BRADS Co-Chair Rogelio V. Cuyno said.

BRADS is a coalition of government and non-government establishments and institutions, formed to spearhead the campaign to promote the production and consumption of brown rice.

Furthermore, the team persuades the consumers to change their life style and replace white rice with brown rice in their diet.

As published in the book, brown rice is not metabolized and digested as quickly as white

rice. With a smaller volume consumption of brown rice, a person will feel full and does not get hungry easily.

As a result, lowers the per capita consumption, hence reducing the national requirement for rice.

The book promotes brown rice for better nutrition and economic opportunities.

It contains valuable information on the production, dietary contribution, health benefits, and nutrient content.

The Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR) provided support for the release of the book under its Scientific Publication Grant program which aims to promote excellence in research and development by providing financial support to different scientific and professional societies, researchers and editors of organizations under the National Research and Development System for Agriculture and Fisheries (NaRDSAF). (Ma. Eloisa E. Hernandez, DA-Bureau of Agricultural Research)



*Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap (2nd from right) and Norwegian Ambassador Knut Solem (right) sign an agreement on behalf of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and the DA-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), where NORAD will provide a grant to implement the 2nd phase of the 'Environmental Monitoring and Modeling Towards Sustainable Aquaculture Development Project' (EMMA 2). With them are BFAR ass't. director Gil Adora (2nd from left) and Westly Rosario of BFAR's Nat'l. Integrated Fisheries Technology Dev't. Center.*

## From the Regions

Selected news and developments on agriculture, fisheries, agribusiness and related sectors, as reported by the DA-Regional Field Units, and those published in national and provincial publications.

### 'Ilocos White Gold' eyed to revive garlic industry

The processing of the "Ilocos White Gold" garlic into pickles and chips is eyed to revive the country's dampened production

of garlic, and perhaps over the long-term make up for the country's substantial garlic imports of close to 165,000 tons.

Said initiative will be carried out by the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR) which has forged an agreement with farmers and respective local government units in Ilocos Region.

The partnership will engage in increasing garlic production, processing, value-adding, pack-



aging, labeling, and enterprise development.

The DA-BAR experts will teach farmers modern produc-

tion technology, and provide new high-yielding and pest-resistant varieties to raise produc-

tion from the current 2.81 MT to as much as nine tons per hectare.

"Since the goal is to enhance productivity, methods have been developed to improve cultural management practices such as balanced fertilization and application of growth hormones," according to Wilhelmina P. Castaneda and three other DA-BAR researchers.

The project also aims to produce value-added products like garlic chips, bread, powder, granules, flakes and pickles., and farmer-processors were trained at the Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU).

To date, 150 farmers from Pasuquin and Vintar, Ilocos Norte were trained in production, while 60 others from Batac and Siwawer Garlic Products Ass'n were trained in processing and enterprise development.

Initial success has been achieved as the trained 150 farmers were able to raise their yield, ranging from 46 to 89 percent, from their one-hectare techno-demo farms, BAR experts said.

In previous years, Ilocos farmers were discouraged from raising the crop with the influx of legally-imported and illegally-smuggled garlic from Taiwan and China.

Garlic farming in Ilocos and elsewhere in the country has not yet been fully tapped, said BAR experts Sharon A. Vilorio, Aida D. Solsoloy, and Leonardo T. Pascual.

Ilocos accounts for 65 percent of the country's total garlic output. (*Manila Bulletin*)

### PGMA opens P68-M corn facility in Agusan Sur

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo recently inaugurated a P68-million Corn Post Harvest Processing and Trading Center in Barangay Mabuhay, Bayugan City, Agusan del Sur.

Top provincial and city officials led by Agusan del Sur Gov. Maria Valentina Plaza and her elder brother Agusan del Sur Rep. Rodolfo Plaza and Bayugan City Mayor Magdalena Asis assisted the Chief Executive during the opening of the facility.

A joint business venture between the DA's National Agribusiness Corporation (NABCOR) and the provincial government of Agusan del Sur, the facility will serve as a center for buying corn on cobs, corn processing, selling of corn grains, and production of food grade corn grain in the Caraga Region.

It is expected to ensure a ready market for farmers' produce at competitive prices, provide mechanism that reduces the corn drying and processing cost by at least 50 percent, ensure continuous supply of premium quality corn grains at 14 percent moisture content and decrease post harvest losses

from 15 to 5 percent of production.

The facility could also process 1,375 metric tons of grain at 14 percent moisture content per month because of its capability to dry corn on the cob and grains even during rainy season.

The Agusan del Sur provincial government said it will also construct two similar facilities in the towns of Trento and San Francisco.

Meanwhile, to address the transport problem, trucks will be provided free for farmers within a 15-kilometer radius from the center.

"The facility will ensure continuous supply of guaranteed premium quality corn in our province," Governor Plaza said.

The provincial chief executive also sees the growing production of farmers especially those in far-flung areas.

As this developed, Plaza mobilized all technical men and personnel of the Provincial Agriculture Office to assist the immediate needs of the farmers.

Agusan del Sur is acknowledged as the "food basket" in Northeastern Mindanao. (*Manila Bulletin*)

### SACY names reg'l officials

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap recently appointed several DA regional field officials.

They are led by Dr. Carlos Mendoza, who was appointed as DA-Davao Regional Executive Director.

Dir. Rolando Imperial of the North Luzon Agribusiness Quadrangle (NLAQ) was designated Regional Technical Director (RTD) in Region 3 (Central Luzon).

