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Roadmap to revive coconut sector

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is crafting a five-year coconut industry development roadmap that is expected to revive the industry in 10 years.

The board of the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) has allotted a P10-million funding for the roadmap which hopes to increase the yield of the nut.

"This will not be a difficult task because we have all the data and what needs to be done is just gather all the major stakeholders and have these data validated. With the coconut industry roadmap, all the efforts for the rehabilitation and revival of the Philippine coconut industry will be geared towards a clear objective," said Emmanuel Piñol, DA secretary.

Piñol said the optimistic projection will be achieved by developing high-yielding and versatile coconut varieties and focusing on other high value coconut products aside from copra to adjust to the current market demand.

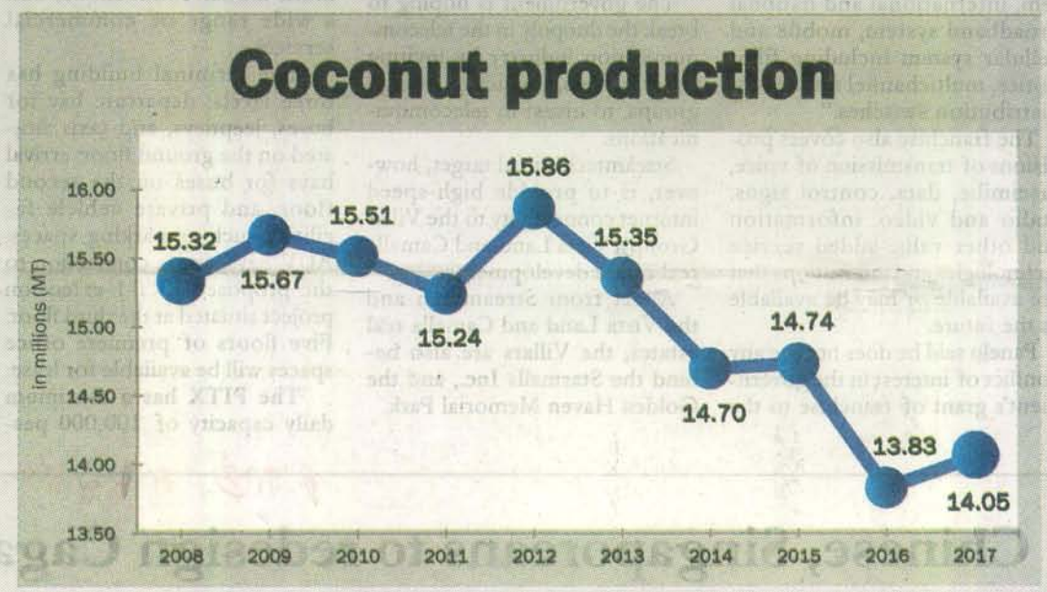
He added the roadmap will likely focus on the manufacture of green coconut, coco water, broom, handicrafts, sugar, syrup, milk, virgin oil, flour, chips, coir and charcoal briquettes.

"As the world market price of copra plummeted, coconut farmers who are among the poorest members of the agriculture sector, are hit hard and could hardly survive," Piñol said.

"There is nothing much that government could do because copra prices are dictated by world market demands and the only other option available – increasing the use of coco oil in the government's biofuel program from B2 to B5 will not even reach first base as the economic managers will certainly not allow an increase of about P0.45 centavos to the cost of the diesel fuel," he added.

The DA said the Philippines should take advantage of the current global demand especially

See ROADMAP ➤ Page A4



ROADMAP

from the United States and European markets.

"While Thailand has a puny coconut sector with only 216,000 hectares of coconut farms, it has bested the Philippines, which has an area of 3.3 million hectares, in the highly lucrative market of coco water, coco chips, green aromatic coconut and other high value products," Piñol said.

To support the thrust, Piñol said he directed engineers from the PCA to fabricate locally-designed coco husk decorticating machines to produce coir, ropes and fiber.

He also said the coconut industry will be using more productive coconut varieties including PCA 15-2 that can yield 6 metric tons (MT) of copra annually as well as PCA 15-1 and PCA 15-9 which can produce 3.5 to 4 MT of copra yearly.

All three varieties can also produce raw materials for virgin coconut oil and coco sugar. These can bear fruit 2.5 to three years after planting.

"Planting materials of these varieties coming from the PCA stations alone could cover an initial 20,000 hectares which could then be sources of planting materials for further expansion three years later," noted Piñol.

He said secondary crops will also be introduced to coconut farmers including cacao, coffee, black pepper, vegetables and sorghum for intercropping to offer alternative sources of income when the price of coconut products is down.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed the country produced 14.05 million metric tons (MT) of coconut last year, up by 1.6 percent from 13.82 million MT in 2016.

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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SRA sees sugar prices easing further due to imports

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said it expects the retail price of sugar to further decline after it has allocated 149,950 metric tons (MT) of the total import volume it green lighted to traders and end-users.

The SRA, a government-owned and-controlled corporation attached to the Department of Agriculture, earlier allowed the importation of 150,000 MT of sugar to ease high food prices. Data from the SRA showed that 99.97 percent, or 149,950 MT, has been subscribed.

Of the volume that has been subscribed, 94.66 percent, or 141,950 MT is refined sugar while the remaining volume of 8,000 MT is raw sugar, SRA data showed.

Figures from the SRA also indicated that the bulk of imports were cornered by traders, who accounted for 70.61 percent, or some 105,875 MT, of the total import volume. Food and beverage (F&B) manufacturers would bring in a total of 44,075 MT of refined sugar.

Some of the F&B manufacturers that were given allocation include food giant Universal Rubina Corp. (10,000 MT) and beverage makers Coca-Cola (8,250 MT) and Pepsi Cola (12,200 MT).

InterBev Philippines Inc., a subsidiary of Asia Brewery, would purchase 9,000 MT of imported refined sugar, while Nestlé Philippines would import 4,625 MT.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol told the BUSINESSMIRROR that the allocation of the import volume is "good news" and could help bring down the price of sugar sold in local markets.

SRA Adminstrator Hermenegildo R. Serafica told the BUSINESSMIRROR that he sees the mill-gate price of sugar to settle at a level that would be "reasonable" for consumers and "profitable" for consumers.

"We also expect the retail market to go down to the level recorded before June. SRA price monitoring data for the past five years prior to June show that retail prices were maintained at P51 per kilogram to P55 per kg when mill-gate prices were at P1,700 [per 50-kg bag] to P1,900 [per 50-kg bag]," Serafica said in an interview.

"Unless greedy traders/distributors are manipulating the prices. Then SRA will have to get them investigated for economic sabotage," he added.

Serafica noted that on the week the sugar importation was announced, the mill-gate price of sugar went down to an average of P1,631.68 per 50-kg bag, from an average of P2,003.6 per 50-kg bag in August.

The latest SRA data showed that total sugar output as of October 14 has reached 113,737 MT, 67.73 percent higher than the 67,810 MT recorded during the same period of last year.

Also, refined sugar output more than tripled to 56,229.3 MT, from last year's 17,564.6 MT. ***Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas***

BusinessMirror
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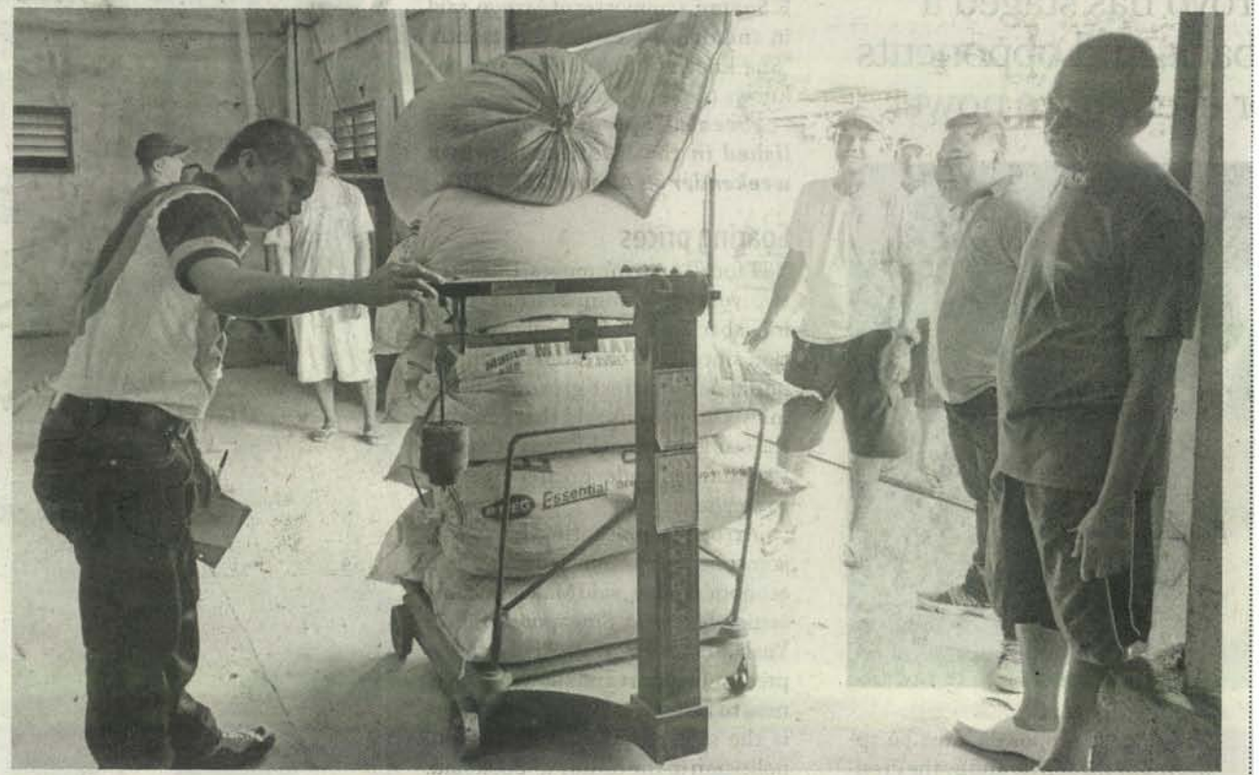
NFA palay purchases this year may reach 30,000 MT–Piñol

