CLIPPINGS FOR WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 07, 2019

A. SEC. DAR w/ EFP QUOTED

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
New agri chief targets 4% growth
More sugar imports mulled
Matching Dar with DAR

THE MANILA TIMES
Duterte appoints Piñol as MinDA chair
Higher LanBank Exposure to agri sector vowed
Dar eyes 3-4% growth in agri sector

BUSINESS WORLD
DA's Dar says will focus on food security, farmer prosperity

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT
Piñol officially transferred to MinDA
Reforms to push agri growth to 3-4%

MANILA STANDARD
New agriculture chief bares strategy to revive local farming

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
Dar to speed up rice competitiveness program

MANILA BULLETIN
***Photo*: New Agri Chief**
Former DA chief apologizes to farmers, fisherfolk
Dar supports sugar sector liberalization

BUSINESS MIRROR
'RCEF will be used well, fast for farmers'
New DA chief wants to double farmers' income

PILIPINO MIRROR
Target ng DA sa loob ng 5 taon: Dobleng kita sa mga magsasaka

PILIPINO STAR MGAYON
Editoryal: Malaking hamon sa bagong Agriculture chief

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL
Dar seeks to double agri folks' income

ABANTE
DA Chief: Nasaan ang PB ng mga magsasaka?

B. DA FAMILY

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
Inflation cools to 2-year low 2.4% in July

THE MANILA TIMES
PH inflation eases to 2.4% in July

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
Inflation hits 2-yr low; BSP seen to cut rates
Go negosyo and SL agritech corp. partner for 'Masaganang Ani 300'

MANILA BULLETIN
Inflation cools down to 2.4% in July

PILIPINO MIRROR
7 Toneladang fossilized giant clams nabawi sa North NegOcc

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL
Improving watershed ecosystem mgm't

C. **AGRI-RELATED STORY**

THE PHILIPIPNE STAR
How they fought rice cartels, price spikes a century ago

THE MANILA TIMES
The small rice farmer in a dead man walking
Farmer finds success in agri-preneurship through science, thirst for learning

THE DAILY TRIBUNE
BCDA, LandBank lease pact at NCC

BUSINESS MIRROR
Editorial: R&D will move PHL farm sector forward

TEMPO
Inflation dips to 2.4%

PILIPINO STAR NGAYON
Inflation rate bumagal pa

D. **FOREIGN STORY**

THE DAILY TRIBUNE
Mechanized harvesting of goji berries

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL
Date: AUGUST 7, 2019 Page: C1 & C3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

New agri chief targets 4% growth

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

Acting Agriculture Secretary William Dar wants to grow the sector by as much as four percent in the next three years to achieve greater food security.

During his first Cabinet meeting Monday night, Dar said President Duterte's marching order was to improve the growth of the industry to be able to significantly contribute to the country's economy.

"Our population growth rate is 1.8 percent, we have to be higher than that. In the next three years, we should hit three to four percent," Dar said.

"We can reach this over time with the right framework, right strategies and right programs. We will reinvent and strengthen the programs and match it with our vision with food security still our primary goal," he said.

Over the last 10 years, the sector only grew by a measly average of 1.1 percent, always short of feeding the country's growing population.

"The President told me to just do it right and with legal basis. The President's campaign is no corruption and no criminality," he said.

Dar has proposed a strategy built around eight paradigms that also make up the "new thinking" for agriculture to help realize Duterte's vision for a food-secure Philippines and to double the income of farmers and fisherfolks.

These include modernization of agriculture, industrialization, promotion of exports, farm consolidation, roadmap development, infrastructure development, higher budget and investments for agriculture, and legislative support.

"We'll have a much broader perspective for agriculture as an industry, from production to high value adding to processing and marketing, both local and global. The value chain approach will help farmers earn more," Dar said.

"We must find more ways to help smallholder Filipino farmers and fishermen double their income in five years. This is a big challenge, but if we are united, purposeful, and systematic, we can do it," he said.

In the near-term, however, Dar said DA's focus in the next 100 days is to accelerate the implementation of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

He said the RCEF would give farmers important interventions that could make them more productive, competitive and profitable.

"In the next 100 days, we should have reached out to three million farmers. We have to give RCEF a chance," he said.

Dar cited the importance of agripreneurship in modernizing Philippine agriculture, as farming and fisheries should be treated as business undertakings.

He also underscored the need to create the framework for the digitization of farming and agribusiness activities in the country where credit is available, affordable and accessible.