DA Region 5 (Bicol) RTD for Operations and Regulatory Marilyn V. Sta Catalina was named Officer-in-Charge, in lieu of Dir. Jose Dayao, who is on leave.

RTD Constancio Maghanoy was designated DA-CARAGA OIC, in lieu of Dir. Ricardo Regis, who is also on leave.

Meanwhile, Acting Governor Ansarudin A. Adiong of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) has appointed Atty. Lomala Mariam Balindong, Al Haj as the new Department of Agriculture & Fisheries-ARMM Secretary.



Acting DA Undersecretary for Operations Joel Rudinas (right) urges outstanding vegetable producers of San Ildefonso, Bulacan to continue inspiring other farmers with their success stories to bring the Bulacan veggie sector into greater heights during the Second Gulayan Festival. He said farmers should sustain their partnerships with local and national agencies to keep up with the demands of the market for quality and safe vegetables. Inset, he together with DA-RFU 3 Dir. Redentor Gatus, Bulacan Gov. Jon-Jon Mendoza, San Ildefonso Mayor Edgardo Galvez hand over vegetable seeds to farmers.

**Certified by Guinness  
at 3.435 kg.**

# Pinoy mango is world's heaviest

A farmer in Mindanao has once again proven that Filipinos have world-class skills in agriculture, following the official recognition by the Guinness World Records (GWR).

Maria Socorro Bodiongan, of Tubod, Iligan City, Lanao del Norte, has successfully grown and harvested a 'super mango,' weighing 3.435 kilograms (7.57 lbs.), which was recently certified by the GWR as the world's heaviest mango to date.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap commended Ms. Bodiongan's record-breaking achievement, whose mango outweighed the previous record-holder from Hawaii, which tipped the scale at 2.4 kilos.

"We are proud of Ms. Bodiongan's achievement and hope that her feat will inspire other stakeholders in the agriculture sector to likewise attain excellence in food production," Yap said.

Farmers and fruit growers like the Bodiongan family, he added, can achieve excellence and be globally competitive with the necessary government assistance and support, particularly under the Arroyo administration, which has made good on its pledge to ensure higher spending for Philippine agriculture.

"At the DA, our goal is to increase not only farm and fisheries production, but also to make agriculture a profitable venture for small farmers, fisherfolk and other stakeholders by providing them technical and input assistance, postharvest facilities, and linking them directly to more markets for their produce both here and overseas," Yap said.

The Bodiongans harvested the fruit -- measuring 30 centimeters long and 50 centimeters wide -- last August 25, 2009, from the family's front-yard mango tree in Tubod. Maria Socorro said their mango was of the 'Florida Keitt' variety. They planted the tree in 1992, and started bearing fruits in 1996.

Ms. Bodiongan said that at harvest time, their mangoes typically weigh from 1.5 to 2.5 kilo-

grams each. They don't sell them, but instead give them to friends.

The particular fruit that was adjudged world's heaviest outweighed the previous 2.4-kilogram mango, also a 'Florida Keitt' variety, owned by a certain Collen Porter of Kailua-Kona, in Hawaii, USA.

On August 27, 2009, the Bodiongans entered the fruit

under the *Pinaka* contest or 'the biggest of everything' at the *Sundayag* agro Festival in Cagayan de Oro City.

It easily won as the biggest and heaviest fruit.

Two months later on October 31, they submitted it to the GWR for the world's heaviest mango category -- with the required documents: photographs, videos, notarized

statements of witnesses, newspaper clippings, internet links, and printouts of other pieces of corroborating evidence.

For the Bodiongans, Christmas came six days early, on December 19, when the Records Management Team of the Guinness World Records officially informed them that their mango won as the "world's heaviest mango."

On January 13, 2010, they received the official certificate from Guinness.

Acknowledging their world-breaking achievement, Ms. Socorro Bodiongan wrote in a recent email:

*"I am happy to inform every Filipino that I received the official Guinness World Records' Certificate for the 'heaviest mango,' on January 13, 2010. Praise, honor and glory be to God, the Almighty for His abundant blessings to the Philippines!"*

*(DA-RFU 10 Info Div. w/ excerpts from Manila Standard Today)*



*Maria Socorro and Sergio Bodiongan of Tubod, Iligan City, Lanao del Norte, proudly shows the current world's heaviest mango, as certified by Guinness Book of World Records.*

## 'Bagoong' can kill rats

In Nueva Ecija, boneless *bagoong* has been proven an effective exterminator of rats. Its aroma draws rats to the rat poison, and thus kills them.

Engineer Redentor Gatus, DA regional director for Central Luzon, said *bagoong* is simply mixed with powdered zinc phosphide, a known rat poison, and *binlid* (broken rice) and other organic materials.

He said one pack of boneless *bagoong* mixed with zinc phosphide with every 150 grams of rice makes the potent mix a deadly potion.

"Rats are somehow magnetized by the smell of *bagoong* and they gather like a crowd," he said.

Gatus said the use of *bagoong* was part of the massive rat poisoning campaign dubbed "Oplan Pain" (or operation bait) launched by the DA with the provincial agricultural office and various municipal agricultural offices in Nueva Ecija to eradicate rats.

Gatus said Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap has ordered regional agriculture officials to undertake the rat infestation campaign in Nueva Ecija, a known rice bowl, amid reports that ricefields in 16 of its 27 towns were infested.

Aside from zinc phosphide, the DA regional office has also equipped municipal agricultural offices in rat-infested towns with flame-throwers.

Using flame-throwers, rats are driven out of the burrows and out in the open where they are bludgeoned to death with the use of wooden canes.