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas @jearcalas

THE National Food Authority (NFA) expressed confidence that it will be able to buy more than a third of its palay procurement target of 82,000 metric tons (MT) this year after it offered additional incentives to farmers.

PART 1 OF 2



TOM SUMAIL (third from right, in green shirt), a farmer from Muricay, Pagadian City, sold 147 bags of his palay to the National Food Authority in Zamboanga del Sur. The government expects the NFA to procure as much as 30,000 metric tons of palay from farmers after it offered an additional P3/kilogram buffer stocking incentive. NFA PHOTO

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PART 1 OF 2

NFA Council (NFAC) Chairman and Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol said the state-run grains agency would be able to purchase at least 30,000 MT of palay, or about 36.59 percent, of its target. Piñol said this would be possible due to the additional incentive of P3 being offered to farmers who will sell their crop to the government.

"We are expecting that of the 82,000 MT targeted for procurement by this year, the NFA will be able to procure at least 30,000 MT despite the delay in the start of its massive and aggressive procurement program," Piñol said in a recent interview with reporters.

"Henceforth, the NFA will focus its resources on local palay procurement."

In less than two weeks after the additional incentives were approved by the NFAC, which effectively brought the NFA's total buying price to P20.70 per kilogram (kg), the grains agency was able to purchase over 60,000 50-kg bags, or around 3,000 MT, according to NFA OIC-Administrator Tomas R. Escarez.

Escarez noted that the NFA's total palay procurement since the start of this year has reached around 160,000 50-kg bags, or about 8,000 MT.

"Our field procurement right now is averaging more than 10,000 bags a day. And we are just starting the main crop," he said in an interview.

"The big chunk of our procurement comes in the main harvest, which is the last quarter of the year. We are now doing everything to purchase [palay from farmers]," Escarez added.

Escarez noted that rice harvest has peaked in some areas, such as Mindoro, Iloilo, Region 4, Region 6 and parts of Mindanao.

He added that the NFA is having a difficult time purchasing palay from farmers in Regions 1 to 3 as the offer of traders is higher than the support price of the rains agency.

"We are unable to buy palay from Northern Luzon because of higher prices. This was caused by the devastation brought by Typhoon Ompong," he said.

Piñol said the NFA's procurement program would safeguard farmers from the possible decline in the farm-gate price of palay due to the influx of rice imports by year-end.

The Manila Times

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Thai firm to support PH sorghum production

BY EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

THE PHILIPPINE unit of Thai firm Charoen Pokphand Foods (CP) has pledged to support the Sorghum Production Program (SPP) of the country to help provide a source of alternative feeds for the poultry and livestock industries.

According to Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol, top officials of Thai firm CP visited the Department of Agriculture (DA) on Monday to express interest in supporting the country's first-ever sorghum development program intended mainly for indigenous people (IP) communities with vast unutilized lands.

"The CP officials informed me that they are interested in entering into a marketing agreement with the IP communities who will produce Sorghum," Piñol said.

The Agriculture chief said Udomsak Aksornphakdee, president for aquaculture of CPF Philippines, along with Sakol Cheewakoset, vice chairman for Agro-Industrial Business Group Philippines Area, and Sompong Rojanaadisorn, senior vice president for livestock feed business, pledged to buy the Sorghum produced by the IP communities.

"Other farmers interested to participate in the Sorghum Development Program will also be linked with feed millers who have been looking for good feed materials at lower cost," Piñol added.

The DA is targeting to begin next year the wider propagation of sorghum in the country as an alternative animal feed.

Sorghum farming, which could be "profitable," according to Piñol, is expected to supplement yellow corn as a source of for feeds for the poultry and livestock industries in the Philippines.

The SPP will be part of the 4Ks Program or *Kabuhayan at Kaunlaran ng Kababayang Katutubo* that is implemented under the Special Areas for Agricultural Development (SAAD), said Piñol.

SAAD Director Bernadette San Juan and National IP Coordinator Camilo Andi Jr. have been tasked to handle the program, he added.

The Agriculture chief said SAAD would distribute sorghum seeds, including fertilizers, to IP farmers the value of which would be deducted from the proceeds after harvest. This system will help make the program sustainable.

"It [sorghum] has been introduced in the country many years ago but it did not receive the needed push from government," Piñol said.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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NFA to still miss procurement target

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The National Food Authority (NFA) still expects to miss its local palay procurement target for the year despite the additional incentives given to farmers.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol said the grains agency was able to procure nearly 8,000 metric tons (MT) of paddy rice from farmers in different regions.

"We expect that of the 82,000 MT targeted for procurement this year, NFA will be able to procure at least 30,000 MT despite of the delay in implementing the massive and aggressive program," Piñol said.

NFA officer-in-charge administrator Tomas Escarez said while NFA has beefed up palay buying in some parts of the country, the agency cannot buy in the regions hit by the recent typhoon.

"In North and Central Luzon areas hit by Ompong, we cannot procure that much because of the damage. Those areas are big producers," he said.

Despite this, Escarez said the added incentive would still help the NFA to increase its procurement to serve as buffer stocks.

Under its local paddy rice procurement program NFA is offering an additional incentive of P3 per kilogram on top of the P17.70 per kilo buying price for clean and dry paddy rice.

The P3 additional incentive per kilo marks the first time that the NFA provided a higher payment for the farmers' produce since 2008 when the buying price of palay was increased from P11 to P17.

The program is also aimed at establishing a support price for farmers who will be affected by the lifting of the quantitative restrictions on imported rice.

The nationwide adjustment of the buying price is being implemented in 37 provinces with surplus rice production.

Apart from buying palay produce at P20.70 per kilo, the DA has committed to reward farmers' associations and cooperatives with farm machinery and equipment based on the volume of rice they sell to the NFA.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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PRICE INCREASE FEARED

HIGHER COCO METHYL ESTER IN DIESEL MIX NIXED

By Karl R. Ocampo
@kocampoINQ

The country's economic managers rejected the Philippine Coconut Authority's (PCA) proposal to increase the coconut methyl ester (CME) content in local biodiesel as farmers continue to suffer from plummeting copra prices.

Increasing the CME content in local fuel could have been the sector's saving grace in a weakening coconut industry, but according to PCA Administrator Romulo dela Rosa, economic managers were afraid that the move would further increase pump prices.

Computation by the Asian Institute of Petroleum Studies Inc. showed that once implemented, there would be a potential increase in diesel prices by around P0.45 centavos a liter.

So far this year, prices of diesel rose by P13.40 a liter on the back of higher global oil rates. In Metro Manila, diesel prices are now within the range of P45.05 to P50.29 a liter.

Dela Rosa said that while the agency understood the additional burden it might cause consumers, he noted that coconut farmers were among the poorest in the country, adding that "the one-time increase can be justified."

"They should look at it from all sides. This will improve the purchasing power of three million coconut farmers. That's three million households," he said.

Dela Rosa added that increasing the local component of the country's biodiesel "makes more economic sense" when world prices of petroleum go up.

As of the second week of October, the farm-gate price of copra has fallen by close to 50 percent year-on-year to P19.09 a kilo from P37.02 last year.

Global crude coconut oil prices also plummeted to $880 a ton from a high of $1,850.

