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Bayer PH inaugurates ₱80-m seed conditioning facility

By Othel V. Campos

CANLUBANG, Laguna—Bayer Philippines Inc. inaugurated Friday an P80-million seed conditioning facility that can process as much as 3,000 metric tons of rice seeds annually.

Bayer head of seeds for Asia Pacific Amit Trikha said the facility would help boost local hybrid seeds production by 30 percent annually, increasing the availability to farmers for better yield.

"More than anything, this infrastructure is dedicated to improve the quality of seeds. This conditioning line of Bayer will be kind of self-sufficient also. Before there was dependency on India, but with this new capacity there will be more flexibility to supply the needs for market," he said.

The company's seed production operations is entirely focused in Mindanao.

Bayer is producing about 150 to 200 MT of hybrid seeds locally from 120 hectares, a combination of five hybrid varieties—Arize Bigante, Arize Bigante Plus, Arize Habilis, Arize Habilis Plus, and the premium Arize AZ 7888.

The company contributes approximately 30 percent of total hybrid seeds supply in the Philippines. With the seed conditioning line, the company expects to augment production by another 30 percent.

Bayer crop science division head for seeds in the Philippines Reecher Ondap disclosed plans to move away from the traditional production site in Mindanao to Luzon.

"We're scouting for more areas where we can establish new seeds plantation. There are locations in Luzon that we are eyeing now," he said.

Bayer, meanwhile, expressed concern on an imminent increase in the price of seeds due to highern logistics cost, especially fuel.

Bayer's mother unit plans to develop the Philippines as the rice seed production hub in Southeast Asia.

The company in 2017 opened a P40-million rice breeding facility in Calauan, Laguna where it can pursue experimental initiatives to improve and create new hybrid seed varieties that are disease-resistant and climate change-ready.

The hectarage planted to hybrid seeds, according to the Department of Agriculture, is estimated at 500,000 hectares. The agency plans to increase the coverage to 1 million hectares within the tenure of President Rodrigo Duterte.

Bayer Philippines Inc. inaugurates Friday a seed conditioning facility that can process as much as 3,000 metric tons of rice seeds annually. Leading the inaugural rites are (from left) Ruel Gesmundo of the Bureau of Plant Industry, Bayer head of seeds Philippines Recher Ondap, Agriculture Undersecretary Ariel Cayanan, Bayer commercial unit head Iiinas Ivan Lao and Bayer head of seeds APAC Amit Trikha.

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• Local milk for feeding program

Senator Cynthia Villar has proposed the use of locally produced milk in the implementation of the National School Feeding Program to not only help address malnutrition among schoolchildren but to also provide livelihood for Filipino dairy farmers. Villar, chair of the Committee on Agriculture and Food, proposed the insertion of a new section mandating the use of locally produced milk in the government's feeding program in Senate Bill 1279 or the "Pagkaing Pinoy para sa Batang Pinoy Act" sponsored by Sen. Bam Aquino. Under the Villar amendment, the Department of Education (DepEd) shall collaborate with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Philippine Carabao Center (PCC), and the National Dairy Authority for the incorporation of a milk-feeding program into the proposed National School Feeding Program. (Vanne Elaine P. Terrazola)

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Rice price hike probe sought

By **MARIO B. CASAYURAN**

The Senate agriculture and food committee yesterday asked concerned government agencies to check on reports of an increase in the price of rice, although no agricultural product was taxed under the recently-signed Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law.

Sen. Cynthia A. Villar, committee chairwoman, said the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Agriculture should activate their monitoring teams to guard against unreasonable increases in the price of commodities and services.

"Unfortunately, there are businessmen who would take advantage of the situation and use the enactment of the TRAIN (law) to justify price increases. We don't want these unreasonable increases to undermine the intended benefits of the law and we ask concerned government agencies to protect the consumers," Villar said.

The lady senator noted that there are reports of spikes in the price of rice in some areas.

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Amid higher taxes

Soft drink firms dumping HFCS stocks

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR**

The administration's tax reform program is causing so many changes in so many different industries. For instance, soft drink manufacturers are now scrambling to dispose their excess high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) stocks amid higher tax on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB).

As a result, the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) needed to allocate more of the local sugar production to domestic use.

The Sugar Order (SO) No. 3 of SRA showed that it has allowed some companies to export their unused HFCS, which beverage firms use as a cheaper alternative to sugar.

"The country's industrial sector which imports and utilizes about 90 percent of HFCS now reconciles the use of HFCS and/or local sugar in the manufacture of their products, from their own business and economic standpoint," SRA said in the order.

"SRA has received several requests to export their advance booked imported fructose currently held by the BOC [Bureau of Customs]," it added.

The order came just a few weeks after Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) — which imposed taxes on SSBs and other products — became effective.