Apart from this, Dar is pushing for a systematic and long-term strategy in developing and promoting exports of raw and processed agricultural products to achieve economies of scale in on-farm production that will generate sustained quantity and quality of export products.

"The government must also promote and support farm consolidation arrangements and should take the lead in generating the big ideas for the roadmaps, and should solicit inputs from the private sector and other stakeholders," he said.

Dar noted the importance of the Build Build Build program to improve linkages to the urban and domestic and export markets.

"The government and the private sector must provide the necessary budget and investment to grow and develop

Turn to C3

New agri... From C1

Philippine agriculture. The increased budget will help unlock the bigger potential contribution of agriculture and agribusiness to the economy, including more employment opportunities," he said.

Meanwhile, Dar called out nonperforming officials of the agency, saying he would give them time to improve their jobs.

"I don't want to just remove them. But they should perform otherwise they will be sent out. Everyone should move," Dar said.

Dar credited former Agriculture secretary Emmanuel Piñol, who is moving to the Mindanao Development Authority, for his good work, saying he will build from there.

"He did what he could. We will make improvements, strengthen what we already have," Dar said.

In a statement issued yesterday following the appointment of Dar, Piñol said his differences with the economic managers on critical issues, especially the rice liberalization, made his stay at DA untenable.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

Date: AUGUST 7, 2019 Page: C1 & C3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

More sugar imports mulled

Newly-appointed Agriculture Chief William Dar is open to allowing more sugar imports to meet demand as local production is expected to remain low in the next crop year.

While he has yet to meet with the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA), Dar said his goal is to always ensure food security.

"You have low production, what is your fallback? To import," he said.

Production is estimated to decline further from the less than two million metric tons expected for the next crop year amid climate change and the recent El Niño.

"I have yet to touch base with the SRA. I have some ideas if we need to import,

Turn to C3

More sugar... From C1

but I will consult with them because it should be a consensus," Dar said.

"It should be a balancing approach. One side on improving productivity, competitiveness and profitability and the other side, making it possible for industries to have a good working environment and the big industries to grow much better," he said.

Given the expected low production, the Philippines will likely lean toward importing more to meet local demand.

The country needs to maintain at least 2.2 million MT in local supply.

Production is expected to settle at 2.072 million MT for this crop year, still lower thanthe 2.08 million MT last crop year.

The SRA recently allowed the importation of 250,000 MT. This was the second round of importation following the 150,000 MT in October 2018 when the crop year started.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) earlier projected that sugar consumption would increase to 2.3 million MT following a flat 2018 as consumption of sugar sweetened beverages on slowed due to higher taxes.

Domestic food processing and beverage firms, nevertheless, continued to expand as consumers adjusted to higher sugar taxes.

For this crop year, demand is pegged at 2.25 million MT as imported sugar fills in the decline in local production and the drop in imports of high fructose corn syrup. – **Louise Maureen Simeon**

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

Date: AUGUST 7, 2019 Page: 11

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

COMMONSENSE

MARICHU A. VILLANUEVA

Matching Dar with DAR

As of June this year, almost five million hectares of land have been distributed to almost three million agrarian reform beneficiaries all over the country since Day 1 of the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte. This so far has been the reported accomplishment of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) in the first three years, or halfway through the six-year term of office of President Duterte.

As far as the President is concerned, these titles so far distributed by DAR represented not just ownership over the lands that Filipino farmers till, but also his steadfast commitment to implement a genuine agrarian reform in the Philippines.

The Chief Executive underscored this in his speech last Friday after he ceremonially turned over certificates of land ownership award (CLOA) to agrarian reform beneficiaries at his home grounds in Davao City. Assisted by DAR Secretary John Castriciones, the President handed out the CLOA that will literally entitle beneficiaries to farmlands carved out of the government's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

In yet another impassioned speech, the former Davao City Mayor sought to reassure Filipino farmers and their families to give them security of tenure in the lands they toil and till.

The land security tenure in the Philippines was, in fact, the heart of government-private sector top-level discussions during the Manila leg of the 7th Asia-Pacific Housing Forum (APHF), hosted by the Habitat for Humanity Philippines and held recently at the New World Hotel in Makati City. The APHF discussions delved into the challenges and possible solutions to the usual policy conflict between development of lands for socialized housing and the use of agricultural lands for food security, both of which require security of land tenure.

As he first publicly admitted during his state of the nation address (SONA) last month, President Duterte said he considers the country's agriculture as the "weakest link" in the country's economic growth program. The former Davao City Mayor is obviously very frustrated over the current state of Philippine agriculture.