The PCA has already urged the National Biofuels Board to consider its proposal, given that under the government's Philippine Energy Plan for 2012 to 2030, local diesel must contain at least 5 percent CME by 2020. INQ

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Worst seen over for inflation crisis

Aside from food, utility costs are also pulling back

By Daxim L. Lucas
@daxINQ

Domestic inflationary pressures —which made local consumer prices accelerate to their fastest levels in almost a decade in recent months—seem to be abating and may, in turn, make the central bank pause from its rate hike streak when its policymakers convene next month.

In a research note to clients, ING Bank senior economist Nicholas Mapa said that recent declines in food prices together with lower utility rates and pump prices bode well for the Philippines' inflation outlook and predicted that the rise in the October consumer price index would be capped at only 6.5 percent.

"Government officials have sounded off recently on the increasing likelihood that domestic inflation had indeed peaked in [the third quarter], pointing to recently implemented nonmonetary and monetary measures that have begun to take root," he said.

The central bank has so far raised local interest rates by a total of 150 basis points in four successive adjustments since May.

"The fruits of such measures are now being reflected on the ground, validating our earlier expectation that inflation peaked in September, affording [the Bangko Sentral] some leeway to pause at its November meeting," Mapa added.

His view jibes with that of government economic managers who have pointed out that the September inflation rate of 6.7 percent, though marking a nine-year high, saw a lower monthly increase from August's 6.4 percent—a possible indication of an emerging plateau in prices that may develop into a downtrend moving forward.

Mapa said the normalization of supply chains after Supertyphoon "Mangkhut" coupled with the government's efforts to augment supply and improved distribution "has been felt on the ground" with the latest official data from the Philippine Statistics Authority validating this development.

A price drop of P1 was recorded for regular milled rice across seven out of the 17 regions with the average week-on-week decline at 0.5 percent, he noted. Meanwhile, prices for meat and fish were broadly stable while substantial declines were reported for vegetables such as carrots (-40 percent), native pechay (-50 percent), cabbage (-50 percent) and white potato (-12.5 percent).

"Aside from food, utility costs are also pulling back with Meralco lowering October charges while motorists have welcomed successive weeks of hefty pump price rollbacks," the economist said. "All these positive developments increase the likelihood that inflation has peaked in the third quarter."

He said that risks to the inflation outlook now appeared more balanced with upside pressure from transport fare adjustments in November coupled with the projected minimum wage increase.

Balancing these risks are downside pressures from the National Food Authority's plan to fast-track an additional 703,000 metric tons of rice.

"If declining crude oil prices continue their trend, normalizing pump prices and utility rates, together with favorable base effects will all factor into a decelerating trend for inflation toward end-2019," Mapa said. INQ

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Sugar firms eye longer fuel tax suspension

By Karl R. Ocampo
@kocampoINQ

The country's biggest group of sugar producers has expressed its support for the government's plan to temporarily suspend the additional excise tax on fuel, but recommended that the second phase of the new tax reform be suspended entirely.

In a statement released Thursday, the Confederation of Sugar Producers' Association Inc. (Confed) said it welcomed the recent announcement of the Department of Finance to suspend the additional increase in the excise tax on fuel for the first three months of 2019. However, the group said the suspension should go beyond the three-month reprieve in light of the country's high inflation rate.

"While we are certainly grateful for this move, we hope that the DOF will continue suspending not just the excise tax on fuel but the implementation of the entire second phase of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law," the group said.

"With mechanization at the forefront of our program to enhance our global competitiveness, the imposition of excise tax has greatly increased our production cost. While mechanization's intent is to lower our production cost, the same has not been achieved because of the implementation of the TRAIN law," it added.

In sugar production, fuel is a primary component such that it affects the planting, harvesting and transporting of the commodity.

Confed accounts for more than 60 percent of farmers in the sugar industry.

In a separate statement, Emilio Yulo, who represents the planters in the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA), supported the call of the stakeholders and recommended that the suspension be extended for at least six months to a year, "or until the people fully recover from the effects of TRAIN 1."

"Part of our mandate in SRA is to encourage mechanization of farms to make them more efficient and globally competitive. How can our sugar planters continue to compete when they have to contend with the high cost of fuel?" he said.

The TRAIN law seeks to increase the excise tax on fuel by P4.50 a liter in 2019 and P6 a liter by 2020, after it imposed an adjustment of P2.50 a liter this year. The additional excise tax was seen to have contributed to jacking up prices of basic goods and services in the market. INQ

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Aging farmers worry agri execs

By Alex V. Pal
@inquirervisayas

DUMAGUETE CITY—For the past 61 years, Mauro Pino shows up for work every day in a more than a hectare rice field close to the sea at Camp Seasite in Barangay Banilad here.

"I started cultivating this field since I was 14," Pino told the Inquirer.

He later met and married his wife Leticia when he was in his 20s and this leased farmland supported them and their four sons until their children got married and started having their own families.

Now 75, Pino single-handedly farms his rice field as none of his four sons want to take after the work he inherited from his own father.

Instead of rice farming, his eldest son stays at home and tends to a garden.

His second son works as a pump attendant at a nearby gasoline station while his third son is a government laborer. His youngest son drives a delivery truck for a rice dealer.

"My sons probably want an easy job as they have their own families," he said.

EDWIN BACASMAS

FARM WORK Planting rice is a backbreaking job that has attracted a few takers.

Pino is a typical example of a farmer in the Philippines, leaving agriculture officials worried.

Bleak

Bernard Limbaga, high-value crops coordinator of the Provincial Agricultural Training Coordination Office of the Department of Agriculture in Negros Oriental province, said the outlook for Philippine agriculture looked bleak.

"Nobody is attracted to farming anymore so instead of training young farmers, our office just helps senior citizens," Limbaga lamented in a recent forum.

Citing recent studies, Limbaga said due to their old age, today's farmers were not anymore open to new technology.

The recent decision of the Duterte administration allowing the importation of rice from neighboring countries may also hurt local farmers, he said.

Farmers abroad can produce a kilogram of rice for P7 but in the Philippines, one needs at least P15 to produce the same amount of rice, he added.

Limited farming space

"This is because of the lack of mechanization and the high labor cost," Limbaga said.

Compounding the problem of fewer farmers is the dwindling agricultural space due to urbanization. Dumaguete City, with a 35-square-kilometer land area, has only 10 percent left for agriculture.

Unless this trend is reversed, Limbaga said the country could become like Singapore, which could no longer produce its own food. INQ

BusinessWorld
INCREASE YOUR BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

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Sugar lobby wants 6-month fuel excise freeze

BW FILE PHOTO
FARMERS loading sugarcane to a truck

THE Confederation of Sugar Producers' Associations (CONFED) of Negros and Panay urged the government to extend the suspension of excise tax for fuel in order not to increase the production cost of sugar.

In a statement, CONFED said, "We appeal to President Rodrigo R. Duterte to extend the suspension in behalf of the 5 million direct and indirect stakeholders of the sugar industry."

The Department of Finance (DoF) has announced the suspension of the excise tax under the second phase of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law for at least three months, as a response to rising inflation.

"While we are certainly grateful for this move, we hope that the DoF will continue suspending, not just the excise tax on fuel but the implementation of the entire second phase of the TRAIN law," CONFED said.

"We fear that further implementing TRAIN 2 which will raise again the levy on fuel by P2 after a three-month reprieve will lead to higher production cost, (and) huge losses for the sugar industry," CONFED added.

CONFED noted that fuel is a primary need for the industry from start to finish with mechanization under way to enhance the industry's global competitiveness.

Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) Board Member Emilio Bernardino L. Yulo who represents the planters said that he hopes the suspension will be extended until the industry has recovered from the effects of TRAIN 2.

"Part of our mandate in SRA is to encourage mechanization of farms to make them more efficient and globally competitive. How can our sugar planters, particularly the small farmers and agrarian reform beneficiaries that comprise over 80% of sugar producers, continue to compete when they have to contend with high cost of fuel?" Mr. Yulo said.

"While we are happy with the recent decision of the DoF to suspend the hike in oil excise tax, we hope that the suspension will be beyond the three-month reprieve but at least for six months to a year, or until the people fully recover from the effects of the implementation of TRAIN 1," he added.

Separately the SRA said it authorized 17 companies to import 150,000 metric tons (MT) of sugar this year.

These companies are: ED&F Man, All Asian, Universal Robina Corp., San Fernando Eric Commercial, Delmax, Sweet Crystal, Interbrev, Bee Crescent, Sucden, Oro Allado, Busco Sugar, Coca Cola, Pepsi Cola, Nestle Philippines, Victorias Milling Co. Inc, Commodity Carrier, and Sweet Crystals.

