CLIPPINGS FOR FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2018

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RICE PRICE REGULATION. The Agriculture and Trade Departments announce a plan to impose suggested retail prices on rice in a bid to prevent overpricing. Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez (left) and Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol preside over a news briefing at the Bureau of Plant Industry in Malate, Manila. **Lino Santos**

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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'NFA MUST CONTINUE SELLING CHEAP GOVERNMENT RICE'

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

PIÑOL: "The NFA will earn more if it will act as a consolidator and trading agency of Filipino farmers and fishermen."

AGRICULTURE Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol is pushing for the retention of the marketing functions of the National Food Authority (NFA) even after the quantitative restriction (QR) on rice is scrapped to ensure stable prices.

"While there are diverse views on what the role of the NFA should be, I still maintain that the NFA could be an effective marketing and trading arm of our Filipino farmers and fishermen

See "NFA," A12

Continued from A1

if managed properly and given guidance," Piñol, who now chairs the NFA Council (NFAC), told the BusinessMirror on Thursday. Piñol added the marketing functions of the NFA would even be more vital in a post-QR regime, when imports are expected to flood the domestic market.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) chief echoed the sentiment of NFA Administrator Jason L.Y. Aquino, who wanted to retain the function of the food agency even after the rice QR is removed. In early April Aquino argued that the NFA's food-security role should even be strengthened under a post-rice QR regime.

"Food security should never be left to the mercy of trade regimes. Rice is the most basic food of Filipinos. In an era of boundless influx of rice imports into the country, the government should be more vigilant about maintaining adequate levels of the staple and to make it constantly available and accessible to all at affordable prices," he said in a statement.

"The NFA believes that there should always be a National Rice Reserve even under a time of surplus because rice production is never assured or certain at all times. This would also spare the country from exposure to price volatility brought about by global political and economic shifts," he added.

Economic managers have been vocal in removing the commercial and marketing functions of the NFA once the country's rice importation is tariffied, leaving it with its buffer-stocking role.

"The NFA should really just focus on ensuring adequate buffer and regulation [of the market]. They should no longer be involved in buying [and] trading," Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto M. Pernia told the BusinessMirror in February.

In the meantime, the government has put on the back burner the restructuring of the NFA to focus on converting the QR into tariffs. National Economic and Development Authority Assistant Secretary Mercedita Sombilla said the government will restructure the NFA right after the law removing the QR on rice is passed by Congress.

An NFA official told the BusinessMirror that removing the commercial power of the grains agency while retaining its buffer-stocking role is "problematic" as its stockpile could rot due to the removal of possible disposal channels.

"Rice should be distributed every six months because it cannot stay for so long as its shelf life is only limited. So, if we only have a [buffer stocking] role, how can we sell or dispose our stocks by the sixth month when we need to refresh our stockpile?" said the official, who requested anonymity.

"So the stocks could rot. That's why there is a need for other schemes, such as selling, to dispose the stocks [especially if there is no calamity]," the official added. The DA chief said he also wants to expand the NFA's functions to become the country's trading agency for agricultural commodities.

"My personal view is that the NFA has been perceived as a rice agency, which isn't the case. The World Trade Organization recognizes the NFA as the only state trading agency of the Philippines," Piñol said.

"This means that the NFA could trade on behalf of Filipino farmers and fishermen, as farmers and fishermen are usually the ones organizing themselves and finding the right market for their products," he added.

Piñol said the NFA could even earn more revenues by functioning as a state trading agency, similar to India's Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) and Hanoi's Vietnam Southern Food Corp.

"Government help in consolidating the products of farmers and representing them in global trade is minimal. Why can't the NFA perform that function?" he said.

"Maybe the NFA will earn more if it will act as a consolidator and trading agency of Filipino farmers and fishermen who only need assistance from the government," Piñol added.

The agriculture chief said a technical working group would study the feasibility of his proposal and make recommendations to the NFAC.

Malaya
Business Insight

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SRP for commercial rice proposed

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is proposing to set a suggested retail price (SRP) on commercial rice in times when stocks of affordable rice are low.

Ramon Lopez, DTI secretary, told reporters he will discuss with the Department of Agriculture and the National Food Authority (NFA) Council the plan to offer at P39 per kilogram (kg) well-milled commercial rice that would be available in all retail stores in the country.

Lopez said this would be another cheap variant, a basic rice variety, to be sold aside from the NFA rice being sold at either P27 or P32 per kg.

Lopez said a change is needed in rice policy after recent developments when NFA ran out of cheap rice.

The government currently has no mechanism to intervene on rice prices, except during a state of calamity when it can only freeze prices.

See SRP ➤ Page A4

SRP

"It's a policy proposal that we have to look into and discuss with the stakeholders, the farmers, traders," Lopez said.

Since the type of rice to be pegged with the SRP will be very basic, it could come from either local or imports.

The trigger for imposing the SRP and length of time at which it will be in effect will have to be determined as well.

Approval of the proposal will come from the NFA Council, Lopez said.

Lopez said the DTI and DA would also now jointly monitor the supply and prices of rice, which used to be under the jurisdiction solely of DA.

According to Lopez, some 250,000 metric tons of rice will be delivered end of May to beef up stocks.

Rice producing provinces have provided 100,000 bags of rice now being sold at P39 per kg.

DA Secretary Emmanuel Piñol echoed Lopez' suggestion for SRP but his proposal covers specific varieties of rice.

" We will look into how to validate (the) classification (of rie) since at present, anybody can just claim the type of rice he is selling. There is no uniformity in the pricing of rice as any retail market can just put a rice tag without official validation ," Piñol told reporters at a briefing in Manila.

He said the agency will form a technical working group to reform its rice distribution system to avoid a repeat of the depletion of NFA rice stocks. This includes a tracing system to improve accountability of supplies.

Piñol said the government will strengthen the role NFA other than just being a rice distributor.

"Farmers and fishers are looking for foreign buyers of their goods on their own. NFA is recognized by the World Trade Organization as a trading agency so there is no problem for them to perform that function. India, China and Vietnam have their state trading agencies so that their farmers would be focused on producing the goods while the government finds a market for them," Piñol said.

The DA said it would be able to improve NFA's buffer stock to 60 days by the first quarter of 2020.

At present, the NFA is mandated to maintain a rice buffer stock good to last for 15 days at any given time and for 30 days at the onset of the lean months, based on the daily consumption requirement of 32,150 metric tons (MT) or 643,000 bags of rice.

Currently, NFA's warehouses are only capable of 22-days worth of stocks which will force the agency to rent more facilities.

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THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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DTI seeks SRP on well-milled rice

By RICHMOND MERCURIO and LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez yesterday said putting a cap on the price of well-milled commercial rice is strongly being considered by his department to ensure consumers would get cheaper options when stocks of the National Food Authority (NFA) are depleted.

Lopez said the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) would be proposing a policy that would put in place suggested retail price (SRP) on well-milled commercial rice.

The commercial well-milled rice is a basic variant currently being sold at about P39 per kilo, according to Lopez.

The NFA, on the other hand, sells two kinds of rice – regular milled rice for P27 per kg and

Turn to Page 8

DTI

From Page 1

well-milled for P32 per kg.