The presidential disappointment was on how the country's agriculture has been lagging behind despite the supposed robust growth of the Philippine economy. This turned for the worse when, in the middle of last year, there was a prolonged period of rice supply shortage that caused the price of this Filipino staple food to shot up to historic high and sent inflation rate almost galloping at a fast, higher clip.

There is still time though for President Duterte to turn around the situation for Philippine agriculture.

In the latest monitoring of the country's economic performance, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the country's inflation rate averaged at 2.4 percent for the entire month of July. In particular, the PSA noted the index-heavy rice prices contracted for the third straight month to 2.9 percent in July. The last time rice prices declined was in June 2016 before President Duterte assumed office at Malacañang.

The PSA also monitored that the country's agriculture sector barely grew in the first quarter of 2019. On total output, agriculture increased by a mere 0.67 percent. Production increases were noted for livestock, poultry and fisheries during the period. At current prices, the gross value of agricultural production amounted to P429.7 billion. This represented a 3.12 percent reduction from previous year's level.

According to the PSA, Filipino farmers and fisherfolk comprise the poorest of the poor in our country. The highest poverty incidence per family are mainly concentrated in the following provinces: Lanao del Sur (67.3 percent); Eastern Samar (55.4 percent); Apayao (54.7 percent); Maguindanao (54.5 percent); Zamboanga del Norte (48 percent); Sarangani (46 percent); North Cotabato (44.8 percent); Negros Oriental (43.9 percent); and Northern and Western Samar (both with 43.5 percent).

Rough estimates by the PSA placed the number of Filipino farmers and fisherfolk at around 2.5 to three million. And if we multiply 2.5 million by five as the average number of family members per Filipino household, this would mean at least 12.5 million. This is equivalent to more than one-fifth of our country's estimated 110 million population at present.

There is still time though for President Duterte to turn around the situation for Philippine agriculture.

This would hopefully come with the appointment of William Dar, a known international agriculture expert, as the new DA Secretary. Dar took over from Emmanuel Piñol whom the President transferred as Secretary of the Mindanao Development Authority. It is actually a homecoming for Dar to his erstwhile office at the Department of Agriculture in Quezon City. He first served as DA Secretary during the shortened term of former president Joseph Estrada.

It was the late Senate president Edgardo Angara who nominated Dar to be the DA Secretary. It was the Cabinet post he chose to serve in the Estrada administration had he won in the vice presidential race. But Angara sadly lost as runningmate of Mr. Estrada during the May 1998 presidential elections.

While waiting for the lapse of the one-year ban against losing candidates from being appointed to the Executive Department, Mr. Estrada named Angara as president of a once state-owned bank for the meantime.

It was during Dar's stint at the DA when the country's agriculture posted an unprecedented 6.2 percent growth. Under Dar's helm at DA, Mr. Estrada gave out P100 million each to municipalities with biggest agriculture outputs as productivity incentives.

So much impressed on the extraordinary turnaround of the country's agriculture sector, Mr. Estrada naturally was reluctant to let go of Dar from his Cabinet. So it took a little longer than one year before Angara was eventually installed as Agriculture Secretary.

For now, Dar assumes as "acting" Agriculture Secretary because the 18th Congress is in session when he was appointed. With his administration's land reform program on track, President Duterte counts upon Dar to match DAR by doing his best for agriculture.

★

The Manila Times

Date: AUGUST 7, 2019 Page: A3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Duterte appoints Piñol as MinDA chair

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has appointed former Agriculture secretary Emmanuel Piñol as chairman of the Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA), Malacañang said on Tuesday.

Duterte appointed Piñol on Monday, the same day that his successor, William Dar, took his oath as acting secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Piñol will serve as MinDA chairman, a Cabinet position, for six years.

He had offered to resign and be transferred to MinDA following reports that Duterte wanted him to lead the agency.

Last month, the President said in a television interview that he wanted Piñol to be his point man in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), as there was "nobody on my side talking to the BARMM to make necessary arrangements for this entity to grow and their needs."

Duterte said Piñol's transfer to MinDA had the approval of Bangsamoro leaders, who expressed earlier apprehension as Piñol previously opposed the struggle of the Bangsamoro people.

In a Facebook post, Piñol said he was supposed to take his oath on Monday, but asked for a "short vacation, which my tired body has been craving for."

"My new task will still be mainly agriculture and the economic growth of Mindanao with special focus on the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao," he said.

"It will also include handling the country's membership in the BIMP-EAGA (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines-East Asean Growth Area)," Piñol added.

He also apologized to farmers and fisherfolk for his shortcomings during his stint as Agriculture chief.