Once without taxes, SSBs have been slapped a tax rate of ₱6 per liter while drinks with HFCS are taxed ₱12 per liter. Beverages that normally has high amount of HFCS are soft drinks and energy drinks.

SRA Chief Hermenegildo Serafica said on Friday that a lot of beverage companies are now shifting their formula back to 100 percent sugar, from the mix of 60 percent sugar and 40 percent HFCS.

"We expect an increase in demand due to the TRAIN wherein excise tax for HFCS is higher than Sugar. Thus, some HFCS users especially the sweetened beverages will be shifting their formula to sugar," Serafica said in a text message.

Serafica was referring to companies like Pepsi Cola Products Philippines, Inc., Coca-Cola Femsa Philippines, Inc. and RC Cola Philippines.

Based on an existing data, the unused HFCS stocks of Pepsi still stood around 15,000 metric tons (MT), while Coke still has 5,000 MT— all ready to be disposed and sold abroad.

SRA said that it will make sure that these stocks will be shipped out of the country and "do not find their way to the local market destination."

For his part, SRA board member Roland Beltran said in a separate inquiry that companies' decision to export their HFCS stocks is one of the reasons why SRA had to cut the allocation of sugar exports to United States and world market and instead use it for local consumption.

"Yes, one of the reasons. But the main reason is that our projected production for this crop year (CY) 2017 to 2018 is slightly lower compared to last year. Our conservative production estimates for this crop year is at 2.27 million MT. This is due to heavy rains experienced in Visayas and Mindanao," Beltran said in a text message.

To be exact, SRA reduced the allocation of sugar to US ("A") from 10 percent to 6 percent, while the allocation of world market sugar ("D"), or those for export to other countries, was also cut to 1 percent from 10 percent.

Under the tariff-rate quota (TRQ) — which allows countries to ship sugar to US at a relatively lower tariff — the Philippines exports about 136,000 metric tons (MT) of sugar to the US every year.

SO 1-A also increased the country's sugar allocation to domestic market ("B") to ▶B-3

Soft drink firms... ◀B-1

93 percent from the 80 percent. This, as the domestic demand is expected to be around 2.17 million metric tons (MMT).

"The domestic market remains as the priority market for locally-produced sugar, and it is of national interest that a comfortable buffer, or carry-over volume, of "B" sugar during the end of season and for the start of the next crop year for stable supply and prices," SRA said.

Meanwhile, SRA now sees local raw sugar production for Crop Year (CY) 2017 to 2018 — which starts in September and ends August — to be less than 2.38 MMT on the weight of unfavorable weather conditions.

A crop year starts September and ends August.

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More sugar exports reclassified for domestic use

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The Philippines has slashed its sugar allocation for the US and other countries due to the expected decline in production, the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said.

SRA administrator Hermenegildo Serafica said 93 percent of sugar production would be for the domestic market, six percent for the US market, and the remaining one percent for the world market.

During the start of the crop year last September 2017, the SRA originally allocated 80 percent for domestic, and 10 percent each for the US and world markets.

The SRA classifies sugar into "A" for sugar for export to the US, "B" for domestic consumption, "C" for reserves, "D" for export to countries other than the US, "E" for local food processors and "F" for ethanol producers.

"Due to unfavorable weather conditions, the total raw sugar production for the current crop year is now estimated to be less than the initial projection of 2.38 million metric tons," Serafica said.

SRA expects domestic demand to reach 2.17 million MT for the current crop year which ends in August.

According to SRA, the domestic sugar market remains as the priority for locally produced sugar to maintain a comfortable buffer or carry-over volume of domestic sugar during the end of season and for the start of the crop year for stable supply and prices.

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SRA jacks up sugar allocation for local market

By Karl R. Ocampo
@kocampoINQ

Domestic production of raw sugar is expected to fall to 2.27 million tons from last crop year's record high of 2.5 million tons—the highest in 34 years—due mainly to La Niña and the erratic weather conditions.

This prompted the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) to recalibrate its raw sugar allocation. It raised the allocation for the domestic market to 93 percent from 85 percent and cut the share of sugar geared for the export market to 1 percent from 10 percent. The order set the allocation for the US market at 6 percent.

The new sugar allocation is contained in Sugar Order No. 1 issued by the SRA earlier this week. This order is deemed the most important document released by the SRA at the beginning of every year as it serves as the basis of the agency in setting its policies for the rest of the crop year.

"We consulted our stakeholders and run our own numbers based on our records as to the projected production and sugar withdrawals," SRA board member Roland Beltran said.

"The unanimous decision of the sugar board is to allocate 6 percent for our commitment to the US market, 93 percent for local consumption to ensure that we have more than enough supply, and 1 percent for exports to maintain our presence in the world market," he added.

The country's US sugar quota varies yearly. For crop year 2017-2018, the quota is 136,201 metric tons (MT) of sugar, 44.89 percent lower than the previous allocation of 197,352.49 MT.