"So if ever consumers can't buy in NFA stores, they would turn to commercial stores. So what we want is for them to have something available that is affordable," Lopez said.

The Foundation for Economic Freedom (FEF), a group composed of economists, former government officials and businessmen, earlier said the low level of NFA stocks makes the rice market vulnerable to price manipulation by rice traders.

The group said the price of rice in the country's rice-exporting neighbors is about half the domestic price of rice.

"There is no reason why rice prices should become unstable and rise since there is plentiful supply from our neighboring countries that can be easily tapped by our private traders," the FEF said.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) will not immediately implement President Duterte's order to increase the NFA's buffer stock to 60 days as several logistics and budgetary requirements still need to be considered.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol said in a press briefing yesterday the plan will hopefully materialize by 2020.

The NFA was brought back to the DA after a reorganization that was prompted by the differences between NFA and the NFA Council on rice policy.

In a statement, NFA administrator Jason Aquino said that during a meeting with the agency's regional directors on April 17, he instructed the agency's operations department to study and recommend a marketing plan for a 15-day strategic rice reserve (SRR) and 30-day stock for the lean months, and a 30-day SRR and 60-day stock for lean months.

"We have to modernize. We will not store rice but palay and we will need modern grain silos," Piñol said.

While economists are concerned the NFA may not be able to fulfill the additional responsibility and may just serve as another financial liability to the government, Piñol said the DA will simply follow Duterte's orders.

"The President did not make that decision from ideas taken out of the blue. He knows that climatic condition is not the only problem. The idea came from him as trade wars could affect food supply and the uncertainties brought by climate change," he said.

The Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) requires NFA to have 15 days buffer stock at any given time and 30 days at the onset of the lean season.

However, NFA has failed to fulfill its mandate since late last year amid low palay procurement.

Aquino said the agency's warehouse capacity is only good for 22 days and NFA merely rents areas when in need of additional space.

This is just one of the additional logistics that DA and NFA would have to consider in pursuing the 60-day buffer stock.

– With Roel Pareño

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No concrete plans yet to execute what Duterte wants for rice sector

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR**

When it comes to rice situation, President Rodrigo Duterte wants to have things done quickly. But officials from the government agencies tasked to handle the situation admit it will take time to fix the problems surrounding the country's rice distribution system.

For instance, Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol said it will take more than a year before the National Food Authority (NFA) can actually maintain a 60-days buffer stock or "fill its warehouses to the roof" — as what Duterte would have wanted — to ensure that the state-run grains agency would no longer face the same problem as it did recently.

It was early this week when Duterte decided to return the jurisdiction over NFA, Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA), and the Fertilizer and Pesticides Authority (FPA) back to Department of Agriculture (DA).

It all began when NFA recently saw its stocks fully depleted after failing to procure rice from Filipino farmers as well as conduct importation — which was purposely denied by NFA Council, led by Cabinet Secretary Leoncio Evasco.

Evasco then continuously argued that the country doesn't need to import, citing abundance in supply.

The DA, for several times, also dismissed that the country is experiencing some sort of rice shortage, citing that production last year even grew by 9.36 percent to 19.3 million metric tons (MT), the highest rice production and annual growth since 1999.

Eventually, as NFA failed to intensify its local procurement and was largely banking on importation, the public was left at the mercy of expensive commercial rice with completely no cheaper government rice in the market.

Duterte was then forced to enter the picture and ordered to immediately conduct the importation of 250,000 MT of rice.

But he also had other things in mind. At first, he said he wanted to abolish the NFA Council, the highest policy-making body of NFA. Then he proposed the transfer of NFA back to DA, which he already made final on Monday as he presided over the the meeting of NFA Council for the first time.

He also ordered Evasco to be removed from the NFA Council as well as called for the reconstitution of the inter-agency body.

Amid all this brouhaha, Duterte also ordered NFA to maintain buffer stocks good for 60 days.

"We may not be able to achieve buffer stock right away, but we are hopeful that by first quarter of 2020, we should already be at that level," Piñol said during a press conference at the Bureau of Plant Industry Office in San Andres, Manila on Thursday.

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PUNCHLINE

Robust GDP for PH – IMF; Rice, 'endo' addressed soon – DU30

By **FRED LOBO**

THE Philippines' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would grow by 6.9 percent next year due to robust demand and government spending, says the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Economic forecast for PH continues to be favorable.

***

President Duterte, likewise, said the National Food Authority (NFA) cheap "rice buffer" issue has been addressed while subcontracting or the "endo" issue will be decided soon, on or before May 1, Labor Day.

Economic and labor issues to be confronted by DU30, as promised.

***

The IMF said that the Philippines, which grew by 6.8 percent last year, enjoys the highest growth projections among ASEAN-5 nations, followed by Vietnam (6.5 percent for 2017), Indonesia (5.1 percent), Malaysia (4.5 percent) and Thailand (three percent).

PH leads ASEAN economically.

***

The IMF added that it sees a higher Philippine GDP growth forecast next year of 6.9 percent while keeping its previous estimate of 6.8 percent for 2017 based on robust demand.

External upheavals can be offset, forecast showed.

***

Economic activity is expected to "accelerate slightly" this year for the Philippines and three other ASEAN-5 countries Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

The IMF pointed out "near-term pickup in growth is underpinned to a significant extent by stronger domestic demand and, in the Philippines, by higher public spending in particular."

***

The IMF added that the Philippine outlook is "subject to downside risks, including from lower regional growth, capital outflows from US monetary policy tightening and heightened global policy uncertainty."

On the other hand, upside risks include a faster pace of budget execution and higher global growth, it said.

***

The IMF also said monetary policy has been supporting GDP growth and the implementation of the interest rate corridor in June last year has made the monetary transmission stronger.

Monetary policy remains healthy.

***

Overall, the IMF said Asia is expected to grow by 5.5 percent in 2017 from 5.3 percent last year, but will slow down to 5.4 percent next year while world economy will grow by 3.5 percent this year versus last year's 3.4 percent, and improve further to 3.6 percent in 2018.

The Philippine economy, by stronger demand and higher public spending, continue to be more favorable, the IMF concluded.

***

Meanwhile, Duterte said he addressed the rice supply-price manipulation by unscrupulous traders by placing the NFA Council or governing body under the Department of Agriculture (DA) headed by Sec. Manny Piñol.

Maintain required government "rice buffer" at affordable price for the sake of consumers, he ordered.

***

As to "labor subcontracting only" or "endo" practice, Duterte said he will act on the issue accordingly on or before Labor Day.

Oppressive, anti-labor practice to be checked as promised, he assured.

THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

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Lawmaker backs NFA's hike of buying price of local palay

Anakpawis Rep. Ariel Casilao yesterday said that the order of President Duterte to increase the buying of local price of palay of the National Food Authority (NFA) from P17 to P20 per kilogram is a welcome development for local farmers.

This coincided with the announcement of a re-organization in the NFA Council, with Department of Agriculture Emmanuel Piñol replacing Cabinet Secretary Leoncio Evasco as head. Piñol revealed the planned price hike.