"As announced by Sen. [Christopher Lawrence] 'Bong' Go, my differences with the economic managers on very critical issues, especially the rice liberalization, have made my stay at the DA untenable," Piñol said.

"I thank everybody who supported me and I offer my apologies to the farmers and fishermen, who may not have been served well enough. *Pasensya na po sa mga pagkukulang ko* (Sorry for my shortcomings)," he added.

The former DA chief also thanked the officials and workers of the department for helping him "transform the department and shedding off its image of a corrupt government agency."

"In this new assignment, I will work just as hard as when I was secretary of Agriculture," he said.

A former governor of North Cotabato, Piñol is a longtime friend of Duterte.

The Manila Times

Date: AUGUST 7, 2019 Page: B2

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Higher LandBank exposure to agri sector vowed

STATE-RUN Land Bank of the Philippines (LandBank) has committed to increase its loans to the agriculture sector by targeting to cover at least 3 million farmers and fishermen across the country in the next three years, newly appointed Acting Agriculture Secretary William Dar said on Tuesday.

In a press briefing in Quezon City, Dar said LandBank officials had reported to President Rodrigo Duterte during the Monday cabinet meeting the banks' intensive efforts for the farm sector.

This, as Dar disucssed with LandBank his plan on updating the Department of Agriculture's Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA), a nationwide database of baseline information concerning farmers, farm laborers and fishermen located in 75 provinces of the Philippines, excluding Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the National Captial Region (NCR).

RSBSA is used as the basis for Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to target beneficiaries of some of the different agricultural support programs of the government, as implemented by various government agencies, such as the RSBSA agricultural insurance program of Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation (PCIC), and the Agriculture and Fisheries Financing Program of LandBank and People's Credit and Finance Corporation.

"Last (Monday) night, LandBank discussed how they would increase their exposure in agriculture sector. Their initial exposure is to almost 1 million farmers with P10 billion. Their plan in the next three years is to elevate this exposure to P30 billlion and giving credit to almost 3 million farmers," Dar explained.

While the target is a "substantial initiative," Dar noted that huge gap between the yearly credit requirement in agriculture sector amounting to about P270 billion a year and to the P30 billion provided by Landbank annually.

Under the Agri-Agra Law or Republic Act 10000, enacted in 2009, banks are mandated to allocate at least 25 percent of outstanding portfolio to agriculture. Of this, 10 percent should be devoted to credit for agrarian reform beneficiaries.

However, the law, which was passed during the Marcos administration, has been yielding to low utilization of the loan funds as banks would choose to pay penalties instead, Dar said.

"Agri-Agra Law is not properly implemented because almost all the banks still wants to just pay the penalties. Some banks say [the programs] are not bankable... that they are high risk," he said.

RA 10000 aims to provide agriculture, fisheries and agrarian reform credit, insurance and financing system to improve the productivity of the agriculture and fisheries sectors. The law consists of loans to support activities and purposes pertaining to agriculture as stipulated under the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA) and the Agrarian Reform Code of the Philippines.

"[W]e discussed that lengthfully because the credit availability, affordability and accessibility is one of those that can make the farmers productive and competitive," Dar said.

"The Cabinet understood that LandBank should remain a universal bank so that whatever is the profit from the universal banking should be [plowed] back to the agriculture credit facility,"he added.

In a statement on Monday, LandBank said its loans to agriculture has been on the uptrend in the past 10 years, reaching P219.62 billion as of June 2019 from P93.3 billion in 2009. These include P42.31 billion in loans to small farmers, fishers, and their associations and P177.32 billion to other players in the agri-business value chain.

EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

The Manila Times

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: B1 & B4

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Dar eyes 3-4% growth in agri sector

THE Philippines should post at least 3- to 4-percent growth in the agriculture sector in the next three years as part of efforts to attain food security in the country, according to the Department of Agriculture's (DA) new chief.

In a briefing in Quezon City on Tuesday, Acting Agriculture Secretary William Dar told reporters that "[o]ur target should be [more than 2 percent]."

"Let's say [that,] in the next three years, we should be aiming [for] 3 [to] 4 percent," he said.

The official, a renowned agriculture export who is also a columnist of *The Manila Times*, also said he would push for programs focusing on increasing the productivity, competitveness and profitability of farmers and fishermen.

Doing so, he added, would enable the DA to ensure food security as the country's population continues to grow.

"If our population growth rate is up to 1.8 percent, [then] we must [raise the agriculture growth rate higher] than that, so that there will be a slight allowance or that we will be assured of enough food," Dar said.

