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EDITORIAL

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Staple food

RICE is the staple food of Filipinos, and the poorest among us sometimes had to make do with only rice and some salt with water for the evening meal.

This makes rice really a very "political commodity," so that whenever there is rice shortage or when people queue up to buy scarce rice, government officials somehow sense the buildup of discontent and protest among the masses.

The grain is so important that Congress deemed it right to legislate a special agency just to take care of the adequate and proper storage of rice, how rice is bought from farmers and allocated in the market, its delivery to disaster areas, its support prices, its importation if needed, and most especially, the maintenance of an adequate buffer stock.

'On the heels of this development is the increase in prices of commercial rice amid the NFA rice shortage. This makes Malacañang's assurances that the rice situation is "under control" hard to believe.'

The agency is the National Food Authority (NFA), which lately is in the news for admitting that they have only 65,200 metric tons of rice in their warehouses, to last for only two days.

The NFA is required to have a 15-day buffer stock at any given time, which obviously they failed to meet this month. The immediate result is that NFA rice, which is the cheapest rice variety in the market, became scarce and one or two pesos more in price.

On the heels of this development is the increase in prices of commercial rice amid the NFA rice shortage. This makes Malacañang's assurances that the rice situation is "under control" hard to believe.

The NFA spokesperson said they had requested the inter-agency NFA Council for authority to import 250,000 metric tons of rice as early as November, and the agency was given a standby authority to import last December, but no importation was made.

The council is headed by Cabinet Secretary Leoncio Evasco, Jr., with members Bangko Sentral Governor Nestor Espenilla Jr., Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III and Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol said the country's rice production is 19 million metric tons this cropping season, compared to 17 million during President Noynoy Aquino's time.

The country has no rice shortage, it has even a surplus because farmers are beginning to harvest their early rice crops this week, Pinol said. What we have is a temporary shortage of NFA buffer stock, which they plan to remedy by importation.

Piñol laments the fact that farmers are left to the mercy of traders, usurers and financiers who dictate the prices of their produce, with the government unable to help much. The businessmen controlling both local rice purchases and importation have been lording it over the farmers and the government for so long that busting the system would take serious effort and strong political will.

Piñol affirms the need for farmers to have direct access to the market, without having to deal with middlemen. Too bad the NFA is not anymore under the Department of Agriculture.

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No rice shortage

BY JED MACAPAGAL

GOVERNMENT yesterday assured the country has enough rice in the market amid fears of a shortage in the commodity.

"Contrary to reports (of) a looming rice shortage because the National Food Authority (NFA) has not brought in imported rice, there is actually a huge inventory of locally harvested rice," said Emmanuel Piñol, secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Piñol said the DA's field operations head undersecretary Ariel Cayanan, estimated buffer stocks at the end of the first quarter of 2018 at 3 million metric tons (MT) which would be enough to supply the daily consumption of 31,450 MT per day for 96 days.

Piñol said the 96-day buffer stock is one of the biggest rice inventories of the country in recent years which was brought by a

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19.4 million MT bumper harvest for 2017.

"By the end of 2017, rice stocks in warehouses and home storages were placed at 2.7 million MT good for 88 days of supply. In the first quarter of 2018, the production forecast is placed at 3.067 of milled rice which when added to the buffer rice stocks carried over from 2017 would place the first quarter rice supply at 5.8 million MT, the DA field operations office reported," Piñol added.

The DA said from January to March, the national rice consumption is estimated at 2.8 million MT and if paired with the projected harvest of 3.067 million MT for the quarter would push the country's buffer stocks inventory to 3.004 million MT which is good for 96 days.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said it is NFA's buffer stock which has been depleted and needs to be replenished with imports.

NFA rice is being infused into the market to stabilize the price of commercial rice. NFA rice sells for P27 to P32 per kilo compared to commercial variety that sells between P45 and P60 per kilo.

"The NFA needs to bring in the imported rice because private rice traders have inconsiderately priced commercial rice at a level which hurts ordinary consumers. The DA does not oppose the importation by NFA of rice stocks to stabilize the price in the market but at the same time calls on the price regulatory bodies of government to check on the uncontrolled pricing of commercial rice in the market," Piñol said.

He said traders who profit from rice importation are just "trying to scare government policy makers by making it appear there is a rice shortage, to justify the entry of additional imported rice."

Meanwhile, despite the fall in stocks of NFA, an official at a government panel that decides on rice imports said the country is facing no urgency to bring in stocks.

"Right now, while their stocks may be low, the council feels the need to import is not that urgent. There is so much supply available in the market and prices have been more or less stable," said Mercedita Sombilla, who sits at the NFA Council.

The Philippines typically buys rice from major exporters Vietnam and Thailand. Its only rice purchase last year was 250,000 tons sourced from suppliers in Vietnam, Thailand and Singapore, via a tender in July. - ***with R. Africa and Reuters***

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No rice shortage – Piñol

Blames cartels for 'maneuvering' prices

By **MALU CADELINA MANAR**

KIDAPAWAN CITY – Agriculture Secretary Manny Piñol yesterday belied reports that the country is suffering from a rice shortage and blamed cartels for allegedly "maneuvering" prices in the market.

Contrary to reports, there is no shortfall in the rice supply in the country, Secretary Piñol said. "In fact, our stocks are enough for our consumption for the next 96 days."

He cited data that the country produced 19.4 million metric tons of palay in 2017, believed to the biggest in history.

He said about 5.8 million metric tons of rice are avail- ▶12

No rice shortage... ◀1

able in the market for the next 96 days. At least 2.7 million metric tons of these come from the rice surplus in 2017 and the rest from the farmers' harvest until March this year.

The country's consumption of rice, Pinol said, is estimated at 31,450 metric tons a day or a total of 2.8 million metric tons for the next three months.

"If you would deduct these 2.8 million metric tons of rice consumption of the Filipinos for the next 96 days, we still have 3 million metric tons available stocks of rice in the market. With these data, ano bang rice shortage ang kanilang pinagsasabi?" he asked.

What the country is suffering from, he said, is an "anomalous food chain" where traders, instead of farmers, dictate prices of rice sold to them.

What is sad, he said, is that "the government has no control over it, and for that matter, the DA has no mandate to do so."

With this situation, traders, based on Pinol's computation, would earn ₱50 to ₱60 million per harvest season, "which should have been earned by the farmers themselves."

In Kidapawan City, the Grains Retailers Confederation (Grecon) in North Cotabato has complained of limited stocks of NFA rice.

Each accredited NFA rice retailer, according to Grecon Cotabato President Carmelito Bacus, is only given five sacks of NFA rice monthly.

This was the reason prices of commercial rice, especially those considered premium, have dramatically increased by ₱5 per kilo, he said.

When NFA here decided to limit the release of stocks to rice retailers, those primarily affected were the beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) and the indigenous communities in remote villages in Kidapawan City, said Bacus.

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With no choice, NFA willing to delay rice importation until second half

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR**

State-run grains agency National Food Authority (NFA) is now all alone in fighting for rice importation. This, after agencies like National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and Department of Agriculture (DA) agreed the country has more than enough rice.

"The market is full of rice," Mercedita Sombilla, National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Director of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Environment Staff, said yesterday.

She said it after agreeing that the NFA Council may delay discussions on rice importation until before we enter the second half of the year or before the lean months begin, which starts in July until September.

Unless, it becomes "very necessary" that we bring in imported rice, Sombilla added.

Part of the NFA Council, the highest policy-making body of the NFA, sources said NEDA always has the most influence when it comes to giving go signal on rice importation.

To recall, NFA spokesperson Rebecca Olarte earlier said the agency will attempt again this month to get the Council's approval to use its "standby authority" to import up to 250,000 metric tons (MT) of milled rice.

This is to replenish NFA's depleting stocks, which are now good to last for 35 days based on actual distribution.

The NFA is required by law to have at least 15-day buffer stock at any given time and 30-day buffer stock during lean season.

The next NFA Council meeting is on February 20 but a source said there would be a special meeting on February 12 (Monday) to discuss this particular issue.

"The NFA council did not say NFA will not import. In fact, they were given the authority to import in case it is badly needed," Sombilla said.

"Right now, while their stocks maybe low, the Council sees the need to import is not that urgent — there is so much supply available in the market and prices have been more or less stable — there are areas that may have prices rising a bit higher but that could eventually be stabilized by market forces-private sector going into those markets. There is bumper harvest and part of the 2017 MAV [Minimum Access Volume] is coming in," she added.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol agreed to this, coming up with a firm statement for his part.

"Contrary to reports that there is a looming rice shortage because the NFA has not brought in imported rice, there is actually a huge inventory of locally harvested rice," Piñol said.

"The scare tactics will not stand a chance against statistics," he added.

Based on the data provided by Department of Agriculture's (DA) Field Operations head Undersecretary Ariel Cayanan, the estimated buffer stocks by the end of the first quarter of 2018 stood around 3 million metric tons (MT), which would be enough to supply the daily consumption of 31,450 MT per day for 96 days.

Piñol said the 96-day buffer stock is one of the biggest rice inventories of the country in recent years and this was the result of a bumper harvest of 19.4 million MT for 2017, a record harvest for the country.

By the end of 2017, rice stocks in warehouses and home storages were recorded at 2.7 million MT, which would be good for 88 days of supply.

In the first quarter of this year, the production forecast is placed at 3.067 million MT of milled rice, which when added to the buffer rice stocks carried over from 2017, would place the first quarter rice supply at 5.8 million MT.

"I have nothing against importation. If it's legal, if it's for the NFA's supply of buffer stocks, I'm fine with it, but let's not twist the truth. There is no shortage of rice," Piñol further said.

The DA chief then called on the price regulatory bodies of government to check on the uncontrolled pricing of commercial rice in the market.

"DTI [Department of Trade and Industry] should come in and put a cap on price of rice in the market. [We should follow] the rule of thumb. The buying price of palay times two should be the price of rice in the market so it should be just around ₱36 per kilo. But how much is the price of rice right now? ₱40 per kilo, ₱50 per kilo," Piñol said.