Jun Espiritu, chief of the public information office of DA-Region 3, said farmers also get pointers from agricultural experts on the various means to eliminate rats apart from the use of zinc phosphide and flame-throwers.

Among these measures, he said, include narrowing of the sizes of dikes and levies, which should be no more than six inches tall and eight inches wide so that rats won't have space to live, and by digging the holes and burrows found in their farms.

Farmers, he added, are also advised to circumfence their farms with plastic sheets, a method known as total rat barrier system, one month before the regular planting. (by Manny Galvez with Ric Sapnu, *The Philippine Star*)

## Bukidnon carpenters produce, profit from organic fertilizers



*Carpenters in Bukidnon earn extra income by simply raising earthworms that produce wastes called 'vermicast,' an organic fertilizer. A bag of vermicast sells for P200 to P250 each.*

Small carpenters in Poblacion, Lantapan Bukidnon--belonging to a group, the Community Helping Livelihood Organization (CHLO)--are benefitting from raising earthworms (or vermiculture), funded under the Department of Agriculture's Mindanao Rural Development Program (DA-MRDP).

The CHLO is one of the 25 people's organizations that received P100,000 each from DA-MRDP to finance their agriculture-related projects.

Benjamin Rosas, CHLO president, said they started their vermiculture project in September 2008, with each member building their own 'vermi-beds,' which is about 1 meter by 5 meters, and half-a-meter deep.

They filled the beds with organic wastes like garbage from the market, and farm and animal wastes, and of course earthworms.

They started harvesting vermicast (the bedding materials and wastes of earthworms) in December 2008. Each bed yielded 17 to 30 bags, depending on the size of the vermi-bed and the amount of organic materials used.

Rosas said they sell the vermicast at P200 to P250 per bag to farmers, who plant banana, corn and vegetables.

They harvest vermicast every two months, with each bed giving them P4,000 to P6,000. "Nagpasalamat gyud mi sa gobyerno nga pinaagi sa CFAD project sa MRDP natagbo ang

among adlaw-adlaw nga panginahanglan pinansyal bisan sa pag-eskwela sa among mga anak," (We are thankful to the government that because of MRDP's CFAD project our daily needs are met including our children's education), Rosas said.

"Naa gyud diy kuwarta sa vermi kung magkugi lang ta, (There is really money in vermiculture, if we only do the painstaking task)," said Cerelina, wife of Ernesto Garcia, one of the CHLO members, who maintain five vermi beds in their backyard.

The CHLO plans to buy a hauler/vehicle, build a storage facility, and rent or buy a lot for their vermiculture project, as well as crop production.

Recently, the group has ventured into squash production in a 3/4 hectare farm. They are set to harvest this January.

They also plan to raise ginger, as it fetches a good price in Bukidnon.

The members have agreed to contribute P200 per bed per harvest to build up the association's fund.

"Bisag wala pa mahal in ang vermicast dili rason nga dili makahatag ang miembro kay puede man nga usa ka sako sa vermicast ibayad" (The contribution is in cash or one bag vermicast, so the member will be able to pay even if the vermicast is not yet sold), said Jason Sulayaw, the CHLO secretary. (Rosie Rosola E. Paasa, DA-RFU 10 Reg'l Info Officer)

## FIELDS Program Scorecard (April 2008-December 2009)

### Fertilizers



Distributed over 3.56 million fertilizer discount coupons, benefitting 1.78 million farmers, and 36.6 million kilos of organic fertilizers and other soil ameliorants such as Bio-N, Vital-N and Bio-con; Established 52 composting facilities and 6 Bio-N mixing plants.

### Irrigation



Generated 22,112 ha of new irrigation areas, rehabilitated 238,371 ha and restored 139,905 ha of unserviceable and deteriorated irrigation facilities; Constructed 3,503 kilometers of farm-to-market roads; and Established 20 mariculture parks located in coves or protected areas.

### Extension



Conducted 13,682 training and training-related activities for 282,793 farmers/fisherfolk and 4,267 various research and development activities; and Established 8,686 techno demos showcasing technologies to improve farming activities.

### Loans



Released P4.4 B loans to 139,854 farmers/fisherfolk under the Agro-Industry Modernization Credit and Financing Program (AMCFP) of which P4.169-B benefited 121,137 farmers covering 179,869 ha; and P24.86B through LBP of which P14.7B was for palay production.

### Dryers



Installed 1,175 flatbed dryers and 11 operational corn postharvest processing and trading centers, tramlines, cold storage facilities for fishery product, 7 municipal fish ports; and 55 bagsakan centers (market retail outlets) and 326 barangay bagsakan (wholesale markets).

### Seeds



Provided certified seeds to over 3 million ha and hybrid seeds to 31,480 ha; Distributed 25.9 million pieces of planting materials, 46,002 head of various animals, 259.3 million pieces of fingerlings and 3.68 million pieces of broodstock.

## International News Round-up

A digest of selected news, developments and breakthrough agriculture, fisheries, agribusiness and related fields culled from websites and publications of international institutions and organizations.

### Vietnam rice export boom an accident, analysts warn

Vietnam's rice exports were at a new high last year at more than six million tons, but analysts cautioned against complacency saying the country owed the success to external factors rather than internal strengths.

They said demand for Vietnamese rice surged since other major exporters like Thailand and India cut back on exports while the economic slump boosted demand for rice worldwide as a substitute for other foods.

The question is how long the market situation will remain so favorable for Vietnamese rice exports.