In the last decade, the agriculture growth rate averaged 1.1 percent. Last year, the sector grew by only 0.56 percent, missing the 4-percent target the department set under the term of Dar's predecessor, Emmanuel Piñol.

Dar said his department would advocate for programs anchored on the "new thinking" for agriculture, as it envisions a

➤Sector B4

■ SECTOR FROM B1

Dar eyes

"food-secured Philippines with prosperous farmers and fisherfolk."

To do this, he said he would prioritize the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law and the utilization of the P10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) that farmers should get yearly from tariff collections on imported rice.

In the next 100 days, Dar wants to accelerate the implementation of RCEF and educate some 3 million farmers about the programs under the new rice regime.

He also aims to double the income of farmers and fishermen in the next five years through industrialization, promotion of exports, infrastructure development, and higher budget and investments, among others.

While Dar said he was open to the idea of importing goods, such as rice, meat and sugar, he clarified that the country should do so only with the required volume to offset the shortfall in local production.

"[F]ood security is the goal. If we cannot produce it here 100 percent and then the inadequacy will be imported. That's food security," Dar said.

He also expressed openness to more sugar imports to plug the shortfall in local production as the country enters the off-milling season.

Dar's remarks come a day after President Rodrigo Duterte appointed him to replace Piñol, who was transferred to the Mindanao Development Authority.

EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

BusinessWorld
INCREASE YOUR BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: 2/S1

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

THE ONGOING programs of the Department of Agriculture will be continued but reconfigured to bring them in line with the primary goals, while also building new programs from the ground up that meet these objectives.

PHILIPPINE STAR/MICHAEL VARCAS

DA's Dar says will focus on food security, farmer prosperity

THE new Department of Agriculture (DA) secretary said his focus will be to achieve food security by achieving a rise in output outpacing population growth, while also boosting the earnings of farmers and fisherfolk.

"*Kung ang* (If the) population growth rate is up to 1.8%, *dapat naman* we (should) aim higher than that *pero dapat naman meron kang konting* (but there should be) allowance *na sapat ang pagkain* (that is enough for food). Again food security is the goal," Acting Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar told reporters Tuesday.

Agriculture outut rose 0.67% in the first quarter of 2019.

"With all the constraints that are there in Philippine agriculture, lack of water, climate change and the like, pest and diseases, so it will be better to have a more practical approach and goal which is anchored on ensuring food security and with the elevation of the farmers and fisherfolk to be more prosperous," he added.

The ongoing programs of the Department of Agriculture will be continued but reconfigured to bring them in line with the primary goals, while also building new programs from the ground up that meet these objectives.

Mr. Dar said that importing commodities will be resorted to in order to fill in domestic production shortfalls, following due consultation with stakeholders.

"If we need to import I have some ideas, but I will consult with them. *Dapat may* (There should be) consensus... Food security... is the overarching goal. Ensuring food security means let's produce enough under the conditions, but any gaps you need to bring as imports," he said.

He said that he is also targeting to reach out to 3 million farmers in the next 100 days, in collaboration with agencies that will implement the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

"Planting is almost over. *Halos* (It's almost) harvest time. *Dapat*, of course overall, *maganda sana kung mas naumpisahan pa ng maaga 'yung* intervention *para sila na ang nakikinabang* (It would be better if this was started earlier so that they are able to benefit from te interventions).... Let's do what is possible now and let's make it much, much better (in the) next planting season," he said in a chance interview after his news conference.

He said he will propose a 2020 budget of about P90 billion, and possibly top P100 billion in 2021 to fund more programs. The DA's current budge is P49.8 billion. — **Vincent Mariel P. Galang**

Malaya
Business Insight

Date: AUG 09, 2019 Page: B2

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Piñol officially transferred to MinDA

PRESIDENT Duterte has officially transferred and appointed Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol to the Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA) where he would sit as chairman.

Malacanang yesterday released a list of appointments, including that of Piñol whose appointment papers were signed on August 5.

The President last month said he was transferring Pinol to MinDa, a national government agency tasked to oversee the development and economic growth in the Mindanao region, to help in the transition and setting up of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Duterte said he also wants to have his "point" person in the region.

Piñol, who takes the place of Datu Abul Khayr Dangcal Alonto who died last May 9, served as former governor of North Cotabato.

He was replaced at the Department of Agriculture by Acting Secretary William Dar. The appointment of Dar was also signed on August 5.

Also signed on August 5 was the appointment paper of Court of Appeals justice Rodil Zalameda as a Supreme Court associate justice.