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Maguindanao's Inaul Festival unfolds today

By **ALI G. MACABALANG**

BULUAN, Maguindanao – The Second Inaul Festival unfolds here today, with organizers and partners in public and private sectors hoping that the events and festivities will help bring this tri-people province to greater heights.

Festival organizers have gathered Moro traditional singers across Maguindanao to render "dayunday" (songs of praise and recollection of culture) Wednesday night as a pre-festival event meant to usher in visitors and residents into the weeklong fest, provincial executive officer Eman Aljani told The Manila Bulletin.

The official opening today will be a parade around this town of delegations from Maguindanao's 36 towns. Parade participants wearing costumes made of colorful inaul (hand-woven) fabric will converge at the provincial gym here for the inaugural program ceremony, said Aljan, a festival facilitator.

Tourism Undersecretary Eden David will grace the opening rite and some succeeding events, which include on-the-spot inaul-making showcase cum contest among known weavers at the Women's Center here.

Adjacent to the weaving contest venue will the new Negosyo Center building, which is expected to be inaugurated by Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio, Aljani said.

A trade expo with over two dozens of booths showcasing Maguindanao's products will also be opened by dignitaries, followed in the evening by the presentation of the 13 local beauties competing in the 2018 Palamata Nu Maguindanao pageant and a concert of renowned musical bands in the country, she said.

The provincial police and Army's Sixth Infantry Division have also made security arrangements for the possible arrival of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte and his son Sebastian.

The President may grace one or two grand events lined up in the succeeding days, while Sebastian, or "Baste," will join guests for the coronation night of winners in the pageant on February 12, festival director Nulfarid Ampatuan bared.

Agriculture Sec. Manny Piñol has earlier confirmed attendance in another festival highlight, notably the opening of the state-of-the art halal dressed chicken factory, a first of its kind in the country, built here by local investors backed by Malaysian counterparts.

Other festive events in succeeding days include an international airsoft gun contest; a traditional banca race featuring former rebels, cops and soldiers; a carabao race, a float design tilt; sagayan (war dance) competition, drum and lyre contest, among others.

The festival will be capped off by the "Governor's Night" on February 13 where Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu will tender a royal pagana (dinner) for visiting dignitaries including royalties, and national government officials.

SLIGHT INCREASE – A vendor scoops some of the rice for sale in her stall in Agdao Market in Davao City as rice traders disclosed that there was a slight increase in the price of rice following the implementation of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law. (Keith Bacongco)

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Innovative agro-energy project eyed in M'lang

By **ALI G. MACABALANG**

M'LANG, North Cotabato – The Philippine National Oil Company-Renewable Corporation (PNOC-RC) is eyeing to pilot an integrated project aimed at yielding electricity and vegetables that can help meet deficiencies in power and tomato supplies in the country.

A four-member team led by PNOC-RC Executive Vice President Pedro L. Lite Jr. met with **Agriculture Secretary Manny F. Piñol** here last Friday, and discussed the proposal to install, in a 10-hectare lot here, elevated solar panels with greenhouses built-in underneath for modern tomato growing.

The integrated energy generation and tomato production project is first of its kind in the country, applying a modern French technology that has been effectively operating for months now in a foreign community, Piñol told The Manila Bulletin.

While current solar panels in the country do not have spaces underneath, the proposed project will build high-leveled panels to accommodate greenhouses for agricultural farming such as tomato-growing to be bankrolled from existing P8-billion PNOC-RC fund for renewable energies, he said.

The proposed pilot project can generate at least five megawatts daily and substantial tomato supplies per harvest, the two officials said.

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Section Editor: ZAC B. SARIAN

A super tall hybrid corn for making silage

AGRI PLAIN TALK
ZAC B. SARIAN

Here's one more good news that could boost silage making for livestock feed. An agricultural company based in Isabela has come up with a hybrid non-GMO corn variety that is very vigorous, it will grow eight to 10 feet tall when it is harvestable for making silage in 75 days after planting.

The Super Tall hybrid corn was launched recently by Right Agri Company during the 8th Goat and Sheep Congress held at the Benguet State University in La Trinidad. Right Agri's Eugene Gabriel says the variety is mainly intended for silage making but it can also be planted for grain production. In fact, a grower in Isabela said it is possible to harvest 8 tons of grains per hectare.

The new variety, which is still being readied for accreditation by the National Seed Industry Council, is now being planted in 20 to 30 hectares in Tarlac and a similar area in Pangasinan by the group of Dr. Ronaldo Sumaoang, a microbiologist who is now focused on commercial silage production in a joint venture with Right Agri.

Right Agri which has expertise in farm mechanization provides the ma-

SUPER TALL HYBRID CORN LAUNCHED – The new hybrid corn intended purposely for silage production was launched during the recent 8th National Goat and Sheep Congress held at the Benguet State University in La Trinidad. The variety is now being planted in Tarlac and Pangasinan under a unique growing scheme with farm owners who grow the plants to 75 days. Because the growing period is short, the farmers can grow two crops after rice in November. Normally, they can only plant one crop if they are growing for grain production. Photo shows Dr. Ronaldo Sumaoang (third from right) and VP Sharon Marie Paet of Right Agri together with other members of the staff.

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chinery for land preparation, mechanized sowing, harvesting and shredding of the 75-days-old corn plants for making silage. It also takes care of vacuum-packing. Dr. Sumaoang's Novatech, on the other hand, provides the expertise in producing silage that is enriched with enzymes and probiotics for enhanced nutritional value of the feed.

The joint venture of Right Agri and Novatech has recruited farmer-cooperators who will grow the Super Tall corn under the guidance of the experts of the joint venture. As of this writing (Feb. 6), Dr. Sumaoang is supervising the harvesting the first three hectares in Tarlac. He said they are getting 80 to 90 tons per hectare.

Dr. Sumaoang explained that each corn plant, including the ears with soft kernels, weigh one to 1.2 kilos. Since there are 75,000 plants per hectare, the yield is 80 to 90 tons per hectare. Under the agreement, the Dr. Sumaoang and his partner (Right Agri) buy the newly harvested corn plants at ₱1 per kilo, hence the farmer can make a gross of ₱80,000 to ₱90,000 per hectare in a growing period of about 75 days.

If the harvesting is not mechanized and the farmer has to do the job, the partners will pay ₱1.20 per kilo loaded to the truck. The farmer will get a good income under the scheme. Dr. Sumaoang said, the average cost of production that includes the seeds, land preparation, fertilizers (organic and chemical) amounts to only ₱30,000 to ₱40,000 per hectare. The cost of seeds, according to Right Agri, is ₱7,000 per hectare.

In Tarlac and Pangasinan, the farmers usually plant corn after harvesting rice in November. Normally, they can grow only one crop for grain production because it takes almost four months to grow one crop. When they grow the Super Tall hybrid for silage, they can grow two crops before the onset of the rainy season around May or June. They don't normally plant two crops of corn after rice if they are producing grains because the maturity of the second crop will be overtaken by the coming of the rains, according to Dr. Sumaoang.

DAIRY COWS LOVE CORN SILAGE – Photo shows dairy cows at the Isabela State University in Echague relishing corn silage. This is one feed that can sustain the animals during the dry season when green grass is scarce. With mechanized production of silage like what Right Agri and Novatech of Dr. Ronaldo Sumaoang have started to do, silage will become more affordable.

The silage produced by the partners is very affordable, according to Dr. Sumaoang. They can sell the same at as low as ₱4.50 per kilo, depending on how far the silage has to be delivered. The silage is good for small ruminants (goat and sheep) as well as large ones like dairy cattle, fattening cattle and carabaos.

The availability of affordable feed like silage will make it possible for small bakyard livestock raisers to increase the number of animals that they can raise. As of now, many backyard raisers take care of just one or two head because they don't have green grass during the dry season. With the availability of affordable feed like silage, the livestock population can increase considerably, according to Dr. Sumaoang.

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DA SECRETARY AT THE RIGHT AGRI BOOTH – Agriculture Sec. Manny Piñol is shown talking with staff members of Right Agri during the 8th Goat and Sheep Congress held at the Benguet State University recently. The Secretary has shown interest in silage production that could enhance livestock production in the Philippines. He had conferred with Dr. Ronaldo Sumaoang who is collaborating with Right Agri in producing silage commercially in Tarlac and Pangasinan.

SHEEP ALSO LOVE SILAGE – Dr. Ronaldo Sumaoang, who has a technology to enhance the nutritive value of silage with the inclusion of enzymes and beneficial microorganisms, says that sheep also relish silage. He himself is raising more than 300 sheep, feeding them mainly with his silage. Goats also love to eat silage which is a convenient substitute for green forage, especially during the dry season. Even during the rainy months, commercial goat farms also prefer to depend on silage because it is more convenient than gathering grass which could also be infested with parasites. Photo shows Dr. Sumaoang's sheep eating silage.

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SUPER TALL – Photo at left shows Super Tall corn plants that are about 10 feet tall. When harvested at 75 days after planting, one plant could weigh 1.2 kilos. The new hybrid, a no-GMO, also produces big ears (right photo). When grown for grains, it is capable of producing eight tons under favorable growing conditions.

CORN SILAGE UP CLOSE – Eugene Gabriel of Right Agri shows corn silage earlier produced in Isabela for dairy cows as well as goats. Gabriel saw the potential of making silage commercially because he has found out that goat raisers and cattle raisers in Tarlac down to Batangas require big volumes of the feed. But because Isabela is far from the customers, Right Agri has partnered with Novatech to produce silage in Tarlac and Pangasinan.

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PHL lifts ban on poultry from Belgium

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas @jearcalas

THE Philippine government has lifted the import ban it slapped on poultry products from two areas in Belgium that were struck by a lethal strain of the bird-flu virus last year.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said traders may now resume importing poultry from Oostkamp and Menen in West Flanders, Belgium, as these areas are already free from the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

The DA issued Memorandum Order (MO) 2 authorizing the lifting of the temporary ban on poultry imports from Oostkamp and Menen.

MO 2 was issued after Belgium's Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain informed the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) that the HPAI events in Oostkamp and Menen in West Flanders have been resolved.

"In accordance to the provisions of Chapter 10.4, Article 10.4.3 of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code 2017, Belgium is now free from HPAI. Based on the evaluation of the Bureau of Animal Industry [BAI], the risk of contamination from importing poultry and poultry products from Oostkamp and Menen in West Flanders, Belgium, is negligible," Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol said in MO 2 dated January 17, a copy of which was given to reporters on February 7.