Out of the 150,000 MT approved for importation this year, only 149,950 MT was taken up by the 17 importers, leaving a 50 MT balance.— **Reicelene Joy N. Ignacio**

The Manila Times

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Palay procurement up after NFA price increase

BY EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

THE National Food Authority (NFA) is stepping up its palay procurement program as more farmers and cooperatives are now selling their produce to the grains agency.

The move follows the NFA Council's having approved an additional P3 incentive to the agency's support price.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol said the NFA was able to procure about 8,000 metric tons (MT) in less than a week after the agency launched its Buffer Stocking Incentive (BSI) on Oct. 12, 2018 in a bid to boost buffer stocks.

"In just six days after the launching of the buffer stocking incentive of the NFA, it was able to procure close to 8,000 metric tons of paddy rice from farmers in different regions in the country," he said.

The figure, however, is only 6.16 percent of the NFA's procurement target for 2018.

The NFA aims to procure 2.6 million bags or 130,000 MT of palay from local farmers nationwide until yearend to boost buffer stock and rice distribution requirements.

Procurement activities in different provinces in the country, particularly Nueva Ecija and Iloilo City, continue to increase which may in turn boost NFA's buffer stock.

The DA chief noted the delay in the start of the procurement program. "Henceforth, the NFA will focus its resources on local palay procurement," he added.

Piñol earlier attributed the NFA's low procurement performance during the summer harvest to the high *palay* farmgate price offered by private traders ranging from P20 to P28 per kilogram.

This prompted the NFA Council to raise its buying price of palay from P17/kg to P20.70/kg to be competitive against that of the private traders.

Previously, the NFA's buying support price was P17/kg for clean and dry palay, with additional incentives of P0.20 to P0.50/kg for delivery; P0.20/kg drying incentive and P0.30/kg for cooperatives or farmers' organizations.

Meanwhile, NFA Officer-in-Charge Tomas R. Escarez is hoping that more farmers nationwide will sell their *palay* to NFA to help the agency achieve its procurement target.

"Our 279 buying stations nationwide are now fully operational. We are willing to extend beyond regular working hours to accept deliveries from farmers. If the farmers cannot deliver their palay to our buying stations, we are more than happy to deploy mobile procurement teams to pick up their produce directly from their areas," Escarez said.

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BIMP - EAGA states offering cheaper rice imports – MinDA

By **ANTONIO L. COLINA IV**

DAVAO CITY – Neighboring countries have expressed interest in supplying rice to Mindanao to lower the cost of the staple amid the reported shortages in the previous months, Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA) executive director Romeo Montenegro said on Wednesday.

Montenegro said members states of the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) have reached out to business players and MinDA and offered to supply cheap rice amid the supply and inflation issues in the country.

He said BIMP-EAGA exporters are willing to sell cheaper rice to Mindanao in a bid to counter rising inflation.

"Our neighbors in BIMP-EAGA, upon learning about the rice situation in Philippines and Mindanao months ago have explored ways by which they are able to supply rice but all of these have to be reckoned with the existing national policies we have in terms of rice importation," Montenegro said.

He said the volume has yet to be threshed out since the rice exporters from these areas have yet to negotiate with National Food Authority (NFA) Council and the Department of Agriculture.

"There's no specific in terms of volume although what they offer is they can provide alternative source of rice that can be viably priced for Mindanao, considering the proximity," Montenegro added.

MinDA chair Abul Khayr Alonto said the agency will meet with officials from Sulawesi, Indonesia and the Department of Trade and Industry to discuss possible rice importation arrangements.

The inflation rate in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) accelerated to 9% in September, the highest among five regions in Mindanao and the second highest in the country, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Inflation rate in the Soccsksargen region is at 8.2%, the second highest in Mindanao, followed by Davao Region (7.9%), Zamboanga Peninsula (7.7%), Northern Mindanao (6.9%), and Caraga (6.1%).

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Coke, Pepsi, Nestle ready to bring in imported sugar to boost operations

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR**

Coca-Cola Philippines (Coke), Pepsi Cola Products Philippines, Inc. (PCPPI), Nestle Philippines, Inc. are just some of the manufacturing companies that have been authorized to directly import sugar.

And based on a data from Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA), these companies are now ready to bring in the additional supply to the country for their own use.

It was just early this month when SRA formally order the importation of 150,000 MT of sugar, also allowing end-users or sugar-using industries to directly import sugar for the first time ever.

This was amid pressure for the government to help address the declining profits of some of the country's largest industrial companies who were directly hit by the tax imposed on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) under the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law. Once without taxes, SSBs have been slapped a tax rate of ₱6 per liter while drinks with High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS) are taxed ₱12 per liter.

Since then, Coke and other companies have always been vocal of their desire to directly import sugar even if the previous import policies don't allow it.

As of October 24, out of the 150,000 MT of sugar local traders and manufacturers have been authorized to import, 149,950 MT has already been taken up, which means the importation is already 99.97 percent complete.

Of the 17 firms that were allowed to join this particular importation, four manufacturing firms were able to make it to the list namely Coke, PCPPI, Nestle, and Interbev. Coke ordered 8,250 MT, while PCPPI purchased 12,200 MT. Nestle, on the other hand, will import 4,625 MT.

This would be the second time the Philippines is importing sugar this year and would be the first time the country is importing at the start of a sugar crop year, which stretches from September to August of the following year.

All the 200,000 MT of sugar from the last importation, which was announced in June, already entered the country and is now being distributed.

John Milton Lozande, secretary general of National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW), said the entry of more imported sugar will negatively affect the lives of 780,000 sugar workers in the Philippines.

This, since it could lower the prices of local sugar, effectively pulling down the wages of sugar workers.

At present, sugar workers in Negros only earn an average monthly income of ₱1,500 to ₱2,000 per month, which translates to just ₱30 to ₱67 per day. Sugar workers in Cagayan Valley, on the other hand, earn only an average of ₱170 a day.

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NFA: C. Visayas rice price to drop before December

By **MINERVA BC NEWMAN**

CEBU CITY – The National Food Authority (NFA) here expects rice prices in Central Visayas to drop before December as imported rice continue to flood the markets and harvest season begins.

NFA Central Visayas Director Fernando Nunez told a media briefing Wednesday that based on its monitoring, the price of commercial rice prices is down by ₱3 per kilogram "and this will continue until the end of the year."

Nunez said the rice inventory in Central Visayas as of October 22, is 1,599,317 bags (of 50 kilos) and the rice consumption requirement per day in the region is 33,587 bags.

The total rice importation allocation for the region is 980,000 bags for both open tender and government-to-government schemes, while the private sector's minimum access volume (MAV) of 805,000 metric tons.

The NFA warehouse has 977,499 bags which are ready for deployment, Nunez said.

The government usually imports rice during the second and third quarters of the year when local rice production dips, he said.

"It is not advisable to import rice during the onset of the rainy season because humidity and moist affect the quality of the rice in warehouses," he added.

Rice makes up 23 percent of a typical household's food basket, and corn is four percent. Nunez said the implication is when rice prices rise, all other things in the food basket follow and this drives inflation.

NFA and the Philippine Association of Supermarkets in the region are trying to work out a memorandum of agreement (MOA) for NFA rice to be available in selected malls and supermarkets in Central Visayas, Nunez said.

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A broader look at today's business

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SRA board member backs sugar planters' call to freeze TRAIN law implementation

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

SUGAR farmers and a member of the sugar board have thrown their support behind the proposed suspension of the additional excise tax on fuel under the second tranche of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law to aid planters in coping with rising production costs and bring down the price of the sweetener in the market.

Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) Board Member Emilio Yulo, who represents the planters sector, proposed that the suspension on the oil excise tax hike should be at least six months instead of the three-month reprieve.

"Sugar farmers and a member of the sugar board are proposing to suspend the excise tax on fuel under the second tranche of the TRAIN law for at least six months to aid planters cope with rising production costs," Yulo said in a news statement issued on Thursday.

"Part of our mandate in SRA is to encourage mechanization of farms to make these more efficient and globally competitive. How can our sugar planters, particularly the small farmers and agrarian-reform beneficiaries that comprise over 80 percent of sugar producers, continue to compete when they have to contend with high cost of fuel?" Yulo added.

The Confederation of Sugar Producers' Associations Inc. (Confed), which accounts for 60 percent of the total planters in the country, has also expressed support to suspend the additional hike on oil prices starting January 1, 2019.

"Fuel is a primary need of the sugar industry from start to finish, and with mechanization at the forefront of our program to enhance our global competitiveness, the imposition of excise tax for fuel has greatly increased our production cost," Confed said in a separate statement.

"While mechanization's intent is to lower our production cost, the same has not been achieved because of the implementation of the TRAIN law.