The President on July 30 appointed businessman Johnny Uy as member of the board of the United Coconut Planters Bank and businesswoman Olivia Aw as special envoy of the President to the Russian federation. – ***Joceclyn Montemayor***

Malaya
Business Insight

Date: AUGUST 7, 2019 Page: A1 & A2

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Reforms to push agri growth to 3-4%

BY JED MACAPAGAL

NEWLY-appointed Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary William Dar said the agency will push for a 3 to 4 percent growth in the farm sector in the next three years to keep up with population growth.

In a briefing in Quezon City yesterday, Dar said he will push for efforts that would achieve national food security: modernization; industrialization; promotion of exports; farm consolidation; roadmap development; infrastructure development; higher budget and investments for agriculture; and legislative support.

"If our population growth rate is at 1.7 to 1.8 percent, (agriculture growth) should have to be higher than that so that we will have a little allowance since our goal is food security... (Agriculture growth) should be higher than 2 percent, maybe we must reach three to four percent in the next three years," Dar said.

He said farmers and fisherfolk earn low income because of high production cost, limited cropping diversification, low productivity, low-income elasticity and volatile commodity prices. "Those challenges are in turn caused or compounded by numerous factors ranging from the low use of inputs, poor soil health, effects of climate change, among others," Dar added.

Dar said under his leadership, value-adding, processing, manufacturing and marketing for both local and global markets will also be given focus.

The Philippine Statistics Authority is set to announce today (August 7) the performance of the Philippine agriculture for the second quarter of the year.

The farm sector grew 0.56 percent in 2018 and by 0.67 percent in

See REFORMS ➤ Page A2

DAR

• FROM PAGE A1 •

REFORMS

the first quarter this year.

Meanwhile, President Duterte ordered a study on a proposal to allow the use of agrarian reform lands as collateral for loan agreements sought by farmers.

Chief Presidential Legal Counsel and concurrent presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the President, during the Cabinet meeting in Malacanang on Monday night directed the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) to look into the plight of the farmers and what impedes their abilities to access loan and other financial assistance.

He said the Duterte also wants the study to determine if the certain laws and issuances, like Memorandum Circular 28, should be amended to allow farmers to use their Certificate of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) as collateral to obtain loans even without the need to be a member of an agrarian reform beneficiary organization.

Panelo said, during the same Cabinet meeting, the Land Bank of the Philippines also reported about the bank's action plan to intensify lending to the agriculture sector during the Cabinet meeting.

Manila Standard

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: B1

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

New agriculture chief bares strategy to revive local farming

By Othel V. Campos

NEWLY-APPOINTED Agriculture Secretary William Dar announced Tuesday his plan to make the sector more profitable and lift the income of millions of farmers and fishers.

"This will require the development and meaningful implementation of programs and projects that will result in increased agricultural productivity, competitiveness and profitability taking into account sustainability and resilience for agriculture smallholders," he said.

"One important law that has to be properly implemented is the Rice Tariffication Law including that of its Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund. Currently, there are a number of factors causing low farmer and fisherfolk income. Among these are high production cost, limited cropping diversification, low productivity, low-income elasticity and volatile commodity prices," he said.

Dar proposed the so-called 8-paradigm strategy that involves the "new thinking" for agriculture. These include modernization of agriculture, industrialization of agriculture, promotion of exports, farm consolidation, roadmap development, infrastructure development, higher budget and investments for agriculture and legislative support.

Dar cited a need to diversify crop production in the Philippines as about 80 percent of the country's farmlands were devoted to only three crops: rice, corn and coconut.

"Agripreneurship should also form part of the paradigm to modernize Philippine agriculture, as farming and fisheries should be treated as business undertakings or industries," he said.

He said while higher productivity was a major objective, it was equally important to produce more income by value-adding, processing, manufacturing and developing markets for both raw and processed agricultural products.

There is also a need to engage the private sector in investing in and setting up more agri-based industries in the countryside and developing markets for agriculture products, he said.

He said the industrialization of Philippine agriculture should be supported by the framework for the digitization of farming and agribusiness activities in the country where credit is made available, affordable and accessible.

Dar said there should be a systematic and long-term strategy in developing and promoting exports of raw and processed agricultural products.

This requires economies of scale in on-farm production that will generate sustained quantity and quality of export products.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: A5

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Dar to speed up rice competitiveness program

MAKING IT OFFICIAL Agriculture Secretary William Dar takes his oath of office before President Duterte on Monday.
—MALACAÑANG PHOTO

By Karl R. Ocampo
@kocampoINQ

Barely 24 hours after his appointment, Agriculture Secretary William Dar immediately dealt with the rice competitiveness enhancement program (RCEP) which has so far failed to ease the adverse impact of rice imports on local rice farmers.