Even as beverage companies are expected to increase their consumption of sugar this year, SRA Administrator Hermenegildo Serafica said the sugar industry would be able to keep up with the growing demand.

As for the beverage companies' remaining high fructose corn syrup, Beltran said the SRA had already reclassified them for exports. He said it was now up to the companies to schedule the shipment of their HFCS pursuant to the guidelines governing Sugar Order No. 5, or the rules and procedures for sugar exportation.

Pepsi Cola Products Philippines Inc. has about 15,000 MT of HFCS to export while Coca Cola Femsa Philippines has 5,000 MT.

As of last week, the average retail prices of sugar have slightly dropped from last month's level to P47.18 per kilogram (kg) for raw sugar, P50.18 per kg for washed sugar, and P55.01 per kg for refined sugar.

Beltran said they were expecting prices to stabilize over the next few weeks. INQ

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SANDIGANBAYAN CASE

SOLON SAYS GRAFT RAP OVER CAR PLAN 'UNFAIR'

By Leo Udtohan
@leoudtohanINQ

TAGBILARAN CITY—Bohol Rep. Arthur Yap said the graft case filed against him in the Sandiganbayan over a car plan for employees of the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) was "unfair" and "unjust" because he never signed the terms and conditions of the plan.

"We found it very unfair and we will really fight the case very aggressively," Yap told reporters here on Friday.

Yap, who as secretary of the Department of Agriculture chaired the PhilRice board of trustees, said he was not present when the board drafted and approved the rules of the car plan.

Yap, who served as agriculture secretary under the administration of former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, was charged with violations of Section 3(e) and 3(g) of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, which prohibited public officials from causing undue injury to the government and giving unwarranted benefits to private parties.

The Ombudsman accused Yap and eight PhilRice officials of approving a car plan that allowed 10 employees to obtain personal loans from the Philippine National Bank (PNB), which were secured with PhilRice's funds from 2008 to 2009.

Arthur Yap —LEO UDTOHAN

Yap said the plan to set up a car plan for PhilRice employees was discussed during the 52nd board meeting in November 2008, but he had told the board to make sure the terms would be advantageous to the government and that proper procedures should be followed.

Barely two months later, on Jan. 30 the following year, the PhilRice director issued an administrative order on the offer to provide car loans to deserving employees, but Yap said he was not present in the meeting when the board approved the program.

"Let me say it again: I was not in the board meeting. Neither did I avail of any [vehicle] from this car plan, so why am I being held liable?" asked Yap. INQ

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Local milk for feeding program pushed

Senator Cynthia Villar has proposed the use of locally-produced milk in the implementation of the National School Feeding Program to help address malnutrition among school children as well as provide Filipino dairy farmers livelihood.

Villar, chair of the Committee on Agriculture and Food, proposed the insertion of a new section mandating the use of locally-produced milk in government's feeding program in Senate Bill 1279 or the "Pagkaing Pinoy para sa Batang Pinoy Act" sponsored by Sen. Bam Aquino.

Under the Villar amendment, the Department of Education shall collaborate with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Philippine Carabao Center (PCC), and the National Dairy Authority for the incorporation of a milk feeding program into the proposed National School Feeding Program.

She said the use of locally-produced milk in cycle menu and recipes should be encouraged and developed to increase livelihood opportunities of dairy farmers and boost the local dairy industry.

"This program will not only provide an opportunity for the children of less privileged families to improve their nutritional status but will also motivate farmers to produce more milk because of the ready local market where they can supply their products," Villar said. **(Vanne Elaine P. Terrazola)**

PILIPINO MIRROR
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Sa gitna ng pagtaas ng mga presyo

VILLAR SA DTI, DA: PAKILUSIN ANG PRICE MONITORING TEAMS

SA gitna ng ulat tungkol sa pagtaas ng presyo ng mga bilihin at serbisyo, nanawagan si Sen. Cynthia Villar sa Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) at Department of Agriculture (DA) na pakilusin ang price monitoring teams upang bantayan ang hindi makatwirang pagtaas ng presyo.

"Unfortunately, there are businessmen who would take advantage of the situation and use the enactment of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) to justify price increases. We don't want these unreasonable increases to undermine the intended benefits of the law and we ask concerned government agencies to protect the consumers," ayon kay Villar.

Binanggit ni Villar ang ulat sa pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas sa ilang lugar kaya nanawagan siya sa DA na busisiin ang bagay na ito. Iginiit niya na hindi dapat patawan ng buwis ang mga produktong pang-agrikultura sa ilalim ng bagong tax system.

"Hindi naman na-tax ang bigas. Ang na-tax is gasoline kaya transportation lang ang tatamaan. Hindi naman iyon ang major cost kaya kailangang tingnan kung tama ang pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas," sabi pa ni Villar.