"By the powers vested in me by law, I hereby lift the temporary ban on the importation of domestic and wild birds, including poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs and semen originating from Oostkamp and Menen in West Flanders, Belgium," Piñol added.

He said all poultry imports coming from the two areas of Belgium shall be in accordance with the rules and regulations of the BAI and the National Meat Inspection Service.

Manila imposes a temporary ban on meat imports from countries struck by animal diseases to protect the local livestock and poultry sector.

With the lifting of the ban, the Philippine government would resume the processing, evaluation of the application and issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance of domestic and wild birds and poultry products from Belgium.

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IMPORT BAN SA POULTRY PRODUCTS INALIS NA

BINAWI na ng bansa ang import ban na ipinataw nito noong nakaraang taon sa poultry meat at products mula sa ilang lalawigan ng Brussels makaraang ideklarang ligtas na ito sa highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) o bird flu.

Nagpalabas ang Department of Agriculture (DA) ng Memorandum Order 02 na nagpapahintulot sa pag-alis sa temporary ban sa pag-angkat ng poultry products na nanggagaling sa Oostkamp at Menen sa West Flanders, Belgium.

Ang kautusan ay ipinalabas makaraang abisuhan ng Brussel's Feederal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain informed ang World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) na ang mga insidente ng HPAI sa Oostkamp at Menen sa West Flanders ay naresolba na.

"In accordance to the provisions of CHapter 10.4, article 10.4.3 of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code 2017, Belgium is now free from HPAI. Based on the evaluation of the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), the risk of contamination from importing poultry and poultry products from Oostkamp and Menen In Weste Flanders, Belgium is negligible," wika ni Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol sa memorandum order na may petsang Enero 17, na ang kopya ay ipinamahagi sa mga reporter kahapon.

"By the powers vested in me by law, do hereby lift the temporary ban on the importation of domestic and wild birds including poultry meat, day old chicks, eggs and semen originating from Oostkamp and Menen in West Flanders, Belgium," wika ni Piñol.

Ayon kay Piñol, ang lahat ng poultry imports mula sa dalawang lugar sa Belgium ay dapat na alinsunod sa rules and regulations ng BAI at ng National Meat Inspection Service.

JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

ABANTE TONITE
MABILIS SA BALITA

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May gustong kumita: Rice shortage pinag-iinit para makapag-import

Duda si National Food Authority (NFA) Council chair Jun Evasco sa isyung may kakapusan sa supply ng bigas sa bansa.

Aalamin ng opisyal sa pamamagitan ng isang pulong kung ang sinasabing dalawang araw na lamang na buffer stock ng suplay ng bigas ng NFA ay isa lamang palabas upang ma-pressure ang NFA council at bumili ng 250 metriko toneladang bigas.

Samantala, inatasan ni Agriculture Secretary Manny Piñol ang Department of Trade and Industry na lagyan ng cap ang presyo ng bigas sa merkado.

Ayon kay Piñol habang may problema sa buffer stock ng NFA rice ay hindi maiiwasan na magtaas ang presyo ng commecial rice subalit maiiwasan na lumobo ang presyo nito kung agad itong pipigilan ng DTI.

"The DTI should come in and really put a cap on the price of rice in the market" dagdag ni Piñol.

Nilinaw naman ni Piñol na tanging NFA rice lang ang nagkokoproblema sa supply dahil na rin sa sunod-sunod na kalamidad sa bansa at ang problema sa Marawi at pagputok ng bulkan sa Albay, bagamat mayroon pa umanong supply ay inilaan na ito sa calamity prone areas kaya hindi nabibigyan ng supply ang ibang lugar ngunit pagdating umano sa commercial rice ay may sapat na supply.

"Ang sinasabi nilang shortage ay NFA buffer stocks, yung ating supply ng commercial na bigas ay 3M metric tons pa ang available. There's no reason to panic because we're expecting another harvest," dagdag pa nito.

Sinabi ni Piñol na pang 96 araw ang pondong commercial rice, lubha umano itong marami kumpara sa itinatakda na 60 araw lamang na pondo ng bigas at ito umano ay resulta ng magandang ani noong nakaraang taon na umabot sa 19.4 metric tons. **(Tina Mendoza)**

ABANTE TONITE
MABILIS SA BALITA

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Kapos na suplay ng bigas pinalalala para tumaas ang presyo

Sinisi ni Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Manny Piñol sa mga traders ang pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas sa merkado.

Ayon kay Piñol wala namang rice shortage at ang pagtaas ng presyo ng commercial rice ay resulta lamang ng pagsasamantala ng ilang tiwaling negosyante at ang kanilang idinadahilan ay ang TRAIN law at ang kakulangan ng rice buffer stock ng NFA.

Naniniwala si Piñol na ang isyu ngayon sa bigas ay pinalalaki lamang ng mga commercial traders para magkaroon ng panic at magkaroon ng dahilan para magtaas ng presyo.

"Rice traders who make money from importing rice are trying to scare government policy makers by making it appear that there is a rice shortage, to justify the entry of additional imported rice. It would also serve as a convenient excuse to increase the selling price of rice in the market which hurts Filipino consumers, po'y nakikiusap, naiintindihan ko naman ang negosyo, sino ba ayaw kumita, Pero ilagay natin sa tama, huwag naman yung sobrang para lang kumita, mag-create tayo ng panic" pahayag ni Piñol.

Sinabi ni Piñol na para maiwasan ang pagsasamantala ng mga negosyante ay nakatakda niyang hilingin kay Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte sa pamamagitan ni Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea na i-exercise ng DA ang regulatory powers nito at masigurong walang mga negosyante ang magsasamantala sa pagtataas ng presyo nang walang sapat na kadahilanan. **(Tina Mendoza)**

Balita

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CARTEL SINISISI SA PRESYUHAN

DA chief: Bigas 'di kapos

Ni MALU CADELINA MANAR

Itinanggi kahapon ni Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Emmanuel "Manny" Piñol ang napaulat na nagkakaroon na ng kakapusan ng bigas sa bansa.

Sinisisi ni Piñol ang kartel sa umano'y pagmamaniobra sa presyo ng bigas sa merkado.

"In fact, our stocks are enough for our consumption for the next 96 days," sinabi ng kalihim.

Tinukoy ni Piñol ang datos ng DA, na aabot sa 19.4 milyong metriko tonelada ang produksiyon ng palay sa bansa noong 2017, na sinasabing pinakamalaki sa kasaysayan.

Aniya, halos anim na milyong metriko toneladang bigas ang available sa merkado sa susunod na 96 na araw, kabilang na ang 2.7 metriko toneladang rice surplus noong nakalipas na taon, at ang iba ay mula naman sa ani ng mga magsasaka hanggang sa Marso ngayong taon.

Tinaya ni Piñol sa 31,450 metriko tonelada ng bigas ang arawang konsumo ng bansa, o kabuuang 2.8 milyong metriko tonelada para sa susunod na tatlong buwan.

"If you would deduct these 2.8 million metric tons of rice consumption of the Filipinos for the next 96 days, we still have 3 million metric tons available stocks of rice in the market. With these data, ano ba'ng rice shortage ba ang kanilang pinagsasabi?" ani Piñol.

Batay sa obserbasyon ng kalihim, nakararanas ngayon ang bansa ng tinatawag nitong "anomalous food chain", kung saan ang mga negosyante ang nagdidikta sa presyo ng bigas at hindi ang mga magsasaka na nagbebenta nito.

"The government has no control over it, and for that matter, the DA, has no mandate to do so," ani Piñol.

Kaugnay nito, nagrereklamo na ang Grains Retailers Confederation (GRECON) sa Kidapawan City, North Cotabato dahil sa limitadong imbak na bigas ng National Food Authority (NFA).

Kaugnay nito, hiling naman ni Senator Cynthia Villar – sa pamamagitan ng inihain niyang Senate Resolution 608 – na maimbestigahan ng Senado ang napaulat na kakapusan sa NFA rice at ang epekto nito sa presyuhan sa merkado.

May ulat ni Vanne Elaine P. Terrazola

Tempo

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No rice shortage, says DA secretary

By MALU CADELINA MANAR

KIDAPAWAN CITY – Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Manny Piñol has denied reports that the country is suffering from rice shortage, saying that "stocks are enough for our consumption for the next 96 days."

The DA secretary said some 5.8 million metric tons of rice have been made available in the market.

Based on data, the country's daily consumption of rice is estimated at 2.8 million metric tons for the next three months.

He said, "So, even if you deduct these 2.8 million metric tons of rice, which is the sum consumption of Filipinos for the next 96 days, we still have 3 million metric tons available. With these data, anong rice shortage ang kanilang pinagsasabi?"

Piñol blamed rice cartels for starting the rice shortage issue to allegedly "maneuver" its price.

The country, as Piñol would describe it, is now suffering from an "anomalous food chain" where traders, instead of farmers, dictate the price of rice.

What is sad, though, he said, is that "the government has no control over it, and for that matter, the DA."

With the "situation," a trader, based on Piñol's computation, will earn from ₱50 to ₱60 million per harvest season, "which should have been earned by the farmers."

In Kidapawan City, the Grains Retailers Confederation (GRECON) in North Cotabato has complained of limited stocks of NFA rice.

Each accredited NFA rice retailer, according to GRECON Cotabato president Carmelito Bacus, is now only being given five sacks of NFA rice monthly.

This, Bacus hinted, is the reason why prices of commercial rice, especially those considered of the premium variety, have dramatically increased by ₱5 per kilo.

BANDERA
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NFA: Walang rice shortage

ITINANGGI ng National Food Authority na may shortage ng NFA rice bunsod ng mga ulat na wala nang mabili nito sa mga palengke.

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Pero inamin ni NFA Administrator Jason Aguino na kokonti na lamang ang imbentaryo ng NFA.

"Hindi kulang ang bigas, wala lang mabigay ang NFA sa poorest of the poor," sabi ni Aquino.

Idinagdag ng opisyal na aabot na lamang sa 34,000 sako ng NFA rice ang ipinapalabas ng NFA, mula sa dating 64,000 sako.