"We urge for the immediate execution of that order, so that the farmers could benefit as early as possible," said Casilao.

Casilao said that the President's announcement goes in line with the long-time and overdue demand of farmers "*Presyo ng palay, itaas! Presyo ng bigas, ibaba!*"

The lawmaker attributed this, as response to the unending resentment of the public to the self-made shortage in NFA rice stocks and demand for affordable rice.

He recognized the mass protests led by Bantay Bigas and Amihan, and other farmers' groups, who usually protested in front of the NFA head office in Quezon City.

"This should push through to the comprehensive policy shift on agriculture. The President should sincerely prioritize local procurement than practically put the national food security on rice imports," he said.

He added that as Duterte has been slamming international bodies that intervenes in domestic affairs, he should as well order the immediate pull-out of the country from the World Trade Organization-Agreement on Agriculture, which impact has already made havoc on the livelihood of local farmers and undermined the country's food security.

Casilao bared that his office is on the final touches of the Rice Industry Development Act bill, which he will file, along with lawmakers under the Makabayan Coalition.

"It will all boil down to the issue of agrarian reform, to secure rice, is to require the tenurial security of farmers, if there are no rice farmers on land, there will no rice on the market, then everything will come to a grinding halt, with poor people, dying of starvation," Casilao said. **Charlie V. Manalo**

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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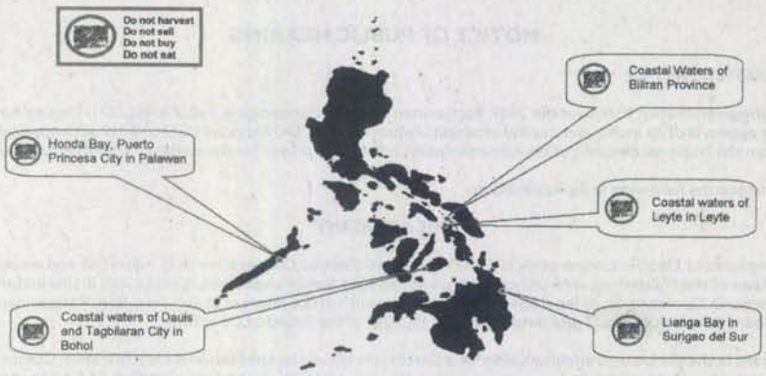
Shellfish Bulletin No. 13

Series of 2018

16 April 2018

Based on the latest laboratory results of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and Local Government Units (LGUs), shellfishes collected at **Coastal waters of Biliran Province; Coastal waters of Leyte in Leyte; Lianga Bay in Surigao del Sur; Coastal waters of Dauis and Tagbilaran City in Bohol; and Honda Bay, Puerto Princesa in Palawan** are still **positive** for paralytic shellfish poison that is beyond the regulatory limit.



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The following areas continue to be **FREE from toxic red tides:** coastal waters of Cavite, Las Piñas, Parañaque, Navotas, Bulacan and Bataan (Mariveles, Limay, Orion, Pilar, Balanga, Orani, Abucay and Samal) in Manila Bay; coastal waters of Bolinao, Anda, Alaminos, Sual and Wawa, Bani in Pangasinan; Masinloc Bay in Zambales; coastal waters of Milagros, Mandaon and Placer in Masbate; Juag Lagoon, Matnog and Sorsogon Bay in Sorsogon; Puerto Princesa Bay, Puerto Princesa City and coastal waters of Inner Malampaya Sound, Taytay in Palawan; coastal waters of Gigantes Islands, Carles in Iloilo; coastal waters of Pilar, Panay, President Roxas, Roxas City in Capiz and Sapian Bay (Ivisan and Sapian in Capiz; Mambuquiao and Camanci, Batan in Aklan); Batan Bay and coastal waters of Altavas and New Washington in Aklan; coastal waters of E.B. Magalona, Talisay City, Silay City, Bacolod City, Hinigaran and Victorias City in Negros Occidental; coastal waters of Daram Island, Maqueda, Villareal, Irong-Irong and Cambatutay Bays in Western Samar; Matarinao Bay in Eastern Samar; San Pedro and Cancabato Bays, Tacloban City and coastal waters of Calubian in Leyte; Murcielagos Bay in Zamboanga del Norte and Misamis Occidental; Taguines Lagoon, Benoni, Mahinog in Camiguin Island; Balite Bay, Mati in Davao Oriental; and Hinatuan and Bislig Bays in Surigao del Sur. **Moreover, Carigara Bay in Leyte is now free of the toxic red tides.**

EDUARDO B. GONGONA
Undersecretary for Fisheries, DA / Director, BFAR

(PDI - April 20, 2018)

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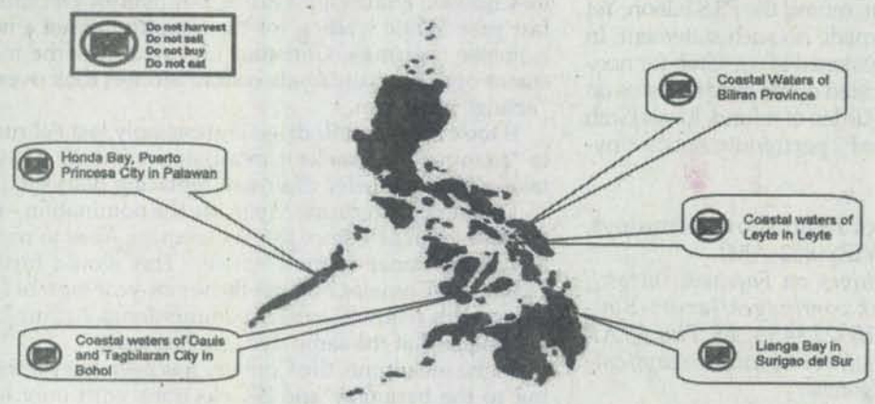

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EDUARDO B. GONGONA
Undersecretary for Fisheries, DA/Director, BFAR

P.S. April 20, 2018

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DTI recommends SRP on comm'l rice

By **BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT**

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is recommending the implementation of a suggested retail price (SRP) on well-milled commercial rice from private traders, which is now selling at ₱39 per kilo, to provide an option for buyers of better but affordable supply on top of the NFA rice.

DTI Secretary Ramon M. Lopez proposed the idea to the National Food Authority (NFA) Council, which held their meeting yesterday.

Lopez said his proposal on the SRP on commercial rice will have to be approved by the NFA Council and the parameters and guidelines will have to determined yet. The parameters would include the coverage period of the SRP, when to impose the price ceiling, and the trigger mechanism.

Lopez was treading carefully on his proposal noting this is the first time that an SRP may be set on rice, but which he said is workable because rice is a basic commodity. At present, the government through NFA accredited distributors is selling rice at ₱27 and ₱32 a kilo.

But the DTI proposal is targeting locally-produced and imported rice by private traders. Lopez said he already held initial discussion with the private traders.

He also had discussion with the Department of Agriculture (DA) for a joint price monitoring on rice.

At present, the DTI price monitoring is only on manufactured basic and prime commodities, but the agriculture products are done by the DA.