We fear that further implementing TRAIN 2, which will raise again the levy on fuel by P2 after a three-month reprieve, will lead to higher production cost, ergo huge losses to the sugar industry," Confed added.

Confed also backs the idea of extending the suspension on additional excise tax beyond the three-month reprieve but did not give a specific timeline.

"We appeal to President Rodrigo Duterte to extend the suspension in behalf of the 5 million direct and indirect stakeholders of the sugar industry," it said.

"Coupled with that fact is the recent joint agreement by the Sugar Regulatory Administration and our economic departments to cap a price on sugar, industry stakeholders, which comprise mostly of small planters and agrarian-reform beneficiaries, will have to bear the cost of rising fuel prices in the event that the national government will enforce the TRAIN laws," it added.

The group also proposed to cut also the additional taxes imposed on other commodities, such as sugar, aside from fuel to arrest the country's rising inflation.

"We are also joining the call to suspend, or at the very least, slash the excise tax on fuel and other commodities under TRAIN 1 in the light of rising inflation," it said.

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PHL dairy imports up 12.64% in January-June–NDA report

PHILIPPINE dairy imports in the first half rose by 12.64 percent to 1.425 million metric tons in liquid milk equivalent (MMT-LME), from last year's 1.265 MMT-LME, according to the National Dairy Authority (NDA).

The latest data from the NDA also showed that the value of imports in the January-to-June period expanded by 10.85 percent to P25.098 billion, from P22.641 billion.

"Milk powder constitutes the bulk of imports contributing 52 percent to the total milk and dairy products imports," the NDA said in its Philippine Dairy Update report published recently.

"Skimmed milk powder comprised 30 percent, whey powder at 11 percent, whole milk powder at 4 percent and buttermilk powder at 7 percent of milk imports," it added.

Imports of skimmed milk powder rose by nearly 5 percent to 614,940 MT-LME, from 586,330 MT-LME recorded in the January-to-June period of 2017.

Data from the NDA showed that the bulk of the country's dairy imports came from the United States, which accounted for nearly 30 percent, followed by New Zealand.

Dairy imports from the US during the six-month period reached 426,710 MT-LME, valued at $99.54 million, while those imported from the New Zealand reached 392,600 MT-LME.

A Global Agricultural Information Network (GAIN) report earlier noted that cheaper international dairy products would encourage local traders to import more milk this year.

The GAIN report prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service in Manila projected that the country's total milk imports this year would rise by 8 percent to 2.7 MMT-LME, from last year's 2.5 MMT-LME.

Data from the NDA also showed that the country's milk exports during the January-to-June period grew by 78.63 percent to 37,780 MT-LME, from last year's 21,150 MT-LME. Total earnings from dairy exports rose by 25.54 percent to $14.99 million, from $11.94 million recorded revenue last year.

"Evaporated milk, ice drops and cream were the big export items during the period. On the other hand, skimmed milk powder, ice cream/ice cream mixes, condensed milk and butter/butterfat recorded decrease in exports," the NDA said.

"Malaysia and Singapore were the top market of Philippine dairy products, accounting for 23 percent and 20 percent respectively of the entire export value," it added. ***Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas***

The Manila Times

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Representatives from the Bureau of Agriculture Research (from left) Danielle Joseph Sisican, Marnelie Subong and Elena Garces evaluate research papers under the Applied Research and Development-Fisheries and Aquatic Resources category at the BAR headquarters in Quezon City.

156 R&D papers vie for awards

A TOTAL of 156 research papers were subjected to initial evaluation to qualify for the 30th National Research Symposium (NRS) where the best research and scientific papers completed in the past five years or from 2013 to 2018 will be chosen.

Staged annually by the Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR) through the Institutional Development Division, the NRS identifies best scientific papers on agriculture and fisheries conducted by Filipino researchers from various agencies such as the Department of Agriculture (DA), state colleges and universities, and other institutions under the DA's National Research and Development System for Agriculture and Fisheries (NaRDSAF).

Present during the initial evaluation activity held at the BAR headquarter in Quezon City early this week were experts from different partner-agencies of the bureau serving as judges and evaluators.

All research paper entries were categorized as follows: Basic Research; Applied Research (Technology Generation/Information Generation/ Technology Adaptation/ Technology Verification) for Agriculture and Engineering and Postharvest; Applied Research and Development (Technology Generation/Information Generation/Technology Adaptation/Technology Verification) for Fisheries and Aquatic Resources; Socio-Economics; and Development for Agriculture.

"Entry papers with a score of 80 percent and above will count as qualifiers, from which only the top three of each category/subcategory with a score of 85 percent or higher will be presented during the symposium proper on Nov. 7, 2018 at the Philippine International Convention Center, Pasay City," BAR said in a statement.

The awarding ceremony will follow on November 8. The theme for this year's NRS is "Generating and Integrating Best Practices in Agriculture and Fisheries through Participatory R&D (research and development)."

"Likewise, the NRS serves as a venue to give due honor and recognition to researchers whose works have resulted in new technologies, information, processes or systems that are of advantage to Philippine agriculture," BAR said.

CONRAD M. CARIÑO

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Republic of the Philippines
Department of Agriculture
Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources
PCA Bldg., Elliptical Rd., Diliman, Quezon City 1101
☎ TeleFax (632) 929-3439

PUBLIC HEARING ANNOUNCEMENT

TO: ALL SEAWEED STAKEHOLDERS (*FARMER LEADERS, BUYERS/TRADERS, PROCESSORS, EXPORTERS, ACADEME, LGU's & OTHER POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS*)

WHAT: "PUBLIC HEARING OF THE PROPOSED FISHERIES ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER (FAO): PROHIBITION ON THE USE OF ANY SUBSTANCE, CHEMICALS AND OTHER COMPOUNDS IN SEAWEED FARMING"

WHO: Visayas Cluster (Regions V, VI, VII, VIII, and CARAGA)

WHERE: Maayo Hotel, Plaridel Street, Mandaue City, Cebu

WHEN: November 13, 2018; 8:00AM-5:00PM

For more details please contact the Secretariat National Coordinating Unit-Seaweed Development Program at (02) 929-3439 & 0922-2760234; e-mail add: ncu_sdp@yahoo.com

P.S. October 26, 2018

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Sugar producers seek TRAIN 2 suspension

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The Confederation of Sugar Producers' Associations Inc. (Confed) is calling on the Department of Finance to suspend not just the excise tax on fuel but the implementation of the entire second phase of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law.

The DOF recently announced the suspension of the hike in excise tax for fuel for at least three months which will start in January next year.

"We fear that further implementing TRAIN 2 which will raise again the levy on fuel by P2 after a three month reprieve will lead to higher production cost, ergo huge losses to the sugar industry," Confed chairman Nicolas Ledesma said.

"We are also joining the call to suspend, or at the very least, slash the excise tax on fuel and other commodities under TRAIN 1 in the light of rising inflation," he added.

The sugar industry has been arguing that the imposition of excise tax for fuel has significantly increased production cost given that fuel is a primary need from start to finish and with mechanization at the forefront of its program to enhance global competitiveness.

"While mechanization's intent is to lower our production cost, the same has not been achieved because of the implementation of the TRAIN Law," Ledesma said.

The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA), for its part, also welcomed the decision of the economic managers to suspend the tax hike as this will augur well for the industry that uses oil as a primary component in sugar production.

"How can our sugar planters, particularly the small farmers and agrarian reform beneficiaries that comprise over 80 percent of sugar producers, continue to compete when they have to contend with the high cost of fuel?" SRA board member Dino Yulo said.

"We hope the suspension will be at least for six months to a year, or until the people fully recover from the effects of the implementation of TRAIN 1," he added.

Meanwhile, 16 private companies will import 150,000 metric tons (MT) of sugar.

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

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ILANG TINDERO UMAPELA TUNGKOL SA SRP, PANGALAN NG BIGAS

UMAPELA ang ilang nagtitinda ng bigas na bigyan sila ng sapat na panahon para maka-paghanda sa pagpapatupad ng suggested retail price (SRP) at bagong pagpangalan sa bigas, na nakatakdang magsimula sa Sabado.

Ayon sa ilang nagtitinda ng bigas, handa silang sumunod sa itinakdang SRP pero aminado rin si-lang mahihirapan sila sa pagpapatupad nito dahil pabago-bago ang presyo ng bigas.

May kalituhan din daw para sa kanila ang hakbang na paglimita sa mga label o pangalan ng bigas.

Ayon pa sa mga nagtitinda ng bigas, kaya pa nilang ibigay ang SRP sa ngayon dahil mura ang bigas bunsod ng anihan at maraming suplay.