VILLAR

Umapela rin si Villar sa DTI na alamin kung ang price tag requirement ay mahigpit na naipatutupad sa mga establisimiyento sa buong bansa at ipahinto ang profiteering at paglabag sa Consumer Act at Price Act.

"The support of local government units is also needed to ensure the stability of prices and to protect consumers from undue price increases," dagdag pa ni Villar.

VICKY CERVALES

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Palay output grows 5% in Q4 as harvest area expands

Production of the seasonally adjusted palay (unhusked rice) for the fourth quarter of 2017 rose by five percent due to improvement in harvest areas nationwide.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), palay output went up 4.93 percent to 4.81 million metric tons (MT) from October to December last year.

The gain was attributed to the increase in harvest area and yield resulting from sufficient water supply, continuous use of high yielding variety seeds and close monitoring of pests and diseases during the cropping period," PSA said.

The improved palay output was largely contributed by Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Bicol Region and Central Visayas.

The seasonally adjusted farmgate price for palay rose by 1.43 percent in the fourth quarter.

Wholesale and retail prices for rice increased by 3.09 percent and 0.91 percent, respectively.

– Louise Maureen Simeon

The Manila Times

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Grains agency runs after rice hoarders

THE National Food Authority (NFA) intensified its campaign against rice traders who hoard the grain or sell it illegally to the agency.

"We continue to run after the rice hoarders, those who divert NFA stocks. We really go after them, but this is under the jurisdiction of our operations department," Ma. Theresa Villafuerte, NFA legal affairs department manager, told *The Manila Times* in an interview on Friday.

Baaed on NFA records, about five cases have been filed against rice hoarders since 2014 during the term of former NFA administrator Arthur Juan. The most controversial of this were the cases against rice trader Jojo Soliman whose warehouse in Bulucan was raided by authorities after the agency's inspection team found that some sacks of rice were mixed with broken rice intended for animal feeds during an ocular inspection.

"In the ocular inspection by investigators, it was found that the stocks in the warehouse of Mr. Soliman were imported rice from Vietnam or Thailand," Villafuerte said.

She added that the case is now pending at the Department of Justice (DoJ).

"We filed an administrative case against Soliman for violations of NFA rules on the grains business. He was found guilty and was made to pay a fine and suspended; the warehouse was ordered closed," Villafuerte said.

In September 11, 2014, the NFA filed a charge of mislabeling of commercial rice against Purefeeds owned by Soliman.

Onovember 19, 2014, Soliman was found guilty.

On January 29, 2015, the NFA denied the motion for rconsideration Purefeeds f iled.

The NFA also filed a criminal case in July 2014 against the rice trader for mislabeling and rebagging of the NFA rice to make it appear as commercial rice.

"The trader did this for the purpose of making a profit. The NFA charter or PD 4, states that acts of diversion, adulteration or co-mixing stocks, this is a criminal offense," Villafuerte said.

On November 4, 2014, the City Prosecutor of Malolos issued a resolution. And on November 27, 2015, the NFA filed a petition for review to then Justice secretary now Sen. Leila de Lima.

On June 27, 2016, the agency filed a motion for rRreconsideration to the DoJ.

On June 3, 2016, the DoJ issued a resolution denying the NFA'a petition. **NEIL A. ALCOBER**

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FOOD SECURITY

NFA PUSHES RICE IMPORTS TO STABILIZE PRICES

By Karl R. Ocampo
@kocampoINQ

The National Food Authority (NFA) is urging economic managers to approve its request to import rice this year to stabilize prices of the staple.

A report from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that prices of regular and well-milled rice have risen by as much as P3 a kilo in six regional centers, including Kidapawan City, Naga City and the National Capital Region.

Although the grains agency has not been able to control the prices of commercial rice, it sells the staple at more affordable prices as part of its mandate to ensure food security.

"Removing NFA rice from the market is like taking away the lower-prices brand of rice whose quality is comparable to high-priced commercial rice," NFA Administrator Jason Aquino said.

"It is the function of the NFA to ensure that rice is always available, affordable and accessible to all, especially to the poor and low-income sector that rely on government to fulfill this social responsibility," he added.

NFA's presence in the local market is estimated to be only at 6 to 10 percent, but Aquino said that "with more than 100 million Filipinos at present, that means about 6 to 10 million of our population are consuming NFA rice on a regular basis."

The policy-making body of the NFA rejected the proposal of the agency to import 250,000 metric tons (MT) of rice this year as the agriculture sector continues to see a positive outlook in rice production.

The PSA reported earlier this week that the country's palay production for the first quarter might reach 4.67 million MT as the crop's harvest area and yield per hectare continued to improve.