According to Lopez, during a meeting with President Duterte, the private rice traders have already committed 100,000 kilos of commercial rice to boost the buffer stock of NFA.

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STABILIZING PRICES

LUZON RICE TRADERS SUPPLY METRO WITH CHEAP GRAINS

CABANATUAN CITY—Grains dealers are offering rice produced in Nueva Ecija, Bulacan and Isabela provinces at P39 a kilogram from April to May, to help manage the price jump created by the absence of supplies from the National Food Authority (NFA).

The NFA lost almost all its buffer stocks due to internal government debates about importing rice. Cheap NFA rice has kept the prices of commercial rice from drastically shooting up.

President Duterte recently approved rice importation before placing the NFA back under the supervision of the Department of Agriculture.

Rice millers in Nueva Ecija said they were prepared to supply Metro Manila markets until the rice imports arrived.

Newly harvested and milled rice had been delivered directly to wholesalers and retailers to keep the price steady at P39 a kilogram, according to Mel Coronel, president of the Nueva Ecija Rice Millers Association.

He said members of the association had contributed bags of rice which were deployed to assigned areas in Metro Manila.

They are expected to deliver 100,000 bags (each containing 50 kg) in April and another 100,000 bags in May, he said.

"We are selling our rice at a loss but ... we are able to help our countrymen," said Coronel, who met with Mr. Duterte and other rice dealers in Malacañang on April 5.

He said rice millers associations in Isabela and Bulacan had also promised to add 100,000 bags of rice each month.

The farm gate price of palay in Nueva Ecija is P20 a kg while dried palay sells for P24.50 a kg. —ANSELMO ROQUE INQ

Consumers in Metro Manila enjoy cheap rice courtesy of traders from Nueva Ecija, Bulacan and Isabela. —JAM STA. ROSA

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Imports boost PHL frozen-pork inventory in March–report

THE country's frozen-pork inventory as of March 26 expanded by 88.78 percent to 23,852.88 metric tons (MT), from 12,634.95 MT recorded in the same period last year, data from the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) showed.

Recent data published by the NMIS also showed that the latest frozen-pork inventory was 5.77 percent higher than the previous week's 22,552.01 MT. However, it was 2.82 percent lower than the 24,546.28 MT recorded last month.

Of the total frozen-pork inventory as of March 26, 95.05 percent were imported, or 22,671.42 MT, while the remaining volume of 1,181.46 MT were produced locally.

During the reference period, the NMIS noted that cold storages in Region 3 held the most volume of frozen-pork inventory at 8,835.55 MT, which was 4.95 percent lower than the 8,418.5 MT recorded in the week of March 19.

The figure was 18.05 percent and 165.83 percent higher than the 7,484.76 MT and 3,323.7 MT recorded volume last month and last year, respectively.

The NMIS, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture (DA), said the frozen-pork inventory included carcass, primal and specialty cuts. The survey covered accredited commercial and in-house cold-storage facilities.

FILE PHOTO

Data from the NMIS also showed that total dressed-chicken inventory held in cold storages as of March 26 declined by 1.84 percent to 16,417.44 MT, from the previous year's 16,726.13 MT.

However, the figure was more than a third higher than the 12,122.44 MT recorded in the week of March 19. It was also slightly higher than the previous month's 16,291.46 MT.

More than half of the total dressed-chicken inventory, or 9,487.27 MT, were imported. Imported dressed chicken in the country's cold storages as of March 26 expanded by 31.69 percent from the 7,203.95 MT recorded a year ago.

The remaining volume was comprised of locally produced chicken at 6,930.17 MT.

The NMIS said the figures did not include fresh, chilled chicken and mechanically deboned meat, as well as those already in distribution channels. The agency also said the survey covered only accredited cold-storage facilities.

The government allows traders to import pork and chicken via the so-called minimum access volume scheme of the World Trade Organization. Pork and chicken imports within MAV are slapped a tariff of 30 percent and 40 percent, respectively.

Last year meat imports rose by nearly 7 percent to a record-high volume of 691,462.564 MT due to the growing demand of Filipino consumers for processed-meat products.

Data from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) indicated that pork accounted for 44.18 percent of meat imports. Last year pork imports expanded by 10.65 percent to 305,479.806 MT, from the 2016 record of 276,066.99 MT.

"Pork cuts, bellies and deboned meat constituted about 30.19 percent or [92,234.802 MT], which are mostly used by meat processors, while the 69.81 percent equivalent [213,245.044 MT] are commonly imported by meat traders, which includes fats, rind/skin and other products," the BAI said.

Data from the BAI also showed that total chicken imports last year grew by nearly 4 percent to 244,104.419 MT, from the previous year's 234,742.766 MT.

The Manila Times

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A unified agriculture R&D

(First of two parts)

WAYS OF THE OASIS
DR. WILLIAM DAR

SOMETHING needs to be done about our country's agriculture research and development (ARD) system.

If that was not the case, the Philippines should be an export powerhouse today when it comes to agri-food products.

It even disheartens me that the country is a net food importer, shipping abroad $5.7 billion worth of agri-food products in 2016 and importing $11 billion for a $5.9-billion trade deficit. The official import figures does not include food and farm products smuggled into the country, which I believe is still rampant and significant in value.

Data from the United Nations Trademap also shows the country's Southeast Asian neighbors are way ahead when it comes to agri-food exports. For example, Thailand shipped abroad $42.2 billion in agri-food products in 2016 and imported $15.7 billion for a surplus of $26.5 billion; Indonesia $36.5 billion in agri-food exports and $17.9 billion in agricultural imports for a surplus of $18.6 billion; Malaysia $26.7 billion in agri-food exports and $17.4 billion in agricultural imports for a surplus of $9.3 billion; and Vietnam $23.1 billion in agri-food exports and $14.5 billion in agricultural imports for a surplus of $8.6 billion.

The Philippines being a laggard when it comes to agri-food exports can also be blamed on the lack of a unified ARD agenda to support an ecosystem for agribusiness and agripreneurship.

I am not alone in this view. Dr. Rolando Dy, the director of the Center for Food and AgriBusiness of the University of Asia and the Pacific, on April 12 he said he has seen how ARD "became a major force for productivity and diversification" for the Southeast Asian countries I just mentioned.

"They have dedicated research institutes, with adequate funding and support, to undertake extensive R&D work," he added.

Well, we do have a good number of ARD institutes like the Philippine Rice Research Institute, Philippine Carabao Center, Philippine Coconut Authority, Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization, Bureau of Animal Industry, and Bureau of Plant Industry under the Department of Agriculture (DA). On top of these ARD institutes, we have funding agencies like Bureau of Agricultural Research under the DA, Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD) under the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) among others. But I have yet to see these ARD and funding institutions guided by a unified ARD agenda aimed at establishing and supporting an ecosystem for agribusiness and agripreneurship.

So what should be the components of a unified ARD agenda? What should be the way forward, initially?

The way forward

Firstly, ARD should be demand-driven and in the case of the Philippines should address the need to increase crop production, address value-adding, help create more agri-based micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and support the needs of industries involved in agribusiness, including improvement of current processes/technologies to produce various farm and food products. We should also study the various mitigation and adaptation measures as a result of changing climate.