Ayon pa kay Aquino, sa kabuuan, tinatayang nasa 1.2 milyon sako ng NFA rice na lamang ang natitira na aabot sa 18 araw.

Mas mura ang NFA rice kung saan mabibili ito sa halagang P27 hanggang P32 kada kilo, kumpara sa mga commercial rice, na aabot mula P36 hanggang P65 kada kilo.

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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Earnings from abaca exports up 16.4% in Jan-May

REVENUES from the country's abaca shipments in January to May 2017 grew by 16.4 percent to $59.832 million, from $51.384 million recorded in the same period last year, according to the Philippine Fiber Industry Development Authority (PhilFida).

The latest data released by the PhilFida showed the bulk of export receipts came from outbound shipments of abaca pulp, which accounted for nearly 70 percent of total revenues. On an annual basis, abaca pulp exports during the five-month period rose by 22.1 percent to $41.772 million.

Total volume of abaca pulp exported by the Philippines during the January-to-May period reached 9,654.033 metric tons (MT), 12.5 percent higher than the 8,577.935 MT recorded in 2016.

The United Kingdom was the top importer of the country's abaca pulp, accounting for 40.1 percent of total shipments during the five-month period. Abaca pulp exports to the UK expanded by 15.6 percent to 3,867.271 MT, from the previous year's 3,265.885 MT.

Germany was the second top buyer of Philippine abaca pulp, accounting for 23.8 percent of shipments.

However, abaca pulp exports to Germany declined by 10.9 percent to 2,300.254 MT, from 2,551.087 MT.

PhilFida data showed the country's total abaca fiber export during the five-month period rose by a third to 7,077.75 MT, from 2016's record of 5,311.25 MT.

Spain was the country's top abaca fiber export destination, accounting for 32.5 percent of shipments. Shipments to Spain jumped to 2,301.75 MT, from the previous year's 432.25 MT.

Japan was the second top buyer of abaca fiber. It imported 2,103 MT, accounting for 29.7 percent of the total shipments. The volume was 13.6 percent higher than the 1,851.25 MT recorded in the same period a year ago.

PhilFida data showed total earnings from shipments of abaca fiber expanded by 41 percent to $13.581 million, from the previous year's record of $9.635 million. ***Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas***

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Your daily look at today's business

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Bulacan's 'Usapang Agri' forum tackled land reclassification, housing conversion

CITY OF MALOLOS—The provincial government of Bulacan headed by Gov. Wilhelmino M. Sy-Alvarado addressed on Tuesday the concern of his constituents regarding excessive land reclassification and conversion of productive land that might affect the food production. He tackled these twin issues during the "Usapang Agri: Pangangalaga sa Lupang Sakahan Forum" held at The Pavilion, Hiyas ng Bulacan Convention Center in this city.

"Bulacan is so blessed, but I worry because of the government's too much land reclassification and conversion. We wake up and see our farmlands developed into urbanized housing. Farmers are tempted to sell their farmlands at say, P30 million per hectare. They would rather sell than spend the whole day doing back-breaking labor under the hot sun in their farm. Besides, many of them farm at a loss," he said. The governor warned his constituents, though, to make sure land development is "according with the mandate of the law."

Sy-Alvarado said this in the light of Bulacan's producing more than 60 percent of all vegetable, meat and fish sold in all public markets in Metro Manila.

Vice Gov. Daniel R. Fernando said that although technology keeps on advancing and the province is on a steady path to progress, too much land reclassification might cause hunger in the long run. "We are calling on the National Irrigation Administration to fix irrigation as it is one of the causes of farmers' selling their farmland to developers."

The forum included discussions on "Productivity and Protection of Agricultural Lands by Michael Manansala from the Department of Agriculture, Region 3; "Powers and Responsibilities of LGUs on Land Reclassification" by Jayson Jumaquio from the Department of the Interior and Local Government; "Process and Requirements of Land Conversion" by Raparado Galos III from the Bureau of Agrarian Reform, Legal Assistance Region 3; and "Process on Land Development" by Perlito Abello from the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board. ***Catherine Joy L. Maglalang***

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'Mosquito fish' tapped vs dengue in Pangasinan

LINGAYEN, PANGASINAN—It's time to restock canals and other waterways near populated areas with mosquito fish, locally known as "tuyong" or "itar," to combat dengue-carrying mosquitoes, health and fisheries experts said here.

Tuyong (Gambusia affinis), which voraciously consumes mosquito larvae, can be the better weapon against dengue instead of the expensive and controversial Dengvaxia, said Westly Rosario, research center chief of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resouces (BFAR).

FIGHTING DENGUE The "mosquito fish," known in Pangasinan province as "tuyong" or "itar," feeds on disease-carrying mosquitoes. —RAY B. ZAMBRANO

Dengue cases up

Dr. Anna Maria Teresa de Guzman, provincial health officer, made the same suggestion, after observing that the number of dengue cases from Jan. 1 to Feb. 5 this year was 300 percent higher than the 140 cases recorded on the same period last year.

Two dengue patients have died while 534 others have been treated in different hospitals in Pangasinan province since last month, De Guzman said on Monday. No deaths were recorded on the same period last year.

Biological solution

A biological solution was the best way to combat the disease, Rosario said, allaying fears that mosquito fish was an invasive species.

De Guzman said her office had not declared a dengue outbreak in the province, saying doctors have yet to establish "if these cases come from one barangay or if they are close to one another."

Urdaneta City, which recorded one death and 82 cases, had the most number of cases, followed by Binmaley town with one death and 40 cases, she said.

> **The good news is that [Pangasinan students who got Dengvaxia shots] are not in the hospital and are all healthy**
>
> **Dr. Anna Maria Teresa de Guzman**
> Pangasinan health officer

Other areas on the dengue watch list of the provincial health office include Santa Barbara (37 cases), Lingayen (30), Mangaldan (29), Binalonan (26), Pozorrubio (24), Asingan (22), San Carlos City (22) and Bayambang (20).

Dagupan City recorded 50 cases. But as an independent component city, it is not under the provincial government's administrative supervision.

De Guzman said most patients were children with ages ranging from 10 to 19. She said these children had not been vaccinated with Dengvaxia.

Monitoring

"We have been closely monitoring those who got Dengvaxia shots in the province. Some of them were vaccinated in Manila, Quezon City, Tarlac and private doctors in the province. But the good news is that they are not in the hospital and they are all healthy," she said.

She said the abrupt increase in the number of dengue cases in the province might have been due to rains last month that created breeding places for the dengue-carrying mosquitoes.

She said it was also possible that there are creeks or ponds in the villages, where mosquitoes bred. —GABRIEL CARDINOZA, WITH A REPORT FROM YOLANDA SOTELO INQ

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Rice pest causes ₱2.4-M crop damage in Negros

By **MARK L. GARCIA**

BACOLOD CITY–The Rice Grain Bug, an emerging rice pest in Negros Occidental, continues to infest more areas as the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPA) recorded another ₱2.4 million worth of damage in two municipalities.

Pontevedra town and Himamaylan City lost ₱2,445,536 worth of rice crops due to infestation in January, records from OPA released to the media Wednesday showed.

Provincial Agriculturist Japhet Masculino said apart from Pontevedra and Himamaylan, OPA is waiting for the reports from towns in the sixth district, Candoni and Hinobaan, where infestations were also reported.

Pontevedra belongs to the fourth district while Himamaylan in the fifth district, both located in the southern part of Bacolod.

This is the first reported Rice Grain Bug infestation this year, Masculino said.

Pontevedra has ₱2,053,760 worth of damage covering 59 hectares and affecting 33 farmers. OPA noted that last year, the town had the biggest rice production yield in the province with 7.1 tons per hectare.

Himamaylan has ₱391,776 worth of damage covering 9.04 has. affecting nine farmers.

The bug sucks the contents of rice grains in the milking stage, causing moisture loss and discoloration.

The pest has a dirty-brown color and is half the size of the Rice Black Bug, with bigger front legs.

The Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation recently included them in the insurance coverage for RGB damages this year after the provincial government submitted a letter to its president Jovy Bernabe last December.

Masculino said experts from Bureau of Plant Industry and the University of the Philippines-Los Baños will be coming in Negros to study the spreading of the pest that was discovered to be infesting rice areas last August.

In the second half of 2017, cases of RGB infestation in south Negros were reported with damage placed at ₱8.4 million.

About 31 packs of bio-controlling fungi Metarhizium anisopliae from the Department of Agriculture-Western Visayas Regional Crop Protection Center were distributed to Pontevedra and Himamaylan, Masculino said.

He advised farmers to adopt the synchronous planting of rice to minimize pest damage.

PILIPINO MIRROR
FILIPINO MIRROR MEDIA GROUP CORPORATION
- SALAMIN NG KATOTOHANAN -

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ABACA EXPORTS NG PINAS SUMIPA

LUMAGO ang revenue mula sa abaca exports ng bansa mula Enero hanggang Mayo 2017 ng 16.4 percent sa $59.832 million, mula sa $51.384 million na naitala sa kaparehong panahon noong 2016, ayon sa Philippine Fiber Industry Development Authority (PhilFIDA).

Sa pinakabagong datos na ipinalabas ng PhilFIDA, malaking bahagi ng export receipt ay nagmula sa out-bound shipments ng abaca pulp, na bumubuo sa halos 70 percent ng total revenue.

Ang abaca pulp exports sa five-month period ay nagtala ng 22.1-percent year-on-year increment sa halagang $41.772 million.

Ang total volume ng abaca pulp na iniluwas ng Pilipinas sa January-to-May 2017 period ay pumalo sa 9,654.033 metric tons (MT), mas mataas ng 12.5 percent sa 8,577.935 MT na naitala sa kahalintulad na panahon noong 2016.

Ang United Kingdom ang top importer ng abaca pulp ng bansa na bumubuo sa 40.1 percent share ng total volume sa five-month period. Ang abaca pulp exports sa United Kingdom ay tumaas ng 15.6 percent sa 3,867.271 MT, mula sa 3,265.885 MT.