On his first press conference on Tuesday, Dar said he wanted to "right and accelerate" the implementation of the RCEP during the first 100 days of his term, and improve the sector's growth rate to 3 percent over the next three years.

Anemic growth

The RCEP provides a P10-billion rice competitiveness enhancement fund (RCEF) as financial aid to farmers. It also finances the government's farm modernization programs to make farmers more competitive, and counter the negative impact of the rice tariffication law.

Dar blamed "high production cost, limited cropping diversification, low productivity and volatile commodity prices" for the low income of farmers and fisherfolk.

He said he was not happy with the sector's anemic growth. Last year, the industry grew by only 0.98 percent, lower than its average 1.1 percent growth over the past decade.

Boost support

Dar said the sector's growth could be accelerated by boosting support to local food production and strengthening the industry's agribusiness component by bringing in the private sector.

The new agriculture chief also made it clear that he opposes any review of the rice tariffication law, adding that stakeholders should give it time to be implemented.

"Our rice farmers are already waiting for the RCEF," Dar said, adding that the delay in the budget release of the RCEF has stalled its implementation.

The farmers' group Kilusan para sa Tunay na Repormang Agraryo at Katarungang Panlipunan (Katarungan) welcomed Dar's appointment as a "breath of fresh air." —WITH A REPORT FROM DELFIN T. MALLARI JR., INQ

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: 1

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

NEW AGRI CHIEF – President Duterte swears in William Dar as acting secretary of agriculture Monday at Malacañang. Dar replaced Manny Piñol who was appointed to head the Mindanao Development Authority. (Malacañang photo)

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: 10

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Former DA chief apologizes to farmers, fisherfolk

By **ANTONIO L. COLINA IV**

DAVAO CITY – Newly appointed Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA) chair Emmanuel "Manny" Piñol apologized to farmers and fisherfolks, who might not have been served well, as well as for his shortcomings as the former agriculture chief.

"Pasensya na po sa mga pagkukulang ko (I am sorry for all my shortcomings)," Piñol said in a statement issued hours after the Palace announced his appointment on Monday.

Piñol, who will serve as MinDA chair for six years or until 2025, thanked colleagues at his former office who helped him transform and change the corrupt image of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

He vowed to work just as hard in his new office.

"I was supposed to take my oath today as the new MinDA secretary, but I asked for a short vacation which my tired body has been craving for," he said.

The former DA chief replaced Secretary Abul Khayr Alonto who died of heart complications last May 9. Lawyer Nathaniel D. Dalumpines, assistant secretary for Mindanao Concerns, was appointed MinDA officer-in-charge last May 20.

Secretary William Dar has replaced Piñol as DA secretary.

Piñol said he submitted his courtesy resignation as DA secretary two months ago after having differences with the government's economic managers over some critical issues, including the passage of Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Import and Export Liberalization Law, making his stay at the agency "untenable."

He said he would continue working for the agriculture and economic growth of Mindanao, specifically the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

As the new MinDA head, he will also be the Philippine signing official for the Brunei Darussalam Indonesia Malaysia and Philippines East Asian Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), a 25-year old sub-regional economic cooperation initiative in Southeast Asia designed to spur economic development in the lagging sub-economies.

BIMP-EAGA was founded in 1994 in Davao. Its focus areas include the entire sultanate of Brunei Darussalam; the provinces of Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, West Papua and Papua in Indonesia; the states of Sabah and Sarawak and the federal territory of Labuan in Malaysia; and Mindanao and the province of Palawan in the Philippines.

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: B11

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Dar supports sugar sector liberalization

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR**

New Agriculture Secretary William Dar is supportive of the proposal to liberalize the sugar industry and open up the local market to more imported sugar.

Roberto Amores, President of the Philippine Food Exporters, Inc. (Philfoodex), said yesterday that he already mentioned to Dar the request of the food industry to liberalize sugar so they could have unlimited access to cheaper, imported sugar.

"He [Dar] supports it," Amores said in an interview.

Together with the other officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA), Dar spoke to reporters on Tuesday for the first time since his appointment as the country's new Agriculture Secretary. For some reasons, Amores was also in the panel.

Dar said the reason why Amores was there is because he wants to tap him to lead the Secretary Technical Advisory Group (STAG), a policy oriented organization composed of agriculture stakeholders from the private and public sector.