Secondly, there should be stronger linkages and collaboration among various R&D institutions, including state colleges and universities (SCUs), particularly those offering farming, fisheries, and forestry, and related courses. The CHED must also play a bigger role by pushing for more ARD funding including reorientation of their curricular programs towards entrepreneurship.

Thirdly, there is a need to put into place a unified but decentralized system to transfer and commercialize R&D outputs, especially to smallholders in the agriculture sector. And I have already written a series of columns on why local government units should also be at the forefront of transferring and upscaling R&D outputs to smallholders in the agriculture sector.

And with a unified ARD, more funding should be allocated for research for development.

I have stated in my past columns that the Philippines is not investing enough in R&D, which according to the UNESCO should be at least 1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

In 2013, the country's GERD (Gross Expenditure for R&D) was only 0.14 percent of GDP.

I may sound critical about the current state of ARD in the Philippines, but as I have stated earlier and sharing Dr. Dy's views, our Southeast Asian neighbors like Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia have strong ARD that result in more agri-food exports. What other proof do we need?

Dr. Dy cited as an excellent example the Rubber Research Institute of Thailand that operates five research centers to address the needs of different agro-ecological zones. The institute has developed two productive rubber clones, and helped make Thailand the world's leading natural rubber exporter.

"Public agricultural research has played a big role. Agricultural research outputs have increased, in particular, improved rice, rubber, maize, soybean and cassava varieties, according to a study done by Leturqe and Wiggins under the Overseas Development Institute in 2010," Dr. Dy said.

"Thailand is a leading global player in sugar, cassava, pineapple, processed fruits, shrimp, and chicken meat," he added.

In the case of the Philippines, coconut products, particularly in oil form, is among the Top 2 agriculture exports. But why is it that smallholder coconut farmers are still part of the country's "poorest of the poor" and the average yield of coconuts trees is a very low 46 nuts per year. In India the average yield per tree is 250 per year, Mexico 300 nuts, and Brazil 400 nuts.

Definitely, something needs to be done about the country's ARD.

The third R&D conference

I am writing this column as a prelude to the 3rd National R&D Conference (NRDC) that is being held today (April 20) at the PICC in Pasay City.

The invitation letter from the DOST stated that the first two NRDCs in 2016 and 2017 had the attendees working on "developing the country's harmonized research and agenda and priorities for 2017-2022." The National Economic and Development Authority also approved the Harmonized National R&D Agenda in August last year.

The annual NRDC is an excellent way to generate a consensus for a unified ARD agenda.

Increasing the budget for ARD is always good news, but fragmented research, development, and extension efforts among institutions including SCUs that do not address the needs of smallholders in the agriculture sector, industry, and agribusiness would be next to useless.

For the second part of the column-series, I will discuss the outputs of the 3rd NRDC, and more on the need to have a unified ARD.

See you at the 3rd NRDC!

The Manila Times

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Research institute tapped for farm tourism drive

BY CONRAD M. CARIÑO

THE Farm Tourism Development Board chaired by the Department of Tourism (DOT) is currently crafting the Farm Tourism Strategic Action Plan, with the Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR), serving as one of the key agencies involved in the technical working group (TWG) for marketing, financing, and infrastructure, and human resource support.

BAR on Tuesday convened a meeting to identify and discuss possible programs, projects, and activities that will serve as the bureau's interventions for the Farm Tourism Strategic Action Plan, with the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) also tapped to provide complimentary activities. BAR and ATI are agencies under the Department of Agriculture (DA).

"BAR and ATI representatives gave recommendations as to interventions that the two agencies could provide with respect to the full implementation of the government's Farm Tourism Act. Furthermore, the two agencies will review the support services they can offer to the DA's stakeholders to further promote investments in farm tourism and look into the establishment of more learning sites for farm tourism accreditation," the BAR said in a statement.

According to Cheryl Marie Natividad-Caballero, the DOT consultant on farm tourism, BAR and ATI will play important roles in ensuring that farm tourism accreditation is facilitated and be seen as a viable source of livelihood among smallholder farmers. This can be accomplished by developing and enhancing farm tourism clusters and tourism circuits across the country.

The DOT is at the forefront of putting into effect the Farm Tourism Development Act (Republic Act 10816) and has initially identified 12 agri-tourism sites in the Calabarzon (Region 4A) for integration into traditional eco-tourism sites as part of boosting farmers' income and stirring up rural economic activity.

The Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) has also pushed for the development of the farm tourism sector, recognizing it is a way to integrate smallholder farmers into the bigger supply chain. Also, it promotes practice of environment-friendly agriculture.

■ (Left to right) Bureau of Agricultural Research-Applied Communication Division Julia Lapitan, BAR Program Monitoring and Development Division head Salvacion Ritual, BAR Program Development Division head Joell Lales, and Department of Tourism Farm Tourism consultant Cheryl Marie Natividad-Caballero, discuss how the BAR, DOT and the Agricultural Training Institute can cooperate in making farm tourism a viable activity for smallholder farmers and agriculture stakeholders. BAR PHOTO

Balita

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Pagtaas ng presyo ng manok, sisilipin

Sinisisi ang matinding init ng panahon sa biglaang pagsipa ng presyo ng karne ng manok sa mga pangunahing pamilihan sa Northern Metro area.

Sa mga palengke sa Caloocan-Malabon-Navotas at Valenzuela City (Camanava), tumaas ng P5 hanggang P10 ang kada kilo ng karneng manok, mula sa dating P140 per kilo.

Ayon sa mga mamimili, nagulat sila sa biglang pagmamahal ng manok, dahil nitong nakaraang araw ay mababa pa umano ang presyo nito.

Sa palengke sa Barangay Ugong, Valenzuela City, umaabot sa P150-P160 ang kilo ng manok.

Katwiran naman ng mga nagtitinda, tumaas umano ang presyo ng manok dahil sa tindi ng init ng panahon, lalo na sa mga lalawigan sa hilagang Luzon, kung saan nagmumula ang karamihan ng supply ng manok sa Metro Manila.

Ayon naman sa United Boilers Association (UBA), wala silang alam sa pagtaas ng presyo ng manok, sinabing bagamat maaaring mamatay sa heat stroke ang manok ay maaari namang iwasan ang nasabing sakit, depende sa lokasyon ng poultry farm.

Kasabay nito, mminado ang UBA na nakaaapekto sa paglaki ng manok ang sobrang init ng klima, pero hindi pa rin umano sapat ang nasabing dahilan para kapusin ang supply ng manok sa bansa, at itaas ang presyo nito.

Katwiran pa ng UBA, noong Marso 16, 2018 ay pumalo sa P83 (poultry price) ang kada kilo ng manok, na bumaba sa P73 nitong Abril 13, kaya nakagugulat na biglang tumaas ang presyo nito sa merkado.

Sinabi naman ng Department of Agriculture na ipatatawag nito ang mga stockholder ng manok para pagpaliwanagin sa isyu.

Orly L. Barcala

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6
Abante
UNA SA BALITA

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HIRIT NA

Arnold Clavio

TWITTER: @TWACofficial

Rice is coming?