Ang Germany ang second-top buyer ng Philippine abaca pulp na may 23.8 percent share. Gayunman, ang abaca pulp exports sa Germany ay bumaba ng 10.9 percent sa 2,300.254 MT mula sa 2,551.087 MT.

Samantala, ang total abaca fiber export ng bansa sa five-month period ay tumaas ng 1/3 sa 7,077.75 MT, mula sa 5,311.25 MT noong 2016.

Ang Spain ang top abaca fiber export destination ng bansa na may 32.5 percent share.

Ang Japan ang second-top buyer ng abaca fiber, na 29.7 percent ng total volume o 2,103 MT. Mas mataas ito ng 13.6 percent sa 1,851.25 MT na naitala noong 2016.

JASPER ARCALAS

Malaya
Business Insight

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Model hybrid rice farm to rise in Lanao del Sur

A 100-hectare demonstration farm for rice production will help in the rehabilitation of Marawi City.

Planted to hybrid rice, the demo farm is a partnership of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and SL Agritech Corp. (SLAC).

Provincial agriculturists in the Lanao del Sur are now identifying a contiguous land area in the town of Bubung, Lanao del Sur.

The model farm eyed is relatively big and may require a production cost of around P30,000 per hectare. Traditionally, technology demonstration sites only cover one to two hectares.

"We want to bring the message to the people of Marawi that there's hope. SL Agritech will put in the money for this techno-demo to inspire hope," SL AGritech Corp. chairman Henry Lim Bon Liong said yesterday in the signing ceremonies of the memorandum of agreement between SL Agritech and local officials.

SL Agritech is carrying out the hybrid rice planting in coordination with Go Negosyo, the city government and the Department of Agriculture.

"Go Negosyo has asked SL Agritech to participate in the economic rehabilitation," Lim said.

The company sees its role in Marawi's rehabilitation as an expansion of an earlier agricultural investment in conflict-affected areas of Maguindanao where it has a model farm.

On top of the technical and financial assistance in the form of seeds and fertilizers for farmers, the project will also link them to markets that will buy the produce.

The project will ensure that irrigation is provided to the farm despite the fact that uplands traditionally do not enjoy large irrigation supply from national irrigation systems.

"We will educate farmers on proper farm management because some rice fields in these areas are plagued by weeds and disease.We will be sending our technical experts to help them achieve a good yield," said Dr. Frisco M. Malabanan, a consultant to SL Agritech.

The establishment of a hybrid rice model farm is part of SL Agritech support not only for infrastructure rehabilitation but the economic restoration in Marawi.

Rebuilding Marawi. The establishment of a hybrid rice model farm is part of SL Agritech support not only for infrastructure rehabilitation but the economic restoration in Marawi.

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Agriculture, manufacturing agreement signed with Turkey

THE Philippines and Turkey have signed two memoranda of understanding (MoU) on investment in agriculture, manufacturing and services during the first Joint Committee on Economic and Technical Cooperation meeting in Ankara.

In a statement released by the Board of Investments, Trade Secretary Ramon M. Lopez outlined the agreed areas of cooperation in the first MoU: services and infrastructure, agro-processing, manufacturing and the further development of mico, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

"Engaging with Turkey is in line with the thrust of President Rodrigo R. Duterte's administration to engage with nontraditional trading partners to reinvigorate ties and increase trade between both countries," Mr. Lopez said.

In the area of agriculture exports, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is looking at expanding mango, coconuts and banana shipments to Turkey. Manufactured goods include textiles, clothing and pharmaceuticals.

The Philippines currently exports desiccated coconut, personal care goods, electronics and tires to Turkey.

"During our discussions, we noticed that there are opportunities for our Philippine exporters — whether for manufactured goods or services — to further tap the Turkish market," Mr. Lopez said.

In services, the areas for cooperation were listed as customs, energy, science and technology, education, film and creative industries, defense, contracting and consultancy.

The Turkish side hopes to expand the Philippine market for its textiles, tourism, pharmaceutical, and infrastructure development industries.

Turkey is the Philippines' 45th-largest trading partner. In the first 11 months of 2017, bilateral trade between the two countries amounted to $163 million.

AFP

PHILIPPINE Foreign Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano (L) greets Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu (R) during a reception for the 50th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers Meeting in Manila on Aug. 5, 2017.

Turkey's per capita income is twice as large as that of the Philippines and grew its economy 11.1% in the third quarter last year.

Turkey has also expressed special interest in the Marawi rebuilding effort via Islamic financing channels.

"The Philippines is committed to pursue several growth opportunities by strengthening partnerships with emerging economic partners like Turkey," Mr. Lopez said.

DTI's Turkish counterpart is set to hold an investments and trade mission to the Philippines next month.

Another MoU, which was signed by the Philippine ambassador to Turkey, centers on cooperation in agriculture, rural development, irrigation and promotion of joint ventures between private sectors. — **Anna Gabriela A. Mogato**

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Monsanto PHL underscores safety of plant operations

MONSANTO Philippines underscored the safety of its plant operations during the recently conducted media briefing at their RIB (Refuge-In-a-Bag) Plant in Pulilan, Bulacan.

For almost four years since its opening in 2014, the blending and packing facility has zero recordable injury or health issue incidence.

Monsanto Pulilan Plant is the first RIB Plant in Asia and second in the world, spanning a total land area of 6,000 square meters.

The first time Monsanto opened its doors to the members of the media was during its opening in 2004 with the purpose of sharing information on the safety of its plant operations as well as highlighting the benefits of agricultural biotechnology.

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No go-ahead for NFA to import rice despite low inventories

THE National Food Authority (NFA) said on Wednesday that despite a decline in its rice inventory, the economic managers who control imports do not see an urgent need to import the commodity.

The grains procurement agency has said that stockpiles were thinning, with Reuters reporting that NFA stocks are at 60,000 tons, equivalent to two days' demand, the lowest level in two decades. However, this estimate was disputed by the NFA.

The reported buffer stock is far below NFA's mandate to maintain 15 days' supply at any given time.

Reuters also reported that the NFA Council, a panel of senior economic managers which must approve rice orders from overseas, sees no current need to import because of ample inventory in the market.

"Right now... the council feels the need to import is not that urgent," the news agency quoted Mercedita A. Sombilla, a Council member, as saying.

"There is no shortage of rice held by commercial traders and households," NFA administrator Jason Laureano Y. Aquino added in a briefing.

In the briefing, however, Mr. Aquino said that the actual inventory held by the NFA is 35 days' demand. He added that an import order takes 45 days to ship, suggesting a 10-day gap between the depletion of NFA stock and the arrival of imports if the order were placed today.

The NFA releases rice into the market to help boost supply and stabilize prices, but has had to divert supply to Region V, where agriculture has been disrupted by activity on Mount Mayon. The volcano's eruption has also sent thousands of people to evacuation centers, where they are fed by local governments and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in part with rice from the NFA.

The NFA's purchase prices are uncompetitive with those offered by commercial traders, which means it is hampered from replenishing its inventory from domestic sources, leading the agency to seek permission to import as early as November.

"That's what we requested for, another 250,000 metric tons of rice (for import) but there's still no approval (from the council)," Mr. Aquino added.

During the briefing, Grain Retailers' Confederation of the Philippines, Inc. (GRECON) President Jaime O. Magbanua said that despite the NFA's declining stocks, regional representatives of GRECON have noted no unusual demand pressures. — ***Reuters*** *with a report from* **Anna Gabriela A. Mogato**

The Manila Times

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Senate to investigate NFA rice shortage

BY JEFFERSON ANTIPORDA

THE Senate is set to investigate the reported shortage of low-cost National Food Authority (NFA) rice.

Sen. Cynthia Villar filed Senate Senate Resolution 608, directing the proper committee to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the status of the NFA's role in ensuring the stability of supply and price of rice.

"There is a need to look into the supply of NFA rice for the consuming public and NFA in fulfilling its administrative capabilities to respond to the need of the people," Villar said in the resolution.

The NFA stopped releasing government-subsidized rice to retailers because its buffer stock had dwindled.

Villar, chairperson of the Senate committee on food, wants to find out why the NFA was not able to anticipate and come up with policy decisions to prevent a rice shortage.

She noted that low buffer stock also happened in March and in July 2017.

The NFA is required to keep a 15-day buffer stock at any given time but as of Tuesday, reports said the agency's stock was only good for two days.

"The NFA should be responsible to respond to natural and artificial shortages of rice or buffer stocking," Villar said.

In 2017, the total approved volume of rice import was 250,000 metric tons for NFA and 805,200 metric tons for the private sector.

The NFA is requesting for an authority to import an additional 250,000 metric tons to ensure rice availability.

The Manila Times

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Bidding for new NFA building 'irregular'

BY NEIL A. ALCOBER

IRREGULARITIES have surfaced in the public bidding for the contract to build the new National Food Authority (NFA) central office in Quezon City.

The project was awarded to Legazpi Premium Development Corp. despite the firm's failure to disclose an abandoned project on its list of ongoing projects, which, a *The Manila Times* source said, was a violation of the procurement law.

The bidding for the contract for the new NFA building, which had an approved budget of P475.7 million, was held on November 29, 2017 with seven qualified bidders passing eligibility requirements, documents obtained by *The Manila Times* showed.

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■ 'IRREGULAR' FROM A1

Bidding for new NFA

A "concerned bidder" wrote to Development Bank of the Philippines Chairman Alberto Romulo on January 29 claiming the project was awarded to Legazpi Premium despite the fact that the company had abandoned a construction project at the National Defense College of the Philippines at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City.

"This matter was already brought to the attention of NFA Administrator [Jason Aquino] but [it] fell [on] deaf ears," the source said in the letter.

Romulo referred the letter to Aquino on February 2 "for appropriate action."

The "concerned bidder" asked Romulo, a member of policy-making NFA Council, to stop the contract signing and the issuance of the Notice to Proceed to Legazpi Premium, saying the bidding should be conducted fairly.

On January 20, "concerned bidders" raised the matter to Aquino, saying "material omission" was a violation of bidding procedures under Republic Act 9184 or the Government Procurement Reform Law.

"We have this apprehension that misfits and undesirable employees in your shop might be in collusion with [Legazpi Premium] for a favorable consideration despite being clearly disqualified by law," the "concerned bidders said in a letter."