With the population increasing and farmlands shrinking globally, rice demand is expected to stay high in the future.

But many countries facing food security threats have begun to deal with it themselves.

The Hanoi-based Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development said the Philippines, for instance, had earmarked US\$1 billion for a program to boost rice production.

Malaysia has approved a 2.4 billion ringgit (\$700 million) food security plan while China is offering various financial incentives to increase rice output.

Vietnam is forecast to have abundant rice for export but all predictions may turn out to be wrong if climate change accelerates and more farmlands are gobbled up by the creep of industrialization.

The country should not just count on increasing exports in the coming years, analysts said.

Rice exports increased 28 percent by volume last year to overhaul the 2005 figure of 5.17 million tons, fetching \$2.4 billion. (IRRI)



### Bill Gates donates \$2.4M for cassava research

Microsoft chair Bill Gates, through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has donated a US\$2.4-million grant to the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and its partner the Agricultural Research Institute (ARI) in Tanzania, and the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO), in Uganda, for a research to develop disease-resistant cassava varieties.

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) said the research aims to identify and use molecular markers for faster and more accurate breeding of cassava varieties resistant to Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD). Caused by a virus, the disease results in a dry rot in the tuberous roots rendering them inedible.

Cassava is an important staple food in Africa, from which over 200 million people derive over 50% of their carbohydrate intake. It is a hardy crop that does well during drought and in poor soils. It requires little inputs such as fertilizers.

The whole plant is useful from the leaves to the roots.

IITA and ARI have identified a few varieties with some level of resistance to the CBSD.

The four-year project aims to identify the DNA markers associated with the resistance genes in these varieties and integrate marker-assisted selection into cassava breeding programs.

Marker-assisted breeding will enable the breeders to determine whether or not the desired genes of CBSD resistance have been successfully transferred from the parents to the offspring at the seedling stage using DNA testing.

This will dramatically reduce the size of the working populations and the time taken to develop improved varieties. (CGIAR)

### Myanmar to breed salmon, sturgeon

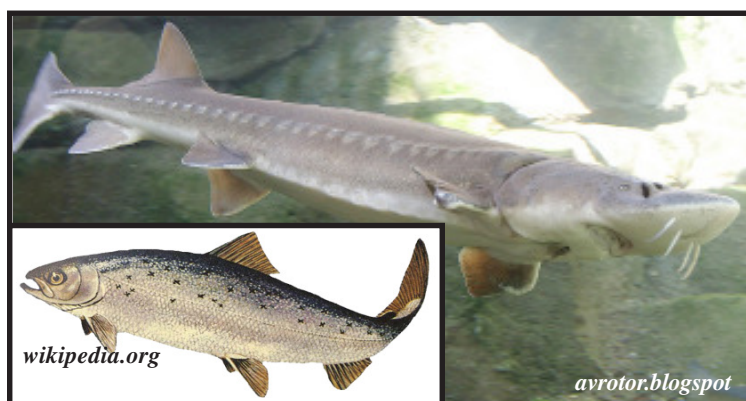
Caviar and smoked salmon could soon be on the menu of the people of Myanmar (Burma), if its Department of Fisheries' (DOF) plan materializes over the next few years.

According to *Myanmar Times*, the plan is to establish cold climate fish farms in the country's northernmost Kachin State, a plan which was identified after an early December visit by a delegation of DOF officials and fisheries industry members to similar farms in Vietnam.

The species likely to be farmed are sturgeon, famous for the caviar (eggs) it produces, and salmon.

The towns already identified as possible locations for farms are Putao, Myitkyina and Kanpaiktee, with investors from Vietnam keen to put money into the idea, said U Khin Ko Lay, director general of the DOF.

Myanmar already farms the mrigal, tilapia and common carp in Shan, Kachin and Chin states but the sturgeon and salmon



A sturgeon, famous for its caviar, (above) and salmon (inset).

would be new additions, U Khin Ko Lay said.

If the DOF's plan goes ahead the eggs required for the programme will be imported from Vietnam, which were themselves sent from Ukraine some four years earlier.

U Khin Ko Lay said Vietnam has hired three experts from Russia and Ukraine to assist its development of salmon and sturgeon farms, and has already invested in similar farms in Laos.

Caviar fetches up to US\$2000 a kilogram in international markets and salmon is also viewed as a lucrative species, he said.

He said any agreement between Vietnamese investors and the DOF would involve the Vietnamese side putting in all of the required capital, with profits split thereafter.

He said a number of experts will be arriving in February to begin working on the farms. (thefishsite)

## ***NFA to buy ... (from p1)***

Navarro said for the first three weeks of January, the agency has already bought 249,905 bags, which is 46% of the month's target of 537,500 bags.

It is rather low, as farmers are just starting to harvest, Navarro said. But it will pick in the coming months through April and May, he added.

The respective procurement volumes are: February - 360,250 bags; March - 540,250; and April - 696,900.

In May, the NFA will buy 504,900 bags more in regions where harvest is extended.

For the entire 2010, the NFA targets to buy up to 11.6 million 50-kilo bags of palay, or 580,000 tons, worth P9.86 billion at P17 per kilo.

To date, the NFA is buying an average of 23,018 bags daily.

## ***Farmers ... (from p3)***

*kalidad at kasariwaan ng kanilang mga isda,*" Alcala said.