Naglagay nga ng murang bigas sa merkado, pero 'di naman makain ng mga Pilipino, bakit ganon?

Pero ang mas dapat alamin ay bakit nag-kaubusan ng NFA rice sa mga palengke?

Mismanagement? Artipisyal? O may pananadya?

Patuloy ang dayalogo sa sektor agrikultural kung paano reresolbahin ang problema.

Ang ngayong inalis na kay Cab Sec Jun Evasco ang pamumuno sa NFA Council, inaasahang mawawala na ang awayang politika at mas uunahin na ang interes ng publiko.

Lord Kayo na po ang bahala.

BALITAWIT

HANGGANG (Wency Cornejo)

Ilang ulit 'nyo nang, itinatanong sa 'kin...

Kung hanggang kailan,

hanggang kailan,

hanggang saan,

Hanggang kailan magtatagal

Ang bigas na kay mahal?

Hanggang may import pa akong naririnig

Sino ba ang kakabig?

Hanggang may lupa pa tayong sinasaka...

Ika'y may kakainin...

REFRAIN:

Giliw wag mo sanang isiping

Ikaw ay aking gugutumin...

Di ko magagawang

Sikmura mo'y umasim

At nais kong malaman mo

Ang presyo sa Nepa ay kamahal

Hanggang ang gripo ko'y

mayroong tumutulo...

Ok lang ito..

Hanggang may panligo...

Hanggang may pangtoothbrush...

At mayroong panghugas...

Hanggang may tubig pa akong iniigib..

Sino'ng kumakabig?

Hanggang ang hatian ay patas lang..

Kayo ay iibigin!

REFRAIN:

Giliw wag mo sanang isiping

Kayo'y pababahuin

Di ko magagawang..

Sinigang ay mawala..

At nais kong malaman nyoKung gano singil ay kamahal!!

(Fade)

The Manila Times

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Agri group to include biosystems engineers

THE Philippine Society of Agricultural Engineers (PSAE) is now the Philippine Society of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineers (PSABE), which will help the country's professionals in the agriculture sector become more aware of trends in the field of biotechnology and related sciences.

The change of the PSAE's name to PSABE is a precursor to the holding of the 29th Philippine Agricultural Engineering Week, pursuant to Presidential Proclamation No. 399 declaring the fourth week of April each year as the Philippine Agricultural Engineering Week.

"The celebration will be highlighted by the conduct of the 15th International Agricultural Engineering Conference and Exhibition and the 68th PSABE Annual National Convention on April 22 to 28, 2018 at the University of Southeastern Philippines Sports and Cultural Center, in Obrero, Davao City," a PSABE official said.

The theme for this year's PSABE conference and celebration is "Agricultural and Biosystems Engineers: Partners in Agri-Fisheries Development for a Sustainable Tomorrow."

■ **The annual conference of the Philippine Society of Agricultural Engineers (PSAE) for 2017 drew 1,167 attendees and was held in Legazpi City. Photo shows one of the plenary sessions of the 2018 PSAE conference.** PSAE PHOTO

The week-long celebration will include among others the conference, exhibits, technology demonstrations, plenary, and technical papers presentations on the development and trends in renewable energy and rural electrification; environmental and waste management; agricultural machinery; irrigation and drainage; soil and water conservation; postharvest and processing; fishery and aquaculture resources engineering; forest product resource engineering; and related fields.

Highlights of the convention include the awarding of PSABE awards to members and chapters who have shown meritorious performance in their respective work: Most Outstanding Agricultural and Biosystems Engineer (Maramba Award); Outstanding Agricultural and Biosystems Engineer in the different fields of specialization; Outstanding Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering Student; Outstanding PSABE Regional Chapter; and Outstanding PSABE PPG Chapter.

The annual convention is expected to draw about 1,500 agricultural and biosystems engineers from local and international agencies coming from both the government and private sectors. **THE TIMES**

The Manila Times

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Searca, ISST to host 2 intl farm tourism meets

THE Philippine-hosted Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) is formalizing ties with the International School of Sustainable Tourism (ISST) to jointly organize for this year two international conferences on farm tourism.

Headed by former tourism secretary Mina Gabor, the non-profit ISST provides education and technical training to develop, promote, and viably operate sustainable tourism in the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries.

Asserting that farm or agri-tourism is an "innovative pathway to ISARD [inclusive and sustainable agricultural and rural development]," Searca Director Gil Saguiguit Jr. said the center and ISST will attempt to jointly shine a spotlight on farm tourism through a Global Farm Tourism Summit in July 2018 and an Asia Women Leaders Meet in December 2018.

A treaty organization founded in 1966, the Los Baños, Laguna-based Searca is mandated to promote ISARD in Southeast Asia and Timor-Leste through its core programs on graduate education and institutional development, research and development, and knowledge management.

Saguiguit said the Global Farm Tourism Summit will be anchored on a theme "Managing Climate Risks via Sustainable Farm Tourism" that will be attended and participated in by experts, practitioners, and stakeholders in the industry worldwide.

He said the summit aims to gather 500 participants to share vast experiences, practices, insights, technologies, and products from around the world, and intends to open channels and networks from one country to another for farm tourism development.

"Farm tourism or agri-tourism can diversify farmers' sources of income and livelihood, and it is a way to promote sustainable agriculture with community involvement and participation," Saguiguit said.

He also explained that agri-tourism is the business of attracting visitors and travelers to farm areas for recreational or educational purposes that encourages economic activity and can provide both farm and community income.

On the other hand, the Asia Women Leaders Meet is an annual having a different theme each year. The first of the series will be held on December 4-6, 2018 with the theme "The Role of Women in Community-based Tourism."

Searca and ISST welcome the support of other international development organizations, government agencies, and private entities for the two conferences, Saguiguit added.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO

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#nationataglance

CLIMACO OFFICIAL FB PAGE

ZAMBOANGA PENINSULA: ZAMBOANGA CITY

Climaco asks BoC to deputize law enforcement agencies vs smuggling

ZAMBOANGA CITY Mayor Maria Isabelle Climaco-Salazar has called on the Bureau of Customs (BoC) to create a city-wide task force with deputized law enforcement agencies who can go after smugglers. "Time and again Zamboanga City has been the hub of smuggling operations and as Mayor I am bent on stopping this economic larceny against our government. We have encountered futile efforts with the Bureau of Customs despite the Senate hearing on the disappearance of smuggled sugar a year ago," Ms. Climaco said in a statement. The mayor made the statement after 10 trucks loaded with suspected smuggled sugar and rice, which were intercepted by police officers at a checkpoint, disappeared after these were sent back in a holding compound of a private wharf in Baliwasan where the trucks allegedly came from. Ms. Climaco said the BoC initially refused to take custody of the goods "due to lack of prior coordination." "These (smuggling) syndicates are powerful; they built a parallel empire of their own, thereby, posing a great threat to legitimate businessmen," she said. — ***Mindanao Bureau***

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British meat industry eager to regain PHL beef market

MEAT exporters from the UK are on a trade mission to forge partnerships with Filipino importers with the goal of bringing back high-end UK beef to Philippine consumers.