'Negative slippages'

A group calling itself the "Concerned Active Military Officers" first brought the matter to Aquino's attention on January 3. Aquino is a retired military lieutenant colonel.

The group said Legazpi Premium had a project with the Defense department, consisting of two distinct buildings – a library and a dormitory for the defense college.

The project, which had a budget of P86.3 million, was awarded to a joint venture between Legazpi Premium and EXAATO Builders Inc.

The project began on June 28, 2017 and is supposed to be completed on March 28.

"However, with the few remaining number of days left prior to its completion date, it is only the library which is in its structural phase and the one has yet to be started. Hence, substantial amount of negative slippages is being incurred by Legazpi Premium as of this date," the group said.

"We are deeply concerned that ... the same fate and situation may occur in your agency," the group added.

Calamity funds misuse

The NFA contractor is already embroiled in a corruption controversy that has already reached the courts.

An official of Legazpi Premium was among those indicted by the Office of the Ombudsman in December, over alleged anomalies in 11 infrastructure projects in Negros Oriental that used P143.3 million in calamity funds in 2012.

Legazpi Premium's Maribel Ranola was charged along with other private contractors and the provincial governor, Roel Degamo.

The Manila Times

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Negros has enough rice supply – gov

BACOLOD CITY: Negros Occidental Gov. Alfredo Maranon Jr. assured Negrenses that there is enough rice supply in the province in the wake of reported absence of NFA rice in some parts of the country saying local farmers reported higher than the average produce.

The governor said the local production has increased exponentially with some farmers reporting they are producing seven tons per hectare which is a lot higher than the 4.2 tons average per hectare produced in the entire country.

He pointed out that local rice production did not go down despite the problems such as the grain bugs and the heavy rains experienced in the province recently.

Marañon said he wants Negros Occidental to become a major rice exporter aside from sugar.

"Actually we have already started exporting high-quality Japanese rice to restaurants in Metro Manila," he said.

He added that organic rice is also being exported, and he is hoping that in the future the province would no longer import rice.

Earlier, the National Food Authority (NFA) here again fell short of its rice distribution target.

Marianito Bejemino, provincial manager of NFA-Negros Occidental cited the sufficient supply of commercial rice in the province as the reason for the agency's failure to hit its target.

Based on its 2017 Rice Distribution Accomplishment Report, NFA-Negros Occidental said 182,159 bags of NFA rice were distributed last year, 54 percent short of the target 400,000 bags.

Bejemino said that with sufficient supply of newly-milled rice, consumers prefer commercial over NFA rice and the undistributed bags of rice will add to the province's existing buffer stocks.

EUGENE Y. ADIONG

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Minimum P5 rice price hike seen

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

With the depleting stocks of cheaper rice from the National Food Authority, consumers should brace for a minimum increase of P5 in the price of commercial rice as the NFA is yet to replenish its inventory following the government's rejection of rice importation.

The Grains Retailers' Confederation of the Philippines Inc. (GRECON), the biggest grains business organization in the country, warned that while rice prices in the market had risen by P2 per

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kilo since last month, this could further increase to P5.

"There will really be an increase because buying price from farmers is also high. Plus there is no supply from the NFA which means that there is no balancing act," GRECON national president Jaime Magbanua said in a briefing on Wednesday.

"We are just the retailers, we buy and sell and we just pass on what was given to us. Now, we can already feel the increase in price but as to the further increase, we don't know yet when it will be felt," he added.

About six to eight percent or the poorest sector of the population depends on NFA rice, which serves as the price stabilizer to avoid jacking up of prices of commercial rice and premium ones.

But with NFA's low inventory, the agency decided to recalibrate its distribution because its primary focus is still to serve as buffer stock for calamities and in the island provinces of the Philippines.

This resulted in the lack of supply in major markets, prompting ordinary Filipinos to buy commercial rice which is priced higher at P45 per kilogram to a high of P60 compared to the P27 to P32 price of NFA rice.

"And the basic law of supply and demand will show that prices will really increase because of this scenario. That is why we are also appealing to have the requested volume of importation be approved," Magbanua said.

Urgent

Since last year, NFA has been requesting for the importation of 250,000 metric tons of rice for it to be able to sustain its food security and stabilization mandate.

"Unfortunately, the approval to do so has not been given until now. And the public has spoken, they urgently need NFA rice in the market. Taking away our low priced NFA rice is the most painful decision we had to make in the midst of rising prices of other commodities," NFA administrator Jason Aquino said during the same briefing.

Aquino said that NFA will resume its distribution to accredited retailers once stocks have been replenished, but as to when, the agency is unsure.

"We have exhausted all the avenues to replenish our stocks. We are not the approving authority so the only thing we can do is to just wait," he added.

Aquino also clarified that NFA's two-day remaining stocks is applicable if there is no more rice supply in the households and commercial markets. To date, households can last for 52 days while commercial for 34 days.

"NFA has 1.2 million bags available nationwide and at the rate of 34,000 bags daily distribution, the whole inventory of NFA will last for only 35 days," Aquino said.

Should the NFA Council approve the importation, it will take 45 days before the supplies reach the country.

"Thirty five days from now, NFA stocks will be fully depleted. If this very moment the NFA Council approves the importation, we will still have 10 days vacuum where there will be no supply of NFA because it will take another 45 days for imported rice to arrive," Aquino explained.

This will add on for every day that the NFA Council fails to approve the importation which means that there is a bigger chance that there will be more days without NFA rice in the market, thus further increase in the price of commercial markets.

"We have already submitted all our recommendations including all these factors. But at the end of the day, it is still for the Council's approval," Aquino said.

'Drama'

But NFA Council chairman and Secretary to the Cabinet Leoncio Evasco Jr. is cautious about claims that the NFA is facing a rice shortage, saying such scenario may have been a "drama" hatched to pressure the government to import rice.

In a phone patch interview with reporters yesterday, Evasco said there is a need to look into recommendations to import the staple to avoid "unscrupulous purchases of rice."

"I have to check and call for a meeting of the council to find out what is true or is this just a drama to pressure the council to purchase rice. This is very sensitive, it is about a purchase. We have a task to protect government from unscrupulous purchases of rice," he added. – **With Alexis Romero, Marvin Sy, Ding Cervantes**

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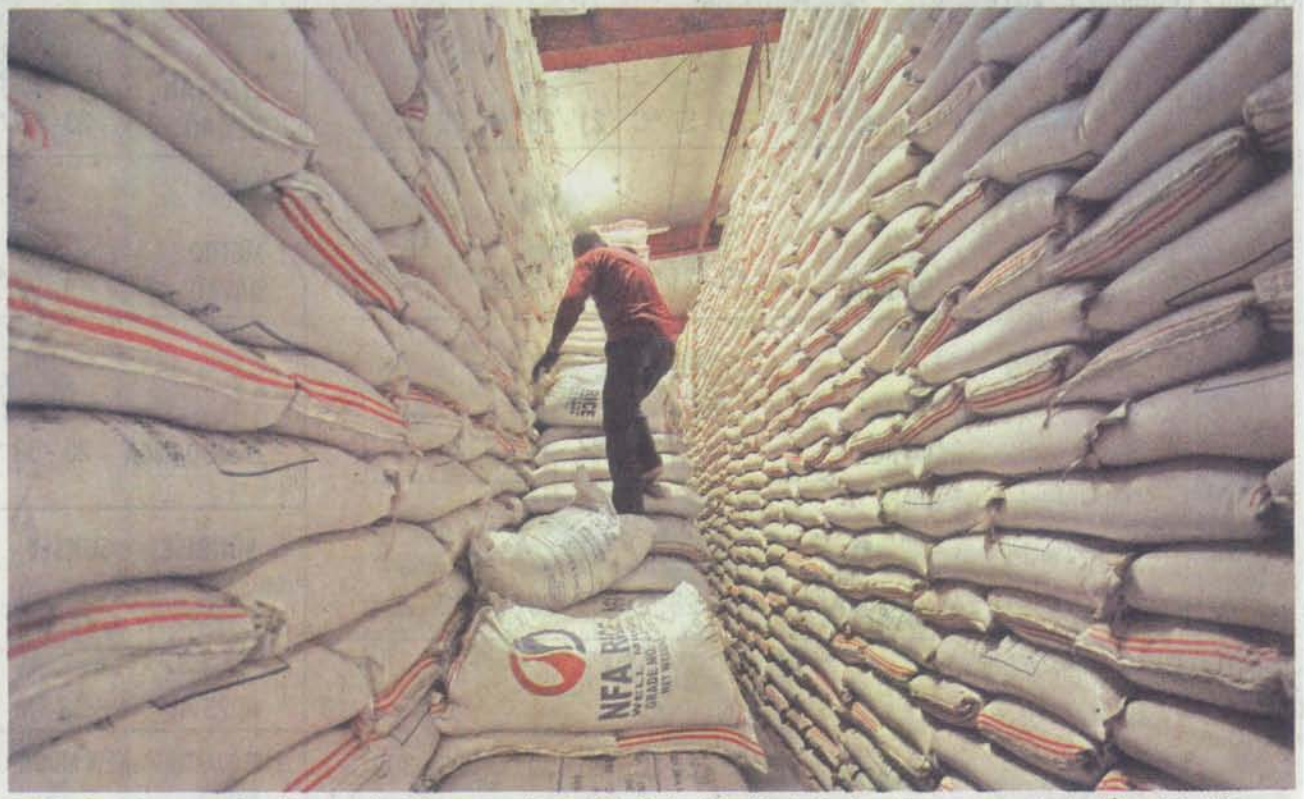
Retailers to govt: Let NFA import rice

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

THE Philippines must import rice soon to avert spikes in the price of the staple and prevent unscrupulous traders from taking advantage of the diminishing stockpile of the National Food Authority (NFA), local rice retailers said on Wednesday.

250,000 MT

The volume of rice the National Food Authority wants to import to boost its stockpile



THIS file photo shows a worker piling up sacks of rice at a warehouse of the National Food Authority. According to reports, the depletion of the NFA's stockpile has prompted some retailers to increase the price of commercial rice. NONIE REYES

Grains Retailers' Confederation of the Philippines Inc. (Grecon) appealed to the NFA Council (NFAC) to immediately approve the proposal of the NFA to import 250,000 metric tons (MT) of rice to boost its buffer stock. Currently, the NFA has a total inventory of 1.2 million 50-kilogram (kg) bags, equivalent to two days of the country's total rice consumption.