Ayon sa isang tindera, pumapatak na P1 kada kilo ang kita niya sa P44 na SRP ng well-milled na bigas pero lugi raw siya dahil sa renta, pasahod sa tauhan, at bayad sa trucking na umaabot din sa P60,000 kada buwan.

Hahanap na lang daw siya ng trader o supplier na mura ang benta.

"Pero kung wala naman silang maibibigay na mababa roon sa pasok sa presyo na 'yan, wala tayong magagawa kundi sumunod sa gusto nila," anang tindera.

Sinabi naman ng ibang nagtitinda na babawi na lang sila sa special rice na hindi papatawan ng SRP.

Ayon sa Department of Agriculture (DA), hindi dapat lumagpas sa P39 ang kada kilo ng regular-milled rice (lokal), P44 ang kada kilo ng well-milled rice (lokal), at P47 ang kada kilo ng premium rice (lokal).

Hindi naman dapat humigit sa P43 ang kada kilo ng imported premium rice, at P39 ang kada kilo ng imported well-milled rice, ayon sa DA.

NALILITO SA PAGPAPANGALAN

Ayon pa sa mga nagtitinda ng bigas, namo-mroblema sila sa pagpangalan sa mga bigas.

Kaya nanawagan sila sa DA na maglabas ng mga alituntuning mauunawaan daw nila.

Nauna nang ipag-utos ng DA ang pagtang-gal ng mga pangalan ng bigas gaya ng "Sinando-meng," "Super Angelica," at "Yummy Rice."

Sa halip, regular-milled, well-milled, pre-mium, at special rice na lamang ang itatawag sa mga ito.

Isa sa mga inihalimbawa ng mga nagtitinda ay ang halos magkaparehong hitsura at kulay ng well-milled at premium na bigas. Mas marami lang daw durog ang well-milled.

Pero kapag hindi maganda ang pagkadurog at pagkagiling sa premium rice ay maaari raw itong maging well-milled, at malagyan ng ibang presyo.

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

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SRP SA BIGAS AT SIMPLENG LABEL SIMULA BUKAS—DA

ILULUNSAD ng Department of Agriculture (DA) simula bukas, Sabado, Oktubre 27, ang pagpapatupad ng suggested retail prices (SRP) at simpleng label ng bigas sa merkado ng Metro Manila at greater Manila area.

Ayon sa report, aprubado na ng NFA council ang mga sumusunod na label ng bigas at ang kanilang katumbas na SRP bawat kilo:

Imported well-milled - P39; Premium imported (PG1) - P43; Premium imported (PG2) - P40; Local regular-milled - P39; Local well-milled - P44; Local premium grade - P47; Special rice - walang SRP.

Gaganapin ang opisyal na paglulunsad bukas, Sabado, sa Commonwealth market sa Quezon City.

Subalit ang regulasyon ay magiging epektibo lamang sa mga retailer sa Metro Manila at greater Manila area dahil ang pagpapatupad sa ibang rehiyon ay aaprubahan pa.

Magsisimulang magpataw ng multa ang awtoridad 15 araw matapos na mailathala ang regulasyon para sa pangkalahatang sirkulasyon. Nahaharap sa multa, pagbawi ng lisensiya at malamang na pagkakakulong ang mga lalabag sa regulasyon.

Ayon kay Agriculture Secretary Manny Piñol, ang retailer na lalabag sa SRP o labeling rules ay nahaharap sa multa na aabot sa P1 million.

"The violations will also be covered by the Price Act, meaning if they sell fake dinorado or if they use the name sinandomeng when the actual rice being sold is not that variety, they will be covered by the Price Act. The penalty will be between P2,000 to P1 million," sabi niya.

Umaapela rin ang DA sa publiko ng kooperasyon at pang-unawa sa kanilang pagtatakda ng bagong SRP at labeling ng bigas.

"'Yung special rice, for example, na Cordillera, they harvest only once a year. It's a special rice variety. Gusto mong kumain ng masarap, mabango at talagang fancy [na] rice, you have to pay the price," sabi ni Piñol.

"There was a spirited discussion... among stakeholders and there were calls for higher SRPs. But in the end, I explained to them, in the desire of this government right now is to make rice affordable to the people," dagdag niya.

Tempo
NEWS IN A FLASH
THE NATION'S FASTEST GROWING NEWSPAPER

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Lower rice prices seen

By MINERVA NEWMAN

CEBU CITY – The National Food Authority (NFA) here expects rice prices in Central Visayas to dip before December due to the availability of imported rice now flooding the markets and the onset of the harvest season, said NFA-7 regional director Fernando Nunez in a media briefing Wednesday at the Cebu Business Hotel, Colon St., this city.

Nunez bared that based on its market monitoring prices of commercial rice has decreased up to ₱3 per kilogram "and this will continue until the end of the year," he added.

According to Nunez rice industry supply situation or inventory in Central Visayas as of October 22, 2018 is at 1,599,317 bags (of 50 kilos) and rice consumption requirement per day in the region is at 33,587 bags.

NFA-7 total rice importation allocation for Central Visayas is at 980,000 bags for both open tender and government-to-government schemes while the private sector is also given minimum access volume (MAV) of 805,000 metric tons.

To date, NFA warehouse has 977,499 good bags which are now ready for deployment to the provinces in the region, Nunez added.

The matter of rice importation is a policy direction that is based on the seasonality of Palay production. It is usually during quarters 2 and 3 that rice production and availability are low that we recommend rice importation during the lean months, Nunez said.

"It is not advisable to import rice during the onset of the rainy season because humidity and moist affect the quality of the rice in warehouses," he added.

Rice is 23 percent shares in the entire food basket in the household while corn is only at four percent. Nunez said the implication here is when rice prices are increased, all other things in the food basket follow and this drive inflation.

According to Nunez to prevent the low supply of rice that triggers inflation, the NFA and the Philippine association of supermarkets in the region are in discussions and negotiations to pursue the memorandum of agreement (MOA) for NFA-rice to be available in selected malls and supermarkets in Central Visayas.

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Agrinurture acquires Australian firm

AGRINURTURE, INC. is planning to expand into Australia, starting with the acquisition of an agribusiness company.

In a disclosure to the stock exchange on Thursday, the listed agribusiness firm said its board of directors gave the go signal for its acquisition of Australian firm Plentex Limited.

Plentex owns a subsidiary in the Philippines with interests in agricultural development. Plentex Philippines, Inc. is currently working on an integrated manufacturing plant for local crops and for the production of feedstock for a proposed aquafeed plant.

Meanwhile, Plentex's Australian operations involves a large scale feed manufacturing plant in Victoria for the supply of premium aquatic and pet foods for both local and international demand.

Agrinurture said the company will expand its business operations in Australia through acquisition of existing companies.

At the same time, Agrinurture's board of directors has approved the application for listing in foreign exchanges, as well as the creation of global depository receipts (GDR).

"The company intends to be listed in foreign exchange/s, and to create Global Depository Receipts, that are intended to raise additional working capital," the company said.

GDRs are depository receipts issued in more than one country for shares in a foreign company.

Agrinurture is currently led by businessman Antonio L. Tiu.

Shares in Agrinurture gained 0.67% or 12 centavos to close at P18.10 at the stock exchange on Thursday. — **A.B.Francia**

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#NATION AT A GLANCE:

ZAMBOANGA PENINSULA: ZAMBOANGA CITY

Zamboanga fisheries sector makes wish list to boost production

THE FISHERIES sector in Zamboanga City has drawn up a proposal designed to increase production and harvest in fishponds, seaweed farms, and common fishing grounds, as well as improve the income of those engaged in fish and dried fish trading. Carmencita C. Sanchez, officer-in-charge of the City Agriculturist Office (CAO), said the proposal was the sector representatives' output during the food security stakeholder's consultation conducted by the CAO last week. "They wanted post harvest facilities like solar dyers, warehouse and drying facilities to include truck payloader with bailing machine, and a sea weed nursery," Ms. Sanchez said in a statement released by the city government. Zamboanga City currently has at least 130 fish-drying plants, which employs about 1,950 direct workers. "All these proposal, requests and recommendations during the food summit will be submitted to the city government for final approval and for funding," she said. — **Albert F. Arcilla**

KWSIT/CIO

THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

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Moderating October inflation seen at 6.55%

The country's inflation might have already peaked in the third quarter when it averaged 6.7 percent in September, the Dutch financial services giant ING Bank in Manila said on Thursday.

If declining crude oil prices continue their trend, normalizing pump prices and utility rates, together with favorable base effects will all factor into a decelerating trend for inflation towards end-2019.

"Declining food prices together with lower utility rates and pump prices bode well for the inflation outlook," ING economist Nicholas Mapa said.

Food inflation were the primary drivers in pushing the rate at which prices change to a nine-year in September and finally compelled supply-side regulators to act with speed and resolve to stabilize the situation.