"We're very much excited about the opportunity the Philippines holds for all the reasons you all know — your population, your income growth — and we want to take advantage of that in complementary relationships," said Jonathan Eckley, Asia-Pacific head of the UK's Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), in an interview.

The UK is trying to gain a share of the beef market after its return in late 2017 with the issuance of a health clearance from the Philippine government.

AHDB, a statutory levy board funded by farmers and growers, is among the UK entities that led a visit in Manila on Thursday to introduce eight meat processors to Philippine importers and distributors.

Mr. Eckley said although he does not expect "quick wins," he remains confident that his group would close deals mainly in two markets — pork and beef. He said the UK is already the seventh-biggest supplier of pork to the Philippines.

"It's (Philippines) our second-biggest [market for pork] outside Europe. China is a big market for us and the Philippines has become an important market for us, with strong growth over the last two years," he said.

"On British beef, we're new to the market because we've only had access since very late last year. I think agreement was reached in August-September and health certificate was in place a bit later in the year," he said.

Data from the Bureau of Animal Industry show that the UK exported a total of about 12.93 million kilograms (kg.) of meat to the Philippines in 2017, slightly lower than the 13.15 million kg. in 2016. Pork exports accounted for the bulk at around 11.63 million kg. last year, up 43% from 8.13 million kg. a year earlier. The Philippines also imports chicken and turkey meat from the UK, although at lower quantities.

"On our pig meat exports, it's become important to us because of the demand we've been able to satisfy here," Mr. Eckley said. "In 2016, we had strong growth of about 27% in volume terms and then again in 2017 we built on that, so volume increased again from the UK to the Philippines," he said.

Jesus C. Cham, president of the Philippines' Meat Importers and Traders Association, said there is a good chance that partnerships will be forged for high-end beef. — **Victor V. Saulon**

FULL STORY

Read the full story by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or by typing the link <http://bit.ly/2HMSFzl>

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Palm oil battling image problem, seeks to tap green-energy demand

JAPANESE scientists are encouraging Southeast Asia's palm-oil producers to chop down trees to help save forests.

Japan International Research Center for Agricultural Sciences (Jircas) and IHI Enviro Corp., a subsidiary of IHI Corp., have developed a way to process scrapped palm trees into methane gas and wood pellets to be sold as feedstock to power generators. The system intends to help palm companies earn income while waiting for new trees to mature and curb their reliance on expanding plantations to boost output.

Concerns about palm oil's environmental impact have prompted the European Union to propose restricting its use in renewable fuels after 2020. Farmers in Malaysia and Indonesia, which account for 85 percent of supply, have been accused of illegally using slash-and-burn methods to clear land for plantations, destroying rain forests. Producers typically need to replant oil palms after a couple of decades when they become unproductive and plant small areas slowly because they won't get any revenue from those trees for three to five years.

"Our project is aimed at reducing the negative impact on the environment of the palm-oil industry, and making it sustainable," Akihiko Kosugi, project leader at Jircas's biological resources division, said in an interview. Currently, scrapped trunks are mostly left on plantations and their high sugar content mean they became sources of harmful insects that spread diseases to living trees, according to Kosugi.

Under the system, trees older than 25 years are cut down and replaced, reducing the need to expand plantations. A pilot plant in Kluang in Malaysia's Johor state started operations this year with the capacity to produce 10,000 tons of pellets a year from a maximum 50,000 tons of old palm trunks. Jircas estimates about 29.5 million tons of old palm trunks will be available annually in Malaysia if 5 percent of its areas are replanted.

Trees experience a sustained drop in yields after 20 years, according to Bloomberg Intelligence analyst Alvin Tai. Older palms are also more vulnerable to fungi, which causes rot and eventually kills them. The share of trees more than 19 years old was about 30 percent in both Malaysia and Indonesia last year, according to Aurelia Britsch, head of commodities at BMI Research, citing data from the 11 top producers.

As well as making pellets, sugar from scrapped palm trunks can generate methane gas for power generation. Sugar from 1 ton of trunks generates an average of 96 kilowatts of power a day, according to Jircas. The system costs more than ¥1 billion ($9.3 million) to buy and install and Jircas and IHI Enviro are also considering offering the technology for a licensing fee.

Expansions

ACQUIRING greenfield plantation land "is very rare nowadays due to the scarcity of suitable land," Sime Darby Plantation Bhd., the world's largest palm-oil grower by area, said in an e-mail.

The average cost of replanting on an existing plantation is around 15,000 ringgit ($3,856) a hectare, Zakaria Arshad, group chief executive officer of Felda Global Ventures Holdings Bhd., said in an interview. Greenfield expansion, including building mills and infrastructure, costs about 32,000 ringgit. Acquiring a brownfield site can cost between 50,000 ringgit and 80,000 ringgit per hectare, he said. The company is targeting replanting about 15,000 hectares this year. Pellets from the trunks could be shipped to Japan as feedstock by renewable-energy plants, where they could replace palm oil, said Tomohide Sugino, the head of Jircas's planning division. Renewable-energy output will increase 78 percent in the year beginning April 2027, with solar to provide about two-thirds.

The project can also benefit smallholders, who control about 40 percent of palm areas in Indonesia and Malaysia and have difficulty funding replanting, Sugino said. Changing the industry's image as a forest destroyer would also help promote long-term consumption, he said. ***Bloomberg News***

A WORKER loads a truck with palm fruit at a plantation in Malaysia. SANJIT DAS/BLOOMBERG

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Sugar demand to remain flat due to TRAIN

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas @jearcalas

PHILIPPINE raw sugar output would post flat growth in marketing year (MY) 2018-2019, as demand for the sweetener would remain unchanged following the implementation of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law.

According to a Global Agricultural Information Network (GAIN) report, the country's sugar production would settle at 2.3 million metric tons (MMT) in MY 2018-2019, which would begin on December 1. Sugar consumption would still be at 2.25 MMT, the report noted, as sugar-sweetened beverages become more expensive.

"Demand for sugar is expected to remain flat in MY 2018-19 as prices of sugar-sweetened beverages increase due to new taxes," the report read.

The report estimated that total sugar consumption in the current marketing year will rise by 2.27 percent to 2.25 MMT, as industrial users veer away from imported high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS). HFCS was slapped a higher tax under the TRAIN law.

"Post estimates sugar demand slightly higher than the Sugar Regulatory Administration's [projection] at 2.2 MMT in MY 2016-17 with consumption rising marginally to 2.25 MMT in MY 2017-18, as more industrial users begin to use local sugar due to lower excise taxes on sugars-sweetened beverages vs. noncaloric and HFCS-sweetened beverages and the amended Sugar Order 3, which places additional regulations on the importation of HFCS," the report read.

For MY 2017-2018, the GAIN report projected that total raw sugar output would decline by 8 percent to 2.3 MMT, from a record-high of 2.5 MMT posted in MY 2016-2017.

"The drop in sugar production is mostly attributed to unfavorable weather conditions, particularly during the vegetative or growth stage in many sugarcane-producing provinces, which should affect sugar content and weight of cane," it explained.