"We made a resolution addressed to the NFAC urging them to act immediately on the request of the NFA for the importation of 250,000 MT," Grecon National President Jaime O. Magbanua told reporters in a news briefing in Quezon City on February 7.

"We are asking the NFAC to reconsider so that affordable rice would continue to be available," Magbanua added.

Magbanua said the price of commercial rice rose by P2 to P3 per kg in recent days due to the high farmgate price of local paddy.

Once the NFA's stockpile is completely depleted, he said local rice prices could go up further as 10 million Filipinos would have no other recourse but to purchase the commercial variant.

This, he added, could cause the price of commercial rice to go up by P5 per kg in the coming weeks.

"The poorest of the poor depend on NFA rice. Because they cannot buy it anymore, they will buy commercial rice. Going by the law of supply and demand, the price of

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commercial rice would surely increase," Magbanua added.

The Grecon chief said consumers would have to shoulder the burden of any increases in rice sold by traders. "We have no choice but to pass on the additional cost of rice to consumers."

NFA Administrator Jason L.Y. Aquino said the state-run food agency has suspended its distribution of rice to almost all retailers across the country due to the depletion of its stockpile.

Aquino added the remaining stocks of NFA are reserved for the needs of calamity-prone areas and rice requirement of island municipalities and provinces.

Because of this, he said the NFA slashed its daily rice withdrawal to 34,000 50-kg bags, from 64,000 50-kilogram bags. At this rate, Aquino said its current stockpile will last for 35 days.

"Our average market participation is 10 percent of the daily consumption of the country, which translates to 640,000 50-kg bags. Now, we are just releasing 34,000 bags in the market because our stocks are depleted," he said.

"Plus, there is the activity of Mayon Volcano in Region 5 and we cannot reduce our supply of

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Retailers. . .

CONTINUED FROM A12

NFA rice in island provinces and municipalities, like Batanes, because 60 [percent] to 80 percent of their supply comes from the NFA. Aside from that other government agencies are making advanced orders in anticipation of calamities," he added.

Aquino pointed out, however, that there is no rice shortage in the Philippines as the country's total inventory is enough for 88 days. Stocks held by commercial warehouses and households would be good for 34 days and 52 days, respectively.

He also said the agency was not able to beef up its buffer stock through local palay procurement as the prevailing farm-gate prices, ranging from P19 to P19.50 per kg, are higher than the NFA's buying price of P17 per kg.

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Can a plant-based diet save the planet?

Prime Sarmiento

PRIME COMMODITIES

MY answer is "yes." This, even if I'm happily (and guiltlessly) snacking on Greek yogurt and cheese and pepperoni pizza while writing this column. But I will qualify that answer by saying that one doesn't have to be vegan/vegetarian to enjoy a more environment-friendly diet. What we can do instead is to eat more vegetables—preferably seasonal, local and organic vegetables—and reduce meat and dairy consumption. They're not only healthier for the body, but it also encourages farmers to grow more types of crops, enrich the soil and secure their livelihood.

I discovered vegetarianism about 20 years ago, after I bought a copy of Fraces Moore Lappe's *Diet for a Small Planet* in Popular Bookstore. After reading how wasteful cattle raising was—as cattle consumes so much soybeans and corn, and with more profitable feedgrains discouraging the cultivation of food crops—I decided to drop beef from my diet. I also stopped eating pork, chicken meat and seafood because it was also around that time that I started doing yoga and meditation under an Ananda Marga nun. Although yoga and meditation students are not required to become vegetarians, Ananda Marga encourages its students to get into a lacto-vegetarian diet as a form of compassion for sentient beings and to aid in meditation. Soon after, I got a job offer in Singapore, and thanks to the Lion City's multiethnic populace, I had the chance to dine on Hindu and Buddhist vegetarian meals.

I was an ovo-lacto-vegetarian for several years until I returned to Manila in 2005 and reverted to being an omnivore owing to my anemia. But I continue to believe in putting more greens in my diet and to this day, seldom eat hamburgers, *lechon* and steak. Having said that, I still maintain that vegetarianism/veganism is not for everyone. Plant-based protein sources like tofu or beans, for one, can't supply vitamins like B12 that the body needs. We also need to consider local food cultures. Would you ask an Inuit to give up seal meat or require all Pinoys to stop serving *lechon* during fiesta? And how about the taste? We don't just eat food for fuel but to enjoy being a gourmet. Another consideration is that farmers have to maximize their small plots of land by raising a variety of animals and plants as this will diversify their sources of food and income.

Thankfully, the Philippine dining scene has changed since I first embarked on my vegetarian journey. The rise of weekend markets, organic farming, healthy eating and farm-to-table dining has encouraged Filipinos to eat more vegetables. There are now vegetarian and vegan restaurants and cafes; and several stores and pop-ups are selling tofu, mock meats and even veganized versions of Pinoy favorites like *tapa* and *longganisa*. In Facebook, there are groups offering tips, recipes and even supplies for a vegetarian/vegan cook and diner. I even had the chance to sign up for a vegetarian cooking class and spent one weekend mashing garbanzos and slicing onions for the falafels that I'm cooking in vegetarian chef Marie Gonzalez's culinary class.

Such development is welcome if only because a relatively new environment issue—climate change—has given rise to the "low-carbon diet." Unlike other diet fads, low-carbon diet is not about weight loss but about carbon loss. It's about reducing the farming sector's greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions by being mindful of what we eat.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said livestock raising alone emits 7.1 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide (CO_2)-equivalent per year, representing 14.5 percent of all man-made GHG emissions. Cattle accounted for more than 60 percent of the livestock sector's emissions. FAO estimates that on a commodity basis, beef and cattle milk are responsible for the livestock sector's emissions, contributing 41 percent and 20 percent, respectively, to the sector's overall GHG output. In contrast, pork only accounted for 9 percent of the livestock emissions. This was followed by buffalo milk and meat (eight percent), chicken meat and eggs (8 percent), and goat/sheep milk and meat (6 percent).

So, if you are an avowed carnivore and your diet is heavy on cow's milk, steak and corned beef, then your carbon footprint is higher than those carnivores who eat lower in the food chain, opting for fried chicken, omelet and goat's milk.

If you want to reduce your carbon footprint further there's no better way to do that but to eat more greens, beans (and bean by-products like tofu) and fish.

According to a fact sheet issued by the University of Michigan's Center for Sustainable Systems (CSS), meat products have larger carbon footprints per calorie than grain or vegetable products because of the inefficient transformation of plant energy to animal energy.

"A vegetarian diet greatly reduces an individual's carbon footprint, but switching to less carbon intensive meats can have a major impact, as well. For example, replacing all beef consumption with chicken for one year leads to an annual carbon footprint reduction of 882 pounds carbon emissions," CSS said.

CSS added eating a vegetarian meal one day a week could save the equivalent of driving 1,160 miles, while replacing all beef consumption with chicken for one year leads to an annual carbon footprint reduction of 882 pounds carbon dioxide.

According to a story published in Treehugger.com, planting beans can return nitrogen to the soil and can save 600 kilograms of carbon emissions per hectare. Herring and tuna, meanwhile, produce only 0.56 g CO_2/Kcal of protein and 5.75 g CO_2/Kcal of protein. Meanwhile, Greeneatz.com released a ranking of each food's carbon footprint *(http://www.greeneatz.com/foods-carbon-footprint.html)* and you can see that vegetables, fruits and lentils are among the food items that have the lowest carbon footprints.

But more than reducing GHG emissions, eating more vegetables can also encourage farmers to diversify their crops. As what several studies have shown, monocropping can deplete the soil's nutrients and also make crops more prone to disease and pests. Monocropping also puts most farmers' livelihood at risk as one infestation can wipe out their crops—and ultimately their only source of income. The farmers' welfare may not be one of our key concerns at the moment as living in the city has detached us from the real people who put the food in our table. But whether like it or not, the farmers' welfare is a key concern for all of us because we all have a stake in our local farming systems. And this is something I will discuss in my next column on community-supported agriculture.

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Villar, Evasco doubt there's rice shortage

The head of the Senate committee on agriculture and food wonders why the the rice supply of the National Food Authority (NFA) is only good for two days, down from the mandated 15 days.

Sen. Cynthia Villar, chair of the committee, also wonders why the NFA wants to import the staple when there is sufficient supply of domestically produced rice.

Villar filed a resolution on Wednesday "directing the proper Senate committees to conduct an inquiry in aid of legislation on the status of the NFA's role in ensuring the stability of supply and price of rice."

Also seeking answers is Cabinet Secretary Leoncio Evasco Jr., who chairs the NFA Council, which approves all plans to import rice.

Evasco said the council was investigating if there was really a "rice shortage" at the NFA or if its management was just trying to "pressure" the NFA Council into authorizing the purchase of more rice from abroad.

'Just drama'

"Is it true or just drama to pressure the council to purchase rice?" Evasco said.

The NFA on Tuesday said its buffer stock as of Jan. 31 was down to only 64,000 metric tons, or just two days of the country's consumption of the staple, when it was required to maintain a 15-day rice supply at any given time.

Cynthia Villar

Because of its low rice inventory, the NFA recently stopped supplying the staple to retailers across the country, forcing the poor to buy the more expensive commercial rice, whose prices have gone up.

Retail prices up

In Tagbilaran City, Cresencia Castaño said a kilo of rice she had to buy directly from farmers cost P12 more than a kilo of NFA rice.

NFA rice in the Visayas can be bought for P27 a kilo for 25-percent broken grains, and P32 a kilo for 15-percent broken grains—cheaper than commercial rice, which costs from P40 to more than P50 a kilo.

Evasco said importing rice was a sensitive issue. "We have to be careful about purchasing rice from outside so as not to threaten our local farmers' production."

GOING UP Prices of commercial rice have gone up partly as a result of higher demand due to the National Food Authority's decision to stop supplying cheap rice to retailers. —LEO UDTOHAN

He said the NFA Council was tasked with protecting the government from "unscrupulous purchases of rice."