Others who witnessed the launching included Department of Trade Industry representative Lani Constantino, Dr. Violeta Zalda of the Benguet State University, Paul Baosling of the DA's Ginintuang Masaganang Ani-High Value Commercial Crops Program in Benguet; Elmer Baquiran, president and chair of the BOD, Agri-Component; Kristoffer Jaronel of the Dinadiawan Cooperative of Aurora, Quezon; Thomas Reyes, president of the Quezon Vegetable Council; Melchor Jovellano, president of the Lucena Vegetable Growers; Raul Edrad, president of the Pagbilao Vegetable Industry Council in Pagbilao, Quezon; and Rombe Philippines, which represented pork producers.

The DA-NABCOR is acquiring a total of 98 BIF freezers.

Decena said by first freezing fish or meat items in the BIF freezers, users can then store their commodities in conventional freezers or refrigerators for as long as six months to a year and still retain their quality and taste.

NABCOR spokesperson Kathryrin Pioquinto said "critics of this project are wrong to cry over-price because they are comparing the purchase cost of these mobile, state-of-the-art freezers with those of conventional or traditional, permanent and single-purpose ice-making machines that are widely used in the country."

The biggest volumes bought were from Southern Tagalog, at 84,025 bags, mostly from Mindoro; and Ilocos region, 71,787 bags.

To entice more farmers to sell their palay, the NFA agency grants an additional P0.70 per kilo incentive, on top of the P17 per kilo buying price for clean and dry palay.

This is an additional P35 per 50-kilo bag.

The 70-centavo incentive includes 30 centavos for cooperative development, 20 centavos each for drying and transport to compensate farmers' efforts in properly drying their palay and bringing them direct to NFA buying stations.

In all, this translates to P17.70 per kilo for clean and dry palay, or a total of P885 per 50-kilo bag, Navarro said. (NFA Public Affairs Dep't.)

"It's like comparing apples and oranges," Pioquinto said in citing the superiority of the state-of-the-art on refrigeration design and one-of-a-kind feature of BIF equipment that Nabcor is acquiring from the winning bidder—the Integrated Refrigeration System and Services Inc. (IRSSI).

The BIF is actually a take-off from the American and Japanese BIF technology of quick-freeze, which was improved upon by a local group, which includes Filipino inventor Decena, to make it to (-40 degree Celsius) a much lower operating temperature, more compact, more-cost effective, user-friendly and a multi-functional piece of equipment.

He said it takes only 3 to 30 minutes (depending on type, size and volume of product to be processed) to freeze a product using BIF, compared to the conventional method, which takes 3 to 4 hours, using the air blast freezing system.

Another advantage of this technology is its mobility and easy plug-in feature, Decena said.

"A BIF compartment stands on wheels, thus it is easy to move around. And it can be plugged into any available electrical outlet," he added.

The BIF freezer is also user friendly, Decena said. "You just wait to reach the ideal freezing temperature of between minus-30 degrees and minus-40 degrees, and then you can already start to freeze the product, whether it be fish, meat, fruits or vegetables."



***Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap (center) proudly shows the agreement forged by DA-PADCC president Marriz Agbon (left), Bum-Jun Kim, CEO of South Korean firm, Wooriranch Co. Ltd., and PAMPANO president Rogelio Amatorio Jr. (Photo by Angelica Barlis, DA-PADCC)***

## **Korean firm to invest in RP tuna industry**

A South Korean company will invest more than \$1 million in the country's tuna industry, said Marriz Agbon, president of the DA's Philippine Agricultural Development and Commercial Corporation (PADCC).

He said Wooriranch Co. Ltd. will supply the monthly requirements of high-grade sashimi tuna for 150 franchise restaurants in South Korea.

"Initially, it will import 200 metric tons of sashimi-grade tuna for a month. It is looking at sourcing tuna from local companies and fishers' groups for one year," Agbon said.

In support to sustainable fishing, the Filipino tuna fishers will only use circle hooks to reduce

by-catch of sea turtles and other marine-resources.

The agreement was forged, along with Luen Thai Fishing Ventures and *Pambansang Alyansa ng Mga Mangingisda at Pamunuan ng Organisasyon Inc.* (PAMPANO).

"We are pioneering this project to see how far we can go in terms of sustaining the activities that will speed up economic growth of the Philippines and the CT nations," said Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap during a media conference.

The agreement was formalized during the 1st Coral Triangle Initiative Business Summit, January 19-20, 2010, in Makati City. (Angelica Barlis, DA-PADCC)

## **DA scholarship, anyone?**

The Department of Agriculture is offering 51 graduate scholarships (48 masteral and three doctoral), starting first semester of SY 2010-11.

These are open to professional staff of the DA's central and regional offices.

Those selected may pursue their MS or PhD on either strategic leadership and public management, development economics and agricultural policy, and agricultural business, trade, and investment.

They may enrol at the UP School of Economics, Ateneo de Manila School of Government in Quezon City, or University of Asia and the

Pacific School of Management in Pasig.

The scholarship program is implemented by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization-Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEAMEO-SEARCA), in Los Baños, Laguna.

Applications should be submitted on or before March 31, 2010 to the Expanded HRD Program, DA-Agricultural Training Institute.

For more information, contact SEARCA Graduate Scholarship Dep't. at [gsd@agri.searca.org](mailto:gsd@agri.searca.org) or [eco@agri.searca.org](mailto:eco@agri.searca.org) or [ijm@agri.searca.org](mailto:ijm@agri.searca.org).



*Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap (2nd from left) inspects an irrigation system in Sto. Cristo, San Antonio, Nueva Ecija, which was repaired and made operational again after 30 years through the efforts of Pastor Elizer Bote (3rd from left) and project manager Antonio Nangel (left), of the National Irrigation Administration's Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation System (UPRIIS). The Sto. Cristo irrigation system is now part of the UPRIIS, and benefits 150 farmers tilling some 300 hectares. Also shown are Marcelino Ibay, chairman of the San Antonio Methodist Producers' Cooperative, and Rufino Fernando, San Antonio municipal agriculture.*

## **FIELDS shifts ...**(from p1)

insurance and guarantee; dryers and other postharvest facilities; and seeds and other genetic materials.

Under the fertilizer component, Yap said the DA will continue to advocate among farmers balanced fertilization and empower them to produce organic fertilizers and other soil ameliorants.

"Balanced fertilization will address farmers' concerns on the high cost of inputs, and at the same time, trigger production increases," he said.

The DA will also provide them Minus-One Element Technique (MOET) kits, leaf color charts and soil test kits.

As for irrigation, this year 16,358 hectares of new areas will be generated, 92,255 hectares will be rehabilitated, and 138,529 hectares will be restored.

The DA will likewise construct or rehabilitate 3,107 kilometers of FMRs, and build more fish ports and fish landings.

Under extension, the DA will provide 26,441 training/seminars for agricultural technicians, farmers and fisherfolk.

These include the conduct of Farmers' Field Schools and School on the Air; establishment of 19,570 farm techno-demos; produce some 1,225 graduates of e-Extension courses; and conduct 1,358 research and development (R&D) activities to generate production-enhancing and cost-reducing technologies.

Yap said the DA will also give priority to agriculture and fisheries biotechnology to spur in-

creased productivity and incomes.

As for loans, the DA will continue to provide credit assistance at low interest rates to farmers, fishers and rural entrepreneurs. For 2010, the target is to assist some 305,445 individuals and hundreds of farmers' and fishers' groups.

Under the dryers and postharvest component, the DA will construct and/or provide 157 dryers, four postharvest processing plants and trading centers, 525 bagsakan centers and barangay bagsakans, construct 10 fishports (1 regional and 9 municipal) and maintain 9 others (8 regional and 1 municipal), build three ice plants and cold storages for fisherfolk, five slaughterhouses/ abattoirs, operate additional five dairy zones, 112 packinghouses, and set up 37 kilometers of tramline systems.

Under seeds and other genetic materials, the DA will continue to empower farmers to produce quality seeds, and assist commercial seed growers.

"The first objective is being addressed by training farmers how to select good seeds together with proper handling and processing," Yap said.

"The second objective is addressed by assisting seed growers through infrastructure support, like seed laboratories and storage facilities, and improvements in the seed certification procedures."

Meanwhile, the DA will continue to provide farmers subsidized hybrid and certified seeds.

He said the DA's seed subsidy program for 2010 targets to

## **Typhoons...** (from p1)

posted a 2.45% output, along with the poultry and livestock subsectors, which grew by 1.8% and 1.2%, respectively.

In all, the country's gross value of agricultural production in 2009 totaled P1.2 trillion at current prices, 2.18% more than in 2008, said Director Romeo Recide of the DA-Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS) in his report to Secretary Yap.

The crops subsector, which contributed the biggest share (46.8%) among the four subsectors to total agricultural output, declined by 1.4% due to the damages wrought by strong typhoons. Total value of various crops produced was P632 billion at current prices.

The fisheries sector, which contributed 26.4% to the total agricultural output, was bannered by the aquaculture industry (up by 2.9%), commercial fisheries (up by 2.7%), and municipal fisheries (up by 1.1%). Value of various fishery products was P215.6 B at current prices.

The poultry and livestock subsectors grew by 1.8% and 1.2%, respectively. They accounted for 26.8% of the total agricultural output, with a combined value of P340 B at current prices.

Recide said several major crops bore the brunt of the typhoons, led by palay as production dipped by 3.3% to 16.26 million tons; sugarcane declined by 10.8% to 23.7 million tons; mango decreased by 12.8% to 771,150 tons; and pineapple was down by 1.35% to 2.18 million tons.

Corn production, on the other hand, was up by 1.5% to 7.03 million tons; coconut gained by 2.2%; banana was up by 3.7% to 9 million tons; and tobacco grew by 12% to 36,380 tons.

On the positive side, farmers had more money in their pockets, as average prices of major agricultural products went up by 1.8%.

Poultry raisers enjoyed the biggest price increase, at 8%; followed by livestock producers, up by 5.2%; and crops, by 1.5%. On the other hand, prices of fishery products went down by 2.5%.

distribute 1.10 million bags of inbred certified rice seeds; 17.57 million of planting materials; 37,947 heads of various farm animals; and 192.14 million fingerlings and 2.1 million broodstock.

## **SRA...** (from p1)

to spot abnormal price spikes.

"We will swoop down on establishments selling sugar at P55 to P60 a kilo, and ask the owners or managers to explain their price levels," said Yap.

"If they cannot give a valid explanation, then we can close down their outlets and file charges against them for violating the Price Act."

He added that initial field reports show that some retailers in Metro Manila wet markets are selling refined sugar at more than P52 per kilo, while supermarkets are retailing it between P49 and P52 per kilo.

For his part, SRA Administrator Rafael L. Coscolluela said the SRP for refined sugar will vary on a weekly basis, as millgate prices change every week. And there is a lag time of three weeks before prices are reflected in the retail market.

He said the P52 per kilo SRP for refined sugar is good until the end of January. It will rise to P54 per kilo first week of February to factor in the increase in millgate buying prices to P1,900 per 50-kilo bag of raw sugar.