With the importation, the NFA is hoping to "immediately replenish its fast-depleting buffer stock." To date, its could meet the country's national consumption requirement for only three days with 1.8 million bags, way below the stock requirement by its council of 15 days.

But NFA spokesperson Rebecca Olarte said consumers need not worry since the country's total rice inventory, including those of households and commercial stocks, was placed at 2.8 million MT. INQ

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NFA insists on rice imports despite council's rejection

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR**

State-run grains agency National Food Authority (NFA) is still insisting on importation even as some of the country's economic managers already decided that the country has enough rice and that the output forecast remains positive.

A statement showed that NFA is still pushing for the immediate replenishment of its "fast-depleting buffer stock" via importation.

This, according to the agency, is for them to be able to effectively fulfill its mandate of food security and price stabilization in the wake of increasing prices of other basic commodities.

Just this week, NFA Council — the inter-agency policy-making body of NFA and is composed of some of the country's economic managers — denied the agency's request to import 250,000 metric tons (MT) of rice.

This is for the reason that commercial rice prices remain stable and that local production forecasts is bright.

However, NFA administrator Jason Aquino pointed out that even if commercial rice prices are stable, regular NFA rice patrons are still looking for it cheaper rice because of the average ₱9 per kilogram (/kg) difference in price.

"Removing NFA rice from the market is like taking away the lowest-priced brand of rice whose quality is comparable to higher-priced commercial rice," Aquino said.

Right now, NFA sells rice at ₱27/kg and ₱32/kg, while commercial rice varieties of comparable quality are sold at ₱36/kg to ₱41/kg.

"It is the function of the NFA to ensure that rice, the basic staple of 85 percent of Filipinos, is always available, affordable and accessible to all, especially to the poor and low-income sector that rely on government to fulfill this social responsibility," Aquino said.

Under the law, NFA is required to have at least 15-day buffer stock at any given time and 30-day buffer stock during lean season, which starts in July and ends in September.

Aquino added that it will be impossible for NFA to ensure national food security if it does not have actual rice stocks, no matter how small its share of the market.

It is estimated that NFA's presence in the market is only about 6 to 10 percent. But this market presence over the years has effectively pulled down or stabilized inflation rates in the food sector as rice occupies about 25 percent of the total food basket of Filipinos.

"With more than 100 million Filipinos at present, that means about 6 to 10 million of our population are consuming NFA rice on a regular basis. Taking that away from them would mean forcing them to buy the higher priced commercial rice and eating away what would otherwise be savings that can be spent for other necessities," Aquino said.

"We are hoping that our economic managers will appreciate the impact of NFA rice on the lives of some 6 to 10 million Filipinos, the regular patrons of NFA rice, who are given the opportunity to feed their families while saving extra money for their other needs," he added.

It was NFA spokesperson Rebecca Olarte who said on Wednesday that interagency Food Security Committee (FSC) on Rice — chaired by the National Economic and Development Authority — has disapproved the plan of the agency to import as much as 250,000 MT of rice.

In an unrelated development, NFA said it has earned as much as P187 million from licensing and enforcement activities.

To be exact, NFA recorded more than ₱173 million from registration and licensing fees while ₱14 million were collected by the enforcement division from penalties, enforcement fees, and administrative fines.

The NFA's Industry Services Department (ISD), which grants permits to grains business, issued licenses to 76,228 grains businessmen from around the country during the year.

Of the total registrants, 65,339 were renewees while 10,889 were new applicants. The NFA is empowered by law under PD. No. 4 to regulate the grains trading business by issuing licenses to corporations and individuals who are engaged in rice and corn business like retailing, wholesaling, import/export, milling, drying, warehousing, warehousing, transporting, mechanical drying, manufacturing, and threshing.

It is also part of NFA's regulatory function to enforce grains trading rules and regulations through its Security Services and Investigation Department (SSID). The ISD works closely with enforcement officers to ensure that grains traders abide by the business regulations set by the agency.

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Resilient rice project to target top 2 producers – China and India

By **MICHAEL TAYLOR**

KUALA LUMPUR (Thomson Reuters Foundation) – Representatives of a pilot project that promotes socially and environmentally responsible rice growing said they aim to expand into India and China, the world's largest rice producers.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Philippines-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) worked with more than 80 partners to create the world's first "global rice sustainability standard."

The standard provides a framework to drive government policy, as well as a working definition to be used by the private sector to monitor their own sustainability goals.

The sustainability standard has been tested over the past two years in nine countries, mostly in Southeast and South Asia.

"This is a fledgling project still – our next task will be to upscale," said Wyn Ellis, coordinator for the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP).

The SRP is a coalition of more than 80 representatives from non-governmental organizations, and the private and public sectors, which launched the sustainability standard in 2015.

"We will need to be moving into China and into India quite soon – those are our priorities in future," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The standard promotes improvements in rice farming using more than 40 requirements and "performance indicators," which authorities and companies such traders and supermarkets can use as best practice guidance.