Importation request

Evasco said that NFA management asked the NFA Council two weeks ago to allow it to use its standby authority to import 250,000 tons of rice.

The council, he said, decided not to act on the NFA management request because around 325,000 tons of rice under the government's minimum access volume (MAV) rice importation program were set to arrive this month.

"We said we will not act on it because the MAV is set to arrive. In fact, the minimum access volume of 325,000 metric tons is now arriving," he said.

Agencies like the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, National Economic and Development Authority and Department of Finance are represented in the NFA Council.

No 'urgent need'

Evasco also pointed out that the National Food Security Committee, which recommends the volume of rice to be imported, did not send any word that there was an "urgent need" to import rice.

The committee tracks down any rice shortage at present or in the coming weeks, according to Evasco.

Like Evasco, Villar doubted whether there was a rice shortage in the country.

She noted that the country had just harvested rice. "Only the NFA has a (supply) shortage," she said.

The NFA has the money to buy rice from local farmers, especially those in the Visayas where unmilled rice is sold below P17 a kilo, according to the senator.

NFA spokesperson Rebecca Olarte said the agency's capacity to buy palay was limited since its mandated buying price of P17 a kilo could not compete with private traders' rate of more than P20 a kilo.

NFA blamed

Villar said it was the fault of the NFA if its rice supply was only good for two days.

The consumer rights group, Bantay Bigas, on Wednesday renewed calls for the government to raise the NFA buying price for palay, or unmilled rice to replenish its inventory.

"The NFA is repeatedly raising false alarm for a shortage to justify more importation, when they should be procuring more palay from Filipino farmers," Bantay Bigas spokesperson Cathy Estavillo said in a statement.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed the country's rice stocks as of Jan. 1, including those kept by households and those stored in commercial warehouses, totaled 2.85 million metric tons, equivalent to 84 days of consumption.

Villar said she would likely call for a hearing next week.

Evasco welcomed a Senate investigation into the alleged rice shortage. "We are at the beck and call of the Senate and Congress, for that matter," he said. —REPORTS FROM CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO, PHILIP C. TUBEZA AND RONNEL W. DOMINGO IN MANILA; AND INQUIRER VISAYAS INQ

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RICE ISSUES – A farmer (Left photo) harvests organic rice from a mountain farm in Tinglayan, Kalinga yesterday. Right photo shows a rice retailer's shop in San Fernando City, La Union without the cheaper National Food Authority (NFA) rice, amid reports of a looming rice shortage. The government, however, dismissed the same and assured the public of sufficient rice stocks. (Zaldy Comanda, Erwin Beleo)

PILIPINO MIRROR
FILIPINO MIRROR MEDIA GROUP CORPORATION
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Ang aming pananaw...

NFA RICE IBINEBENTA BILANG COMMERCIAL RICE?

MABIGAT ang paratang ni Senate committee on agriculture and food chair Senator Cynthia Villar na ang mga ismagler ang nasa likod ng ulat na kakulangan ng bigas ng National Food Authority (NFA).

Simple lang ang mandato ng NFA, tiyaking may 15-araw na buffer stock ng bigas ang ahensiya pero sa pag-amin na may dalawang araw na lamang na reserba ito sa mga bodega ay masasabing nagpabaya sa tungkulin ang hepe nito na si dating Col. Jason Aquino.

Matindi ang resulta ng artipisyal na kakulangan ng NFA rice sa merkado---tumaas ang presyo ng lahat ng klase ng bigas kaya muling magsasagawa ng imbestigasyon ang Senado sa pagkawala ng NFA rice na tinatangkilik ng maliliit na mamamayan sa buong bansa.

Sabi nga ni Villar: "Nagtataka lang ako, napakalinaw ng mandate, bakit nagkakatsismis ng ganyan? Kasi kung ginagawa ng NFA ang kanilang trabaho, hindi dapat mangyayari iyan. Kaya minsan ang mga usapan na ganyan hindi natin pinakikinggan kasi minsan ginagamit iyan para ma-justify ang pagtaas ng presyo."

May dapat managot sa pagkawala ng NFA rice, pangunahin na ang administrador na si Aquino na matagal nang iginigiit ang importasyon ng bigas kahit sa panahon ng anihan.

Hindi pupuwedeng natutulog ang NFA sa pansitan na hindi maipaliwanag kung paano nawalan ng buffer stock ng bigas ang ahensiya. Pero kung totoo ang ulat na may mga tiwaling rice miller sa Intercity sa Brgy. Wakas, Bocaue, Bulacan na inililipat lamang ang NFA rice sa mga sako para maging commercial rice, dapat itong busisiin ng Senado dahil malinaw na pagsabotahe ito sa ating ekonomiya na lalong nagpapahirap sa hikahos nang sambayanan.

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NFA supply kulang na

10M PINOY NAPILITAN SA MAHAL NA BIGAS

NAPILITAN nang lumipat sa pagbili ng mas mahal na commercial rice ang tinatayang 10 milyong consumers dahil sa mababang suplay na galing sa National Food Authority (NFA), ayon sa Grains Retailers' Confederation of the Philippines Inc. (Grecon).

SUNDAN SA PAHINA 2

Mula sa pahina 16

"Wala tayong makuha ngayon so pupunta sila sa commercial. Ang problema, hindi po natin maikukumpara 'yung commercial at tsaka government rice dahil nga 'yung bigas ng commercial, mataas talaga 'yung kuha," lahad pa ni Grecon national president James Magbanua sa isang panayam.

Idiniin ni Magbanua na halos 10 milyong Filipino ang bumibili ng NFA rice dahil sa mababang presyo.

"Ang sineserbisyuhan ng government-subsidized rice, 'yung NFA rice natin, is from 6 to 8 percent of the total population. Ibig sabihin mga 10 million Filipinos na umaasa sa NFA rice," sabi niya.

Sinabi naman ng isang opisyal ng NFA na minarkahan at inireport na ng mga consumer sa NFA ang kapansin-pansing paglipat sa commercial rice sa merkado.

"Even consumers are saying the same ... Admin [Jason] Aquino is having a meeting with grains businessmen now," sabi naman ni NFA spokesperson Rebecca Olarte.

Ibinebenta ang NFA rice sa regular-milled variety sa halagang P27 bawat kilo at P32 kada kilo para sa well-milled version ng kalakal.

Ayon naman sa datos ng Philippine Statistics Authority, ang average retail price ng regular-milled rice ay P38.58 kadal kilo, samantalang ang commercial well-milled rice ay ibinebenta ng P42.51 bawat kilo.

Sinuspinde ng NFA ang pamamahagi ng bigas sa mga accredited retailers sa desisyon ng gobyerno na unahin muna ang mga biktima ng kalamidad at mag-ipon sa mga isla na namemeligro sa kalamidad.

Ang suplay ng NFA rice ay naapektuhan din sa desisyon na mag-release ng 140,000 bags ng bigas sa mga apektadong pamilya na biktima ng kaguluhan sa Marawi City, sabi ng NFA noong nakaraang buwan.

May total na 636,666 bags ng bigas na ini-release ng NFA sa biktima ng natural na kalamidad noong isang taon, ganundin sa mga pamilya na apektado ng gulo sa Marawi.

"Walang maibigay na supply kasi inuna 'yung mga nasa programa ng gobyerno, 'yung sa DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development) at tsaka sa ibang programs ng LGU (local government units)," sabi ni Magbanua.

"Pinaalam sa atin na pinaka-last priority 'yung sa palengke na ibebenta sa public," dagdag pa niya.

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Brazil court suspends export of live animals for slaughter overseas

A BRAZILIAN judge has suspended export of live animals for slaughter, citing concerns that they are transported in cruel conditions.

Exports can only restart when guarantees of adequate treatment are provided, Judge Djalma Moreira Gomes in Sao Paulo wrote in his late Friday decision, published in the local media.

The injunction was in response to a case brought by an animal rights group, National Forum for the Defense and Protection of Animals.

The forum's civil suit cited conditions aboard the ship *Nada*, currently docked in Sao Paulo's Porto de Santos with about 27,000 heads of cattle owned by Minerva Foods and bound for Turkey.

A veterinary report found that the animals were held in tiny and unhygienic spaces.

Mr. Gomes wrote he was accepting the petition "to prevent the export for slaughter of live animals, from throughout the national territory, until the destination country adopts slaughter practices in line with those of the Brazilian legal system."

Animals currently aboard the *Nada* must be taken off, he said.

"It can only continue its voyage after the complete disembarkation of the live animals."

The same judge had issued an initial court order on Thursday to stop the ship from leaving port.

The animal rights group bringing the case said it had received "huge support" from other activists.

The case "represents an extremely important point in the history of Brazil's protection and defense of animals," said Patrycia Sato, from the Animal Forum, in a statement.

"We hope that the export of live animals will be definitively banned." — ***AFP***

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Facial recognition for cows is latest Cargill-backed technological idea

CARGILL, INC. is backing an Irish start-up that uses facial recognition software to help increase the productivity of dairy cows, the latest move by the largest closely held US company to bolster its agricultural technology efforts.

Cargill has taken a minority stake in Cainthus, which harnesses machine learning and imaging techniques to identify cows and glean information on everything from their behavior to appetite, David Hunt, president and co-founder of Cainthus, said in a telephone interview Wednesday. Details of the investment weren't disclosed.

Mr. Hunt said Dublin-based Cainthus chose Cargill over venture capital firms because of the US company's footprint in agriculture. Cargill is still owned by the same family that founded it 153 years ago and it's one of the world's largest crop traders and meat producers.

In the last few years, Minneapolis-based Cargill has reorganized parts of its business and built up a stronger presence in farm technology. It announced last month it's partnering with other companies to form a start-up accelerator that will identify new food technologies. Cargill is seeking breakthroughs from other industries that can be applied to meet the big challenges in agriculture, such as population growth, labor shortages in rural areas, and consumers' concern over how their food is sourced and treated.

It's a question of "how do you do some of the same activities" but "in a more efficient manner," SriRaj Kantamneni, managing director of its digital insights business, said in an interview. — ***Bloomberg***