There have been indications, he said, the long drive to where prices have been pushed and the measures to correct or counteract them seem finally to have gained traction. Core inflation in September, he noted, in fact moderated to 4.7 percent from 4.8 percent in August.

According to him, this boosts the likelihood the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas will no longer use its potent interest rate weapon when it next meets in November as the non-monetary policy measures begin to take root ahead of the Christmas season.

The moderating core inflation numbers now being reflected in the latest price surveys, he said, validate earlier expectations that indeed inflation might have already been tamed at last and that both the monetary and non-monetary measures have finally bore fruit.

"The normalization of supply chains after super typhoon "Mangkhut" coupled with the government's efforts to augment supply and improve distribution has been felt on the ground with the latest official data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) validating this development," Mapa said, noting the P1 drop in the price of regular milled rice across seven of the 17 regions. Well milled rice posted an average week-on-week decline of 0.5 percent.

He also noted that meat and fish prices stabilized amid the reported substantial declines for some vegetables such as carrots, pechay, cabbage and white potato.

Food inflation were the primary drivers in pushing the rate at which prices change to a nine-year in September and finally compelled supply-side regulators to act with speed and resolve to stabilize the situation.

Lower utility costs from Meralco in October in addition to successive weeks of hefty oil price rollbacks added to the possibility of inflation peak in the previous quarter while October print is seen to slightly decelerate at 6.5 percent year-on-year, Mapa said.

Given these developments, Mapa argued the risks to inflation are now "more balanced" as upside pressures from transport fare adjustments in November were offset by downside pressures from the National Food Authority's plan to fast track the additional 703,000 MT of rice to augment supply this coming holiday season.

"If declining crude oil prices continue their trend, normalizing pump prices and utility rates, together with favorable base effects will all factor into a decelerating trend for inflation towards end-2019," Mapa said. **Joshua Lao**

Malaya
Business Insight

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IRRI gene bank will conserve rice forever, funding assured

BY PAUL ICAMINA

THE conservation of 136,000 rice varieties for perpetuity is assured with the signing Tuesday of a never-ending funding of $1.4 million a year by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and the Crop Trust on World Food Day and during the 5th International Rice Congress in Singapore.

The Crop Trust supports crop conservation in genebanks, whether in international or national genebanks and in the world's backup facility, the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

IRRI, based in Los Baños, Laguna, is the world's premier research institute on rice, a staple crop that feeds more than 3 billion or half of the global population.

IRRI's Genebank, the world's largest rice collection, maintains a massive rice collection and saves almost all known varieties of rice crops forever.

The first phase of the Crop Trust funding will cover essential operations of the IRRI genebank from 2019-2023, including conservation, regeneration and distribution of its cultivated and wild seed collections. At the same time, IRRI will provide expert advice to five national genebanks to help their crop conservation efforts.

A second five-year phase after 2023 allows for any revisions in the genebank's business plan and operational costs. It will be renewed every five years into the future.

"This is fantastic news for the future of rice research," said Matthew Morell, director general of IRRI. "The Crop Trust funding enables IRRI to focus on using its large and diverse rice collection to benefit the world."

Scientists worldwide use the seeds stored at IRRI's high-tech facility to develop improved rice varieties that can withstand the impacts of climate change such as severe flooding and drought which, according to IRRI, already threatens production in key rice-producing regions, including India, China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia and Malaysia.

One "submarine" variety is appropriate for about 20 million hectares of rice land across Asia regularly hit by flooding. Most rice dies within days of submergence under water; submarine rice withstands flooding for up to two weeks. The rice variety is now grown by five million farmers in the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Laos and Indonesia. Researchers are now adapting the rice for Africa.

Also in the IRRI genebank are the ancestors and descendants of IR8, the world's first high-yielding rice, the "miracle rice" that brought Asia back from the brink of famine during the Green Revolution in the 1960s and 70s. The rice was grown in the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar (then Burma), Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and India.

The IRRI genebank conserves wild rice species which have been used to develop varieties that tolerate heat and drought and resist pests and diseases. Some wild species have been used to develop varieties that can tolerate iron toxicity, a common problem that affects flooded, lowland rice, mostly in Africa.

IRRI is pioneering ways of improving efficiency, including using tailor-made robotics to automate seed sorting processes.

"Our work to conserve rice has a proven track record in bringing benefits to the world," said Ruaraidh Sackville-Hamilton, an evolutionary biologist who manages the IRRI genebank.

"With this collection safely conserved, we can continue to use it to develop improved rice varieties that farmers can use to respond to the challenges in rice production and to adapt to the changing tastes and preferences of consumers everywhere," Hamilton added.

By 2050, annual global rice consumption is estimated by IRRI to rise from 450 million to 525 million tons. More than half a billion Asians eat more than 90 percent of the rice on the table.

"This is a landmark moment for IRRI and for the Crop Trust," said Marie Haga, executive director of the Crop Trust. "At a time when many donors have increasingly complex demands on their resources, it's important that the world's crop collections are safe, secure and the genebanks functioning effectively."

The IRRI genebank is one of 11 genebanks of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), a global network of 15 agricultural research institutes that include IRRI.

The CGIAR genebanks conserve millions of crop seeds, distributing more than 100,000 samples to researchers and farmers around the world every year.

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UN crafts assistance plan for PH

THE United Nations is crafting an assistance plan for the Philippines that is focused on food security, the peace process, and environmental protection for the next five years.

"We're working with the Philippine government in designing our next five-year plan on how our assistance is going to be. I'm hoping to launch that in 2019 across the UN system" Ola Almgren, UN Philippines resident and humanitarian coordinator, said during the reception of United Nations Day in Taguig City on Wednesday night.

Almgren said the Philippines is facing challenges on food security and is "bringing together [a] policy" in line with the Sustainable Development Goals related to prosperity.

He added that there is a way of "sharing the wealth" and "generating the wealth of the country" without exhausting its natural resources.

While there are challenges, Almgren said the Philippines is "doing quite well" in pursuing the SDGs compared to other countries.

"The Philippines, if you look back and look at the achievement of Millennium Development Goals [MDGs], the Philippines didn't achieve them all fully, but it made good progress, and I believe compared to the global benchmark now, the Philippines is advancing quite well towards 2030" he added.

The SDGs are a set of 17 aspirational goals that seek to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

These build on the MDGs and seek to address the economic, social and environmental aspects of development.

The Philippines is a strong advocate for its achievement and has embedded it in its national plans and programs through the Philippine Development Plan.

During the reception, Acting Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo highlighted the Philippines' major contributions to the work of the UN in areas of migration, SDGs, climate change, human rights, and peacekeeping. **PNA**

The Manila Times

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Coffee industry to honor movers

FIVE proponents in the Philippine coffee industry will receive the Coffee Cup of Distinction award for their exceptional achievements and outstanding contributions to the industry.

In celebration of Coffee Month this October, the Philippine Coffee Board Inc. (PCBI) will hold the first Coffee Dinner today (Friday) at the Mayuree Grand Ballroom of the DusitThani Manila Hotel in Makati City. The event will highlight the recognition of exemplary individuals who have become an inspiration to the new generation of industry players in the country.

"Today's coffee industry landscape is changing, yielding to a new crop of coffee entrepreneurs and farmers who are reshaping the coffee field with their novel ideas and dynamic thinking obtained from the best in the trade," said PCBI President Pacita Juan. "By honoring these coffee champions, we want to underscore and share their inspiring lessons with today's coffee players."

To be conferred the Coffee Cup of Distinction awards are Enrile (posthumous) and Evelyn Asuncion of Silca Coffee Roasting Co., Ernest Escaler of Gourmet Farms, Jose Mercado of Café de Lipa, Amado Silva of Siete Baracos Coffee, and professor Benjamin Dimas, former director of Benguet State University's Agroforestry Project.

The Coffee Dinner has invited Sen. Cynthia Villar, chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food, to deliver the keynote speech.

Another highlight of the evening will be the symbolic signing of the memorandum of agreement between PCBI and the Dusit Hospitality Management College. The partnership aims to deliver coffee courses such as Coffee 101 (Introduction to Coffee) and Introduction to Coffee Farming, among others.

The Manila Times

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Food security and agriculture R&D

WAYS OF THE OASIS
DR. WILLIAM DAR

LET us first refresh ourselves on the difference between food self-sufficiency and food security.

Food self-sufficiency refers to a country being able to produce its food needs, and that can be limited to one or two staples. In the case of the Philippines, we can say food self-sufficiency is attained if we achieve rice self-sufficiency.