These include measures against abuses such as child labor. The standard also aims to make rice growing more environmentally friendly by, for example, restricting the use of pesticides.

Members of the SRP hope that the standard will also be used in a certification scheme to help consumers choose ethical rice. Governments may also use it to promote sustainable rice farming and meet emissions targets.

Water management is crucial factor in achieving those targets.

Up to 40 percent of the world's irrigation water is used for rice production, while up to 10 percent of global methane emissions come from rice fields, according to the SRP.

During pilot testing, the standards helped reduced the water used in rice farming by 20 percent, cut greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent and increased farmers' incomes by 10 percent.

"It is huge," said Bruce Tolentino, deputy director general at IRRI, referring to the sustainability standard, which he hoped could be expanded globally.

The world produced more than 500 million tons of milled rice in 2017, with China, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Thailand among the top growers.

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Section Editor: ZAC B. SARIAN

One veggie that Filipinos should plant and eat

AGRI PLAIN TALK
ZAC B. SARIAN

While going around the vegetable plots at the Hortanova Farm in Lipa City last Wednesday, the founder of East-West Seed called our attention and pointed to a vegetable that was growing among the plots of pechay, amaranth and other leafy greens. He asked us if we knew its name.

Well, we said it looks like a mustard although we were sure it was not. We were not really sure what it was called so he told me, he was not surprised for my not knowing its name because it is not being consumed in the Philippines like they do in Thailand, Indonesia and Hongkong. He mentioned the botanic name as Brassica campestris, one of the many cousins of cabbage, pechay and the like. Its common name among the Chinese is Chaisim. In Thailand, they call it Kwantong while in Indonesia, the name is Sawi.

The founder, of course, is the venerated Simon N. Groot, the Dutchman who started East-West Seed in 1982, rather modestly but which has grown to become one of the Top 10 vegetable seed companies in the world today.

Mr. Groot mentioned a number of reasons why we should eat Chaisim. For one it is very tasty and nutritious. It tastes better than pechay or mustard, according to him. He asked us to taste the fresh leaves and we did. We really liked the very agreeable taste and mild flavor.

We told him that perhaps the reason why Filipinos are not eating Chaisim is that we don't know how to cook or prepare it for our meals. Well, he said

EAST-WEST FOUNDER AND CHAISIM PLANT – Simon N. Groot, founder of East-West Seed, holds a young Chaisim plant which he believes that more Filipinos should learn to eat. It is nutritious and tasty. It is also easy to grow. He knows that Filipinos are not eating Chaisim because East-West has not been able to sell seeds in the country whereas tons of seeds are being sold in Indonesia and Thailand.

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CHAISIM UP CLOSE – This is a close-up of a young Chaisim plant grown at the Hortanova Research Farm in Lipa City. This is a very popular vegetable eaten in Thailand, Indonesia, Hongkong and some other places.

NEW TOMATO UNDER FIELD TRIAL – Researchers of East-West Seed are continually developing varieties with desirable characteristics. They are not only looking for high yield but also for varieties with excellent eating quality, good shipping quality, longer shelf life, good resistance to pests, diseases and other stresses. They are also looking for crops that could be grown during both wet and dry seasons. Photo shows a new tomato under field trial.

it is very simple to cook Chaisim by stir-frying. But he hastened to add that in doing so, the oil before putting in the chopped leaves should be really hot and then quickly taken out from the frying pan. He added that Indonesians love to cook noodle soup with Chaisim. On the other hand, in Hongkong they use the flowers as vegetable.

Mr. Groot said that Chaisim is also very easy to grow. It is planted like pechay. It can be grown in plots mulched with plastic sheet, or it could be planted in plastic cups or some other containers and grown in a vertical garden like what is now being popularized in Metro Manila and other urban areas.

Chaisim grows very fast. In five weeks, 35 days, one plant can weigh 200 grams. So stir-frying four plants will already suffice as one of the viands for a family of five during regular mealtime.

To popularize growing and eating Chaisim, maybe a planting contest among groups of school children could be organized by schools in their garden. Then when it is harvest time, the harvested Chaisim could be cooked and served to the students and teachers.

Cooking demos and tasting could also be done in events like Agri-Kapihan, in weekend markets and other events. Chefs could also be invited to concoct dishes that use Chaisim as one of the ingredients. There could be many creative ways to promote the consumption of Chaisim. If we may suggest, the Sipag Farm School of Sen. Cynthia Villar should spearhead the growing of Chiasim in every batch of training classes that they hold.

Oh, by the way, how come we were at the Hortanova Farm last Wednesday, January 24? Well, we were invited to witness the turnover of the management of East-West Seed from the founder to the next generation. Now, it is the turn of Simon's lawyer son, Ard, to bring to even greater heights the company that his father founded. This could be achieved by continually bringing to the marketplace better seeds through research so the farmers will continue reaping the benefits of improved planting materials.