The SRA will submit to the DA and DTI the weekly recommended SRP based on monitored millgate prices.

To help stabilize supply, the DA chief has earlier instructed the SRA and the National Food Authority (NFA) to make available 150,000 kilos of sugar to poor consumers via the NFA's Tindahan Natin outlets in Metro Manila.

In addition, local traders have agreed to import some 60,000 metric tons (MT) to 150,000 MT.

Yap has also directed the SRA to issue new regulations requiring traders to liquidate their sugar release orders to ensure that sugar stocks withdrawn from the mills do get to the intended beneficiaries in the local market, instead of being smuggled out in the face of spiraling prices abroad arising from tightening supplies.

He explained that increasing sugarcane production expenses and bad weather have combined to cut yields over the past two years, leading to a global shortage, estimated at nine million MT. Said supply gap has eventually jacked up sugar prices in the international market.

India's aggressive efforts to beef up its domestic supply have further driven up international prices, Secretary Yap said.

## PGMA ... (from p1)

Niño 'highly vulnerable' provinces, namely: Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, La Union, Pangasinan, Cagayan, Aurora, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales, Cavite, Rizal;

Occidental Mindoro, Palawan, Capiz, Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Misamis Oriental, Zamboanga City, Sarangani and South Cotabato.

As a result of the El Niño, PAGASA said the country will experience a hotter and longer summer, as temperature would reach up to 38 degrees Celsius, three degrees higher than normal. (with reports from *The Phil. Star* and *Phil. Information Agency*)

### DA El Niño Task Force

Two weeks before the NEDA meeting in Malacañang, Secretary Yap on January 13 formed a DA National El Niño Task Force to formulate and implement various interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of said weather phenomenon.

The task force is headed by OIC-Undersecretary for field operations Joel Rudinas. He is assisted by Administrator Carlos Salazar of the DA-National Irrigation Administration (NIA).

### NIA Initiatives, Measures

As per instruction of Secretary Yap, the NIA has been monitoring the water level of the four major dams in Luzon: Magat Dam in Isabela, Pantabangan Dam in Nueva Ecija, San Roque Dam in Pangasinan, and Angat Dam in Bulacan.

NIA Administrator Salazar said as of last week of January, only Pantabangan has enough for irrigation, while the three do not have enough, unless strategies will be adopted such as cloudseeding operations.

NIA-Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation System (UPRIIS) Operations Manager Antonio S. Nangel said the heavy rains brought about by typhoons *Ondoy*, *Pepeng* and *Ramil* have supplied Pantabangan Dam enough water to last until summer.

Meanwhile, NIA regional and operations managers will implement various water savings technologies and strategies, in partnerships with Irrigators Associations, local government units, and other DA family agencies.

These include the adoption of: sustainable system of irrigated

agriculture, which features intermittent and lesser water application; Quick Turn Around (QTA) scheme, which encourages farmers to plant early-maturing rice varieties to enable them to plant a third crop; re-use of drainage water; and adoption of rotation method of water delivery and distribution.

The NIA has also programmed for CY 2010, distribution of shallow tube wells (STWs), continued rehabilitation and restoration of existing irrigation facilities, and construction of on-going foreign and locally-funded irrigation projects. (*NIA*)

### DA Regional Initiatives

Meanwhile, several DA regional field units (RFUs) are undertaking their respective initiatives to mitigate the adverse effects of the El Niño.

#### Cagayan Valley

At least 45,000 hectares of rainfed farms mostly planted to corn in Isabela and other parts of Cagayan Valley are already experiencing the effects of El Niño. Thus, DA-Region 2 Director Andrew Villacorta said they are now conducting cloud seeding operations.

"We will be prioritizing the Magat Dam area as well as the rainfed areas in our ongoing cloud-seeding operations," he said.

"If rains will not fall at the watershed areas of Magat Dam, there will be a big effect, especially to rice (and corn) farmers because the dam water (is) nearing its low, critical level," said engineer Wilfredo Gloria, operations chief of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA)-Magat River Integrated Irrigation System.

"It will only take until March 16 for the dam's water level to fall below the 160-meter critical level if no rain will fall in the next two months," Villacorta said.

He said the Magat Dam watershed area and northern Isabela and southern Cagayan will be prioritized in cloud-seeding operations. (*Philippine Star*)

#### Western Visayas

DA-Region 6 Director Larry Nacionales said that 40,000 hectares in Western Visayas are vulnerable to El Niño -- in the first and second districts of Iloilo, portions of Antique, and Guimaras.

He said together with respective local governments, they formulated an El Niño mitigation



*Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap (middle) poses with four new DA family officials after administering their oath of office, namely (from left): Jose Laquian, Cotton Dev't. Administration deputy administrator, Orkhan Usman, National Dairy Authority administrator, Dr. Carlos Mendoza, DA Region 11 director, and Rolando Imperial, DA Region 3 technical director.*

plan and has submitted it to the DA central office.

The plan intends to establish vegetable farms, distribute piglets to affected farm families, install shallow tube wells, and maintain buffer stocks of palay seeds.

They estimate that El Niño would damage about 125,000 metric tons of palay, equivalent to two percent of the total 2010 target production of 2.3 million metric tons. (*Manila Bulletin*)

#### Bicolandia

Meanwhile, DA-RFU 5 officer-in-charge (OIC) Marilyn V. Sta. Catalina said she has reactivated the DA regional task force El Niño.

"We are taking sufficient steps this early to sustain the DA's programs and projects on food security," she said.