The report said about 80 percent of total sugar produced in the Philippines is consumed locally, while the remaining volume is exported.

"Roughly 50 percent of domestic consumption is accounted for by industrial users, 32 percent by households and the remaining 18 percent by institutions [e.g., restaurants, bakeshops and hospitals]," it read.

The GAIN report said the country's raw sugar exports in MY 2017-2018 and MY 2018-2019 "are expected to level out to 220,000 metric tons [MT] after a bumper crop in MY 2016-2017." Manila exported a total of 300,000 MT of raw sugar in MY 2016-2017 "due to record production levels."

"The largest Philippine sugar export market is the United States, as prices under the US tariff rate quota system are normally higher than world market prices," the report read.

Manila would still import refined sugar at around 100,000 MT in MY 2017-2018 and MY 2018-2019 "due to strong demand from food and beverage producers." The country imported about 50,000 MT of refined sugar in MY 2016-2017, according to the GAIN report.

The report was prepared by the Foreign Agricultural Service of the US Department of Agriculture in Manila.

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1,065 farmers from Kalinga, Eastern Samar receive CLOAs

THE Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) announced the distribution of certificate of land ownership awards (CLOAs) to a total of 1,065 farmers in the provinces of Kalinga and Eastern Samar.

In Kalinga 745 farmers were awarded their CLOAs, proof of ownership of lands awarded by the government under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program, during a simple ceremony in Tabuk City on April 12.

The awarded lands are in the municipalities of Balbalan, Lubuagan, Pasil, Pinukpuk, Rizal, Tabuk and Tinglayan.

The awarding of the CLOAs was led by Agrarian Reform Secretary John Rualo Castiriciones.

Castriciones, in a statement, said the awarding of CLOAs demonstrate the Duterte administration's recognition of the important role of small farmers while being victims of social injustice. He noted poverty is the culprit behind the attraction of peasants to "other ideologies."

The distribution was graced by Undersecretary Karlo S. Bello of the Field Operations Office, who apologized for the long-overdue distribution.

The delays, Bello pointed out, were due to the long processes of land titling. The DAR, he added, is doing its best to issue titles to actual tillers to give them absolute control over their basic resource and in the process, propel progress in the countryside.

In Eastern Samar the DAR chief distributed CLOAs to 320 farmers. The distribution was led by Bello. The CLOAs cover a total of 614.6 hectares of agricultural land.

DAR Region 8 data revealed that of the total land areas distributed, 354.3 hectares are in the municipality of San Julian; 76.5 hectares in Maydolong; 33.8 hectares in Dolores; 32.3 hectares in Lawaan; 27.7 hectares in Giporlos; 22.8 hectares in Salcedo; 19.2 hectares in Quinapondan; 19 hectares in Balangiga; 18.7 hectares in Can-avid; 6.4 hectares in Borongan; and 3.9 hectares in Balangkayan.

The distribution of the CLOAs in Kalinga and Easatern Samar were witnessed by other DAR officials and local government units. ***Jonathan L. Mayuga***

The Manila Times

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US businesses, farmers worried by trade dispute

WASHINGTON: Despite continued economic growth, US businesses and farmers are increasingly concerned about the trade spat with China which already has pushed prices higher, according to a Federal Reserve survey released Wednesday.

■ **In this file photo taken on March 10, 2018 a worker leaves US Steel Edgar Thomson Steel Works in Braddock, Pennsylvania.** AFP PHOTO

In the wake of the steep tariffs imposed last month by President Donald Trump, steel and aluminum prices have risen around the country, in some cases doubling, the Fed said.

Industries and retailers across the country also continue to report difficulty finding skilled workers, which in some cases is holding back growth, although wages have risen only modestly in response, the nationwide survey showed.

The 12 Federal Reserve districts reported "modest to moderate" economic growth over the past six weeks and a generally upbeat outlook. But manufacturing, agriculture and transportation firms "expressed concern about the newly-imposed and/or proposed tariffs."

The trade tensions have escalated in recent weeks, with Washington and Beijing exchanging increasingly severe threats -- most recently with China's tariffs on US sorghum. The dispute centers on US complaints about investment restrictions, theft of American intellectual property and overproduction of metals.

The Cleveland Fed reported steel prices had increased at double-digit rates in some cases, while across the country there were reports of companies stockpiling steel against further price hikes.

In the Boston region companies said the trade dispute represented "a major risk" and that they were already seeing increased aluminum prices.

"These tariffs are now killing high-paying American manufacturing jobs and businesses," one said.

And a contact in the Dallas Fed's region said trade issues "continue to make agricultural producers and lenders nervous."

It is not the first time the Fed has cautioned about the impact of trade policy uncertainty on the economy.

Worker shortage

In a speech Wednesday, New York Federal Reserve Bank President William Dudley said the dispute complicates the work of the central bank.

"By increasing uncertainty around the economic outlook, these shifts in fiscal and trade policy could make it more difficult" for the Fed to balance its dual objectives of low inflation and full employment.

The Fed's so-called beige book survey, which gathers reports from businesses across the nation, was prepared for the central bank's next policy meeting, set for May 1-2.

The Fed raised its benchmark lending rate in March and is expected to hike twice more this year, after three increases in 2017 as it tries to guide the economy on a path of continued growth without letting inflation accelerate.

The shortage of workers continues to afflict business across sectors, regions and all skill levels, "restraining job gains in some regions," the beige book said.

Some firms, especially in regions where the labor shortages are most severe, have begun raising pay and benefits, and also have increased overtime, improved training and even turned to automation to replace human workers.

One manufacturer in the Chicago Fed region reported increasing production at its facility in China "because they couldn't find workers for their US operation."

However, while the survey said wages and prices continued to rise at a "moderate pace," they "generally did not escalate," indicating the Fed does not need to raise the alarm about inflation just yet.

The central bank keeps a close watch on wages since those could feed into inflation, which has been running below the Fed's two percent target despite falling unemployment and economic growth that has picked up steam. **AFP**

Malaya
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Wheat hits more than 1-week high

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat futures rose for a third consecutive session on Thursday and hit their highest since April 10, with the market underpinned by lower-than-expected rains across the drought-hit US southern Plains.

Corn ticked lower as prices were pressured by forecasts of warm weather in the US Midwest which is expected to boost planting. Soybeans gained for a third straight session.

The Chicago Board of Trade front-month wheat contract Wc1 added 0.7 percent to $4.78-3/4 a bushel. Prices for the most-active contract earlier hit their highest since April 10 at $4.94.

Corn was down 0.1 percent at $3.82-3/4 a bushel and soybeans Sc1 gained 0.2 percent to $10.43-1/2 a bushel.

"It is a weather market for wheat, prices are likely to remain volatile depending on weather forecasts and positioning by investors," said an India-based agricultural commodities analyst.

The market is concerned that rains will not meet expectations, stoking fears about the condition of the US crop which has been hit by lack of moisture.

Corn market is being weighed down by outlooks for warmer weather in the US Midwest which will allow farmers to make quick progress in planting in the coming weeks.

Investors in the agricultural markets remain concerned about a widening trade war between the United States and China. – ***Reuters***