The turnover ceremony was witnessed by special friends and executives of the company's offices in Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, Africa, South America, India and elsewhere. The Netherlands ambassador to the Philippines was also there to personally deliver her message. Those who were not able to attend sent their congratulatory messages in the form of videos.

The occasion must have been a most fulfilling moment in the life of Simon N. Groot. For lack of space, in succeeding articles, we will write about new offerings of East-West to improve the income of farmers, especially the underprivileged ones.

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Camote tops and dengue fever

EXPORT ACTION LINE
NELLY FAVIS-VILLAFUERTE

Camote (kamote), sweet potato, yam. They're one and the same. This is a plant that was introduced during the Spanish period to our country. Camote which is a native to tropical America is scientifically known as Ipomoea batatas.

Here in our country, camote is a popular plant basically for its edible root and its leaves. The young leaves are known as camote tops. The camote root is usually cooked by boiling. While the camote tops is usually added as vegetable to our native sinigang (either fish or meat with broth) or it can be eaten as salad. Both the camote tops and the edible tubers (roots) are highly fibrous and have rich anti-oxidant properties. In fact, camote has more dietary fibers than many other vegetables. Camote helps avoid constipation and unbelievably also reduces blood cholesterol and stabilizes blood sugar levels. And more, camote is anti-aging, contains more vitamin C than apples, and is anti-cancer.

When I learned that camote is highly nutritious, I started eating everyday boiled camote tubers (roots). That was nine (9) years ago. I also eat for breakfast camote tops (blanched in boiling water for a few seconds) dipped in vinegar at least three (3) times a week. I just love eating camote!

My sister who is a medical doctor who practiced in the United States for more than thirty-five (35) years told me one time that she received some years ago e-mail testimonies from her friends in US about the miraculous healing of camote leaves to cure dengue fever. The afflicted children of my sister's friends in the US just ate camote tops the night before and the next day, their dropping platelet count rose to normal level - (an adult has a normal platelet count of about 150,000 to 450,000 platelets per microliter).

Sometime in 2013, my grandson was having the initial symptoms of dengue fever for four (4) days. Laboratory tests also showed that his platelet count was low and got lower the next day. I immediately tried the camote treatment by blending the camote leaves and my grandson consumed one big pitcher for one day. Unbelievably, his dropping platelet count incredibly rose to normal level the next day.

In 2015, a friend of mine (upon my advice) told me that she fed her young child with symptoms of dengue fever with "blended" camote leaves. Next day, the child's platelet count went up to normal level and was immediately healed.

For those having the symptoms of dengue fever, I am not advising you to drop whatever formal medicine you are presently taking as advised by your doctors. Probably, you can take the camote juice as a supplement. No harm.

Many of us know that dengue fever is contracted from the bite of an infected/striped Aedes aegypti mosquito that has previously bitten an infected person. Many do not know that just one mosquito bite can inflict dengue fever. Also, dengue fever cannot be spread directly from one person to another person. But rather from one person-to-mosquito-to another person.

It's now time for the Department of Health (DOH) to validate stories/testimonies about the instant miraculous healing power of camote leaves to cure dengue fever. Instead of taking expensive drugs. Since dengue fever is caused by a virus, antibiotic cannot treat the disease. Let's try instead camote leaves to stop the spread of dengue fever in our country.

It is now time for us to be educated and trained about herbal products for better health and a greater sense of well-being. Simply, herbal products in its strict sense are those products that are prepared from plants without using additives, preservatives, artificial colors and flavors.

Have a joyful day! (For comments/reactions please send to Ms. Villafuerte's email: villafuerte_nelly@yahoo.com).

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Price monitoring teams should be deployed amid TRAIN – Villar

By MARVIN SY

Sen. Cynthia Villar called on the Departments of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Agriculture to activate their respective price monitoring teams amid reports that some businesses raised the prices of their goods in response to the implementation of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law.

Villar, chairperson of the Senate committee on agriculture, said the two national government agencies should guard against unreasonable price increases, all done in the name of TRAIN.

"Unfortunately, there are businessmen who would take advantage of the situation and

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use the enactment of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion to justify price increases. We don't want these unreasonable increases to undermine the intended benefits of the law and we ask concerned government agencies to protect the consumers," Villar said.

Villar cited reports of increases in the price of rice in some areas even though agricultural products were not covered by TRAIN.

Villar said the rice dealers cannot use the increase in excise tax on fuel to justify the hike in prices because transportation costs have minimal impact on the price of rice.

On the part of the DTI, Villar said it should monitor the compliance of the various commercial establishments with the price tag requirement and ensure there is no profiteering and violations of the Consumer Act and the Price Act.