Three Bicol provinces (Sorsogon, Camarines Norte and Sur) are vulnerable to El Niño, having below normal rainfall during the last four months.

Sta. Catalina stressed that it is imperative to educate farmers, fisherfolk and other stakeholders by providing them information and practical tips.

For instance, she advises farmers to consider the following tips: plant early maturing rice varieties via direct seeding; do not burn rice straws, instead use them as composting materials or mulch to minimize moisture loss, or as supplementary roughage (hay) for livestock;

clean irrigation canals and remove all weeds and obstructions to improve delivery; reduce water in rice paddies to as low as one to two centimeters; plant vegetables that require less water, such as pechay, winged bean or pigeon pea. (*DA-RFU5 Info Div.*)

#### Davao

DA regional director Carlos Mendoza said the El Niño is already affecting Davao City and five provinces: Cotabato, Davao del Sur, Norte and Oriental, and Compostela Valley.

He added they have already submitted to the DA central office their El Niño action plan and budget to conduct cloud seeding operations and install shallow tube wells.

He said "we have already recommended certain areas to shift to vegetables in place of rice or corn."

They have also advised farmers to resort to water conservation this early.

In South Cotabato, members of irrigators' associations have decided to rotate the use of water, reducing the frequency to one day, from three days a week.

Also, some 5,000 hectares devoted to rice would be planted to corn, as it requires less water.

Mendoza said the dry spell is advantageous to fruit crops like mango and durian, which are on their flowering stage. (*Business Mirror*)

# Dynamic partnerships needed to protect 'Coral Triangle'

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap cites the need for stronger partnerships among Government and private sectors in pursuing international and national innovations—ranging from better tuna fishing practices to climate change adaptation—to protect the 'Coral Triangle,' and ensure its diversity and sustainability.

The Coral Triangle is home to a majority of the world's known coral reefs and species, as well as to more than 350 million inhabitants of six countries bordering it, dubbed as 'CT6,' namely: the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Timor Leste.

Yap said the governments and private organizations in these countries have to continue working together to protect it because 'the collapse of the triangle will not only mean the end to food security, but also to the very livelihood of hundreds of millions of people.'

Fortunately, "our partnership is growing stronger and potential partners have signified their interest and enthusiasm in becoming part of the Coral Triangle Initiative," said Yap during the first-ever Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) Business Summit, held Jan. 19-20, 2010, in Makati City.

"This must be in no small measure due to exciting innovations

within the CT6 that directly contribute to the dynamic partnerships between and among the public and private sectors many of whom are with us in this summit," Yap added.

President Arroyo keyed the two-day summit, also attended by top officials of the DA, other government agencies, leaders of non-government organizations (NGOs) like the World Wildlife Fund, International Seafood Sustainability Foundation, Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy and the Bangkok-based Southeast Asia Fisheries Development Council (SEAFDEC).

Yap said the Philippine government is "awaiting the favorable action" by the Ministers of the CT6 countries on the membership of Brunei Darussalam in the CTI, which Manila formally endorsed last November during the Second Ministerial Meeting held in the Solomon Islands.

Foremost among the innovative approaches being pursued by the CT6, he said, is the CTI's framework that takes into account an Eco-Systems Management Approach.

"Whereas other regional management bodies merely focus on specific commodities, like tuna, turtles and other threatened species, the CTI looks at the entire eco-system in which these commodities live in," he



Spanning 6.5 million square kilometers, the Coral triangle provides direct livelihood to about 130 million fisherfolk and their families in six countries, including the Philippines.

added.

"The lives of coastal dwellers and the interests of food aggregators and processors are considered in the equation, which makes sustainability possible," he said.

"Thus, issues about diversity, marine life, species protection, climate change, and food security, are discussed side by side with corporate profits, tourism, jobs, livelihood, rural and fisherfolk income and public governance."

In the Regional Plan of Action, he said that "priority seascapes have been designated and established with complementary investment plans. In the area of resource mobilization, provisions are made for joint-country efforts, which are at the heart of recognizing that the resources sought to be pro-

ected are trans-boundary in nature."

At the core of the Philippine National Plan of Action is the management of the 'Verde Island Passage,' which is recognized to be, at the center, of the center of marine bio-diversity, he said.

"The impairment or damage to the Verde Island Passage can mean the collapse of marine resources to the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Eco-Region that is bordered by Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines," he added.

"Presently, the Plan is being implemented by five provincial governments and includes law enforcement, establishment of sanctuaries, extension, information dissemination and capacity building in coastal resource management," he added.



Palay harvest is expected to dramatically increase this year as more farmers will be planting quality certified seeds through the government's **Rapid Food Production Enhancement Programme (RaFPEP)** which seeks to augment the country's rice production. It was formally launched January 13, 2010, by Agriculture Undersecretary **Bernie G. Fondevilla** (seated 3<sup>rd</sup> from left), who represented DA Sec. **Arthur Yap**, at the **SEAMEO Innotech** in **Quezon City**. With him above are: (seated from L-R) **Dr. Frisco Malabanán**, Project Coordinator for RaFPEP and DA-GMA Rice Program national coordinator; **Ms. Raffaella Boudron**, Food Facility Programme Officer, European Commission Manila; **Mr. Sana Jatta**, Country Program Manager, International Fund for Agricultural Development; **Mr. Kazuyuki Tsurumi**, Food and Agriculture Organization Representative to the Philippines; **Romeo Jimenez**, Marketing and Operations Directorate, National Food Authority.. Standing behind them are the representatives from different local implementing agencies.