But a country achieving food self-sufficiency does not mean it is already food secure or has achieved food security. And the Philippines, despite having achieved above 93 percent rice self-sufficiency, among other crops, ranked at No. 70 with a score of 51.5 points in the latest findings of the 2018 Global Food Security Index (GFSI) report published by The Economist Intelligence Units. The latest GFSI report was researched by Corteva Agriscience.

Singapore and Ireland ranked No. 1 and No. 2, respectively, achieving scores of 85.9 and 85.5 points, respectively. The highest possible score is 100. Let me also disclose that the Philippines got a very disappointing score for agriculture research and development (ARD) from the GFSI report. How low? Just read on!

So what does the Philippines score of 51.5 points mean to you, me or all of us?

My simple answer is: the Philippines still has a long way to go when it comes to achieving food security. Even achieving 100-percent sufficiency in rice is not the answer, as leading rice-exporting countries like Thailand and Vietnam were ranked at 54th and 62nd respectively, with scores of 58.9 and 56, respectively.

Weaknesses and strengths

The 2018 GFSI report said the strengths of the country in terms of food security were in addressing the following issues: Nutritional standards (100 points), volatility in agriculture production (98.4), urban absorption capacity (96.8), food loss (93.4), food safety (93.3), agricultural import tariffs (84), and proportion of population under global poverty line (83.8). The report said a score of above 75 indicated strengths of a country with the perfect score at 100.

While the strengths identified by the 2018 GFSI report for the Philippines can be reasons to rejoice, the weaknesses identified should be a cause for great concern. They are: public expenditure on agricultural research and development or ARD (zero points), corruption (zero), gross domestic product per capita (6), and protein quality (19.1).

Yes, the Philippines got a zero score in ARD from the latest GFSI report, and should we be surprised about that? Should we all be surprised that it also gave the Philippines zero in addressing corruption?

And the latest GFSI report giving a low score of 6 for GDP per capita clearly shows that majority of households may not have enough purchasing power for food, including those of smallholder farmer and fishers (ironically).

A low score of 19.1 for protein quality also means poor households do not have access to foods offering protein, which is important for children in the formative years and for people who have to work hard, including our smallholder farmers and fishers.

And there lies the paradox of Philippine agriculture — most smallholder farmers and fishers still live in poverty and could not afford enough food for themselves and their families.

From the findings of the 2018 GFSI report on the Philippines, what is the way forward to making the country more food secure?

More infrastructure and ARD

The summary of the 2018 GFSI report enumerated improvements from developing countries in their quest to achieve food security. Let me quote one of them: "Lower-middle- and low-income countries experienced the most substantial gains over the past year. The improvement among lower-income countries signals a shift towards more resilient food security measures, including developments in agricultural infrastructure and strengthened capacity to feed rapidly growing urban populations."

Among the key agricultural infrastructure the Philippines still needs to improve are farm-to-market roads, cold storage facilities, general facilities for storing grains, drying and milling facilities for grains (primarily rice and corn), sea ports, trading centers, among others.

So we should also have a "Build, Build, Build" program for the agriculture sector.

But more important for the Philippines is to ramp up ARD spending and focus it on increasing productivity and poverty alleviation through enterprise development and sustainability. Thus we really need to create more agripreneurs among the smallholder farmers, fisher and the youth.

Let me also add that the latest GFSI report said a "range of risks" still threatens world food security including climate change and dwindling natural resources.

In the case of the Philippines, we don't have much land supply to expand the current area devoted to agriculture and our water resources need to be rehabilitated. Also, the Philippines is still one of the countries most affected by climate change.

And how do we increase farm yields given the dwindling supply of lands and water, and effects of climate change? The answer is simple: Ramp up ARD spending and focus it on poverty reduction and food security.

I have written much about ARD and the need for an extension system that will deliver matured technologies to the hands of smallholder farmers, fishers, agriculture stakeholders and the industry in general. And it is very clear what type of agriculture we have now given the country's low investment on ARD: little or no value-adding; dominance of monocropping systems; dwindling soil and water resources; and millions of farmers and fishers trapped in poverty. Clearly, all of these issues affect the country's food security and food self-sufficiency situation.

So besides the 2018 GFSI report showing the country getting zero in ARD, what else should convince us on the need to enhance technology commercialization and increase ARD investment so we can achieve a better level of food security?

Maybe the scenario of hundreds of thousands of people lining up to buy rice? I shudder at such a thought.

Balita

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Pagtatampok ng 'best coco wine' sa 'Oktubafest'

MULING itatampok ngayong araw ang ipinagmamalaking coco wine ng Eastern Visayas, sa pagbubukas ng 'Oktubafest' sa Tacloban.

Ang piyesta, na lokal na bersiyon ng German beer fiesta na kilala bilang 'Octoberfest', ay idaraos sa Astrodome ng lungsod ngayong Oktubre 26.

Sa isang panayam nitong Martes, sinabi ni Waray Partylist Rep. Victoria Noel na ang pagdiriwang ang pinakamalaking pagtitipon ng mga tuba (coconut wine) producer sa buong rehiyon.

Para sa pagdriwang ngayon taon, nahahati ang paligsahan sa tatlong kategorya; ang best "bahal" o old at bahalina o aged; best "kutil" o special wine mixture; at ang best tuba-infused dish cooking for hotels and restaurants.

Para sa bukas na kategorya, magkakaroon ng on-the-spot "kawit" painting, on the spot photo contest, at on the spot Vlogging contest.

Ang "Kawit" ay gawa sa kawayan na ginagamit sa pag-aani o pagkuha ng tuba. Inilalagay ito sa balikat ng aani sa pamamagitan ng kahoy na kawit at nagsisilbing lalagyan ng bagong ani na katas.

Ngayon, sa ikasampung anibersaryo, nangako ang Waray partylist na magapatuloy ang pagdiriwang ng Oktubafest upang maipakita ang suporta sa industriya ng pagniniyog, na pangunahing hanap-buhay ng mga tao sa rehiyon.

"This is synonymous to gaiety and merrymaking and has always been the center of every local festivity, both of the humble and of the grandiose in form," ani Noel.

Layunin din ng pagdiriwang na maisulong ang kultural na yaman at ang industriya ng pagtutuba sa mga probinsiya ng Leyte at Samar.

Ang tuba ay isang inuming alcohol na nagmumula sa katas ng puno ng niyog. Sa Layte, pinatatagal ang alak hanggang dalawang taon.

PNA

Malaya
Business Insight

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Wheat at 6-week low, soybeans extend losses

CHICAGO wheat futures lost more ground on Thursday with prices dropping to a six-week low as a stronger dollar raised concerns over US exports, which have been facing competition from the Black Sea region.

Soybeans slid to a two-week low, while corn fell for a second consecutive session as freshly harvested US crops hit the market.

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board Of Trade was down 0.7 percent at $4.96-1/4 a bushel. Earlier in the session, the contract dropped to its weakest since Sept. 13 at $4.95-1/2 a bushel.

Soybean dipped 0.2 percent to $8.49 a bushel, having slid earlier to $8.48-3/4 a bushel, the lowest since Oct. 11; and corn lost 0.3 percent to $3.67 a bushel, after ending the previous session 0.5 percent weaker.

"Wheat is under a bit of pressure as we have yet to see wheat exports from the United States pick up," said Phin Ziebell, agribusiness economist, National Australia Bank.

"Black Sea exporters are still pretty much dominating the show although there are expectations of demand for US supplies next year."

An index measuring the US currency's value versus six major peers was only a touch lower in Asia at 96.35, after gaining an impressive 0.5 percent on Wednesday.

A stronger dollar makes the greenback-priced commodities expensive for buyers holding other currencies. - ***Reuters***

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A broader look at today's business

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Mystery of missing US pigs, swine fever spark hog-price surge

THERE'S a mystery unraveling in the hog market: call it the case of the missing pigs.

For weeks now, traders have been expecting slaughter rates in the United States to jump as the government has consistently reported a swelling domestic herd this year. Hurricane Florence hit North Carolina, one of the top hog states, in mid-September, slowing down processing operations. But that bottleneck should have cleared by now, and analysts were expecting a sudden rush of hogs to market. Instead, slaughter rates have stayed low, raising questions about whether the animals were ever really there, said Rich Nelson, chief strategist at Allendale Inc. in McHenry, Illinois.

The lower-than-expected US slaughter is coming at a time when a highly contagious, pig-eradicating virus is spreading through China, the world's top pork consumer. African swine fever continues to spread in the country, with several new outbreaks reported this week.

The combination of supply woes sent hog futures in Chicago up by the exchange limit of 3 cents on Wednesday to settle at 57.525 cents a pound. Prices have surged 11 percent this week.

"We don't have this backup in market hogs like we expected," Nelson said, adding that US Department of Agriculture estimates for rising animal inventories may have been miscalculated. ***Bloomberg News***