"The support of local government units is also needed to ensure the stability of prices and to protect consumers from undue price increases," Villar said.

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TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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HortiKultura Filipina opens Feb. 3

HortiKultura Filipina 2018, the Plants and Arts Festival of the Philippine Horticulture Society, opens to the public on Feb. 3. The event spans all four show gardens at the Quezon Memorial Circle (QMC): Hardin ng mga Bulaklak (Flower Garden), Tropical Garden, Runnex Elevated Garden and Rock Garden. Special exhibits are also scheduled at the nearby QCX Museum.

Among the highlights of the show are Allied Botanical, which is bringing upland blooms that can be to lowland tropical conditions. King Louis Flowers, Manila's favorite supplier of Christmas poinsettias and wedding flowers, is weaving together flowers of varying vintage colors that will carpet the Elevated Garden or Runnex of QMC. In another part of Runnex, My Mother's Garden is putting up a meditative area by showcasing a collection of 20 bonsai plants.

There are 15 entries in competition for Best Landscape Design, while indoor and outdoor potted plants will also be displayed. These types of plants are vying for different best in show categories.

Urban Farming is showcasing creative farming in small spaces or in recycled containers. Exhibit and competition on urban farming promote the cultivation of different varieties of vegetable and ornamental plants that can be grown in your own homes or available community areas. The ultimate aim is to augment family incomes and reduce food expenses.

At least 10 vertical gardens are being set up at the QMC's Rock Garden. Groups of UP Landscape Architecture students were tasked to do basic designs. Harbest Agribusiness will be on hand to advise on irrigation systems for vertical gardens. It will also help revive and refurbish the existing vertical gardens at the Tropical Garden and at the rotunda fronting the East Avenue gate of QMC.

King Louis Flowers, Manila's favorite supplier of Christmas poinsettias and wedding flowers, is weaving together flowers of varying vintage colors that will carpet the Elevated Garden or Runnex of QMC.

One of the newest categories in competition is the terrarium. Creations by Jhay Cortes will be on exhibit.

Tiffany Cham, wildlife breeder and creator-partner of the World of Creepy Crawlies at the Manila Ocean Park, is also exhibiting a number of her terrariums including a host of exotic animals.

Aside from DIY seminars on horticulture, plant propagation and sustenance, the Department of Trade and Industry through its agencies such as the Bureau of Small and Medium Enterprises and the Bureau of Domestic Trade is holding daily seminars, lectures and counseling on business start-ups on horticulture and business related topics.

HortiKultura Filipina 2018 is open to the public from Feb. 3 to 11.

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UNA SA BALITA

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Supply ng bigas sapat pa – NFA

HINDI muna itutuloy ng National Food Authority (NFA) ang plano nitong mag-angkat ng bigas dahil may sapat pa umanong supply nito ang bansa sa kasalukuyan.

Ayon kay NFA spokesperson Rebecca Olarte, ang kanilang desisyon na isantabi muna ang planong pag-i-import ay batay na rin sa report ng Inter-Agency Food Security Committee on Rice ng National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA).

Lumilitaw umano kasi na tumaas ang produksyon ng palay noong nakaraang taon kaya inaasahang hindi pa magkukulang ang supply ng bigas.

Base pa aniya sa datos ng Philippine Statistics Authority, nasa 19.28 milyong metriko tonelada ang itinaas ng produksyon ng palay noong 2017 na higit na mataas sa 17.63 metriko tonelada noong 2016.

Una nang sinabi ng NFA na mag-aangkat ito ng 250,000 metriko tonelada ng bigas ngayong taon upang masiguro ang kanilang supply matapos ipamahagi ang ilang toneladang bigas ng ahensiya sa Marawi City at iba pang lugar na naapektuhan ng kalamidad. **(Tina Mendoza)**

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Sapat ang supply

PAG-IMPORT NG BIGAS 'DI TULOY

Sapat ang supply

DAHIL may sapat na supply ay hindi muna aangkat ng bigas ang National Food Authority (NFA) ngayong taon.

Mula sa pahina 1

Batay ito sa naging pagtaya ng Inter-Agency Food Security Committee on Rice ng National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA).

Ayon kay NFA Spokesperson Rebecca Olarte, dahil sapat pa ang supply ng bigas ay hindi na muna nila itutuloy ang pag-aangkat ng 250,000 metric tons (MT) ng bigas.

Sinabi ni Olarte na tumaas din ang produksiyon ng palay sa bansa noong nakaraang taon.

Batay sa datos ng Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), mula sa 17.63 million metric tons noong 2016 ay tumaas ito sa 19.28 million metric tons noong 2017.

Pinawi rin ng nasabing ulat ang lumutang na balitang may shortage ng bigas sa merkado kaya kailangang mag-import ng bigas.

VERLIN RUIZ