Aside from Philfoodex, Amores also serves as a director at Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI).

Regarding sugar liberalization, Dar said he will still study the proposal and that he needs to meet with the officials of the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) first.

Earlier this year, Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno said there is a need to deregulate sugar importation in order to address the rising cost of the commodity. This was backed by Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia, saying that it was a "collegial stand" among the country's economic managers to push for the liberalization of sugar importation.

This was being opposed by the country's sugar planters and millers as well as some members of the SRA Board namely Roland Beltran and Emilio Yulo.

According to Beltran and Yulo, the high cost of sugar could be a result of price manipulation among traders and retailers.

A few months ago, they even asked the Senate to look into the rising retail price of sugar despite a relatively low millsite price in the provinces.

In a letter to Senator Juan Miguel Zubiri, the SRA Board Members requested a senate inquiry on the prices of sugar as well as Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) supposed failure to exercise its mandate to protect the consumers from the rising cost of the commodity at the retail level.

"Time and again, we have asked the Department of Trade and Industry to look into possible violations, exercise its mandate and ensure that consumers are protected as well to maintain the viability of the sugar industry," the letter, signed by SRA Board Members Roland Beltran and Emilio Yulo, wrote.

"However, instead of looking into these concerns and identifying the underlying reasons for the high prices of sugar, the DTI has in fact been one in calling for the liberalization of the sugar industry without first conducting an investigation on these allegations," it added.

In one of SRA's earlier consultation with stakeholders, the agency has received complaints of high retail prices of sugar.

Based on reports, sugar is retailing at ₱60.00 per kilo or double the price at which the farmers are paid at millgate. SRA noted that millsite price of rice has been steady at ₱1,450 to ₱1,500 per 50 kilo-bag.

Confederation of Sugar Producers Associations, Inc. (CONFED) Board Member Salvador Escalante pointed out earlier that a retail price of ₱60 a kilo for sugar means the millsite price has to be around ₱3,000 per 50-kilo bag.

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: A2 & A12

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

'RCEF will be used well, fast for farmers'

ACTING Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar said he will focus on the implementation of interventions funded by the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to assist farmers incurring losses due to falling farm-gate prices.

Dar told reporters in a news briefing in Quezon City that he will ensure the smooth and proper implementation of initiatives bankrolled by the RCEF in the first 100 days of his leadership.

"This will be our focus for the next 100 days. To correct and accelerate the implementation of the RCEF," he said on Tuesday.

"Rice farmers of almost 2.5 million are already waiting for the RCEF."

Dar said he has instructed attached agencies of the Department of Agriculture responsible for implementing the interventions to inform rice planters that help is on the way.

The new agriculture chief said initiatives aimed at improving the competitiveness of rice planters should have been implemented earlier than the third quarter.

He said the DA will try to provide the necessary interventions to farmers in the next 100 days.

The DA will also craft a "catch-up plan" embodying additional interventions to help farmers in the 2020 dry season. DA officials were instructed to complete it in two weeks.

The plan includes the provision of hybrid rice seeds, distribution of of inputs like fertilizers, construction of shallow wells and even direct cash assistance, he added.

"Let's have a plan to compensate what we lost this wet season. We need a catch-up plan because it is during the dry season when all components of RCEF are expected to be in place," Dar said.

SEE "RCEF," A2

RCEF...

CONTINUED FROM A12

'Missing' ₱4 billion

DAR will sit down with DA officials to discuss the P5 billion released by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to the DA last December.

Until now, the DA and the DBM cannot see eye to eye on the purpose of the money. The DA maintained that it was a "special" fund meant for the national rice program, while the DBM insisted that it was already part of the P10-billion RCEF.

Dar said he will look into how the P4 billion was allocated and used by the DA's attached agencies. The P1 billion was returned to the Land Bank of the Philippines, which RA 11203 mandated to extend credit assistance to farmers.

Documents obtained by the BUSINESSMIRROR showed the DA used the money for production support service (P1.005 billion), agricultural equipment machineries and facilities (P2.752 billion), irrigation network services (P241.465 million) and credit program (P1 billion).

The DA allocated P1 billion to the Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC) for its credit program; the remaining P4 billion was divided among 13 regions.

Sources told the BUSINESSMIRROR that Regions 3 and 7 refused their share of the P5 billion due to absorptive capacity issues.

The DBM issued a total of 14 special allotment release orders (Saro) on December 28, 2018, to download the funds to the 13 DA regional field offices and the ACPC.

Government sources told the BUSINESSMIRROR that the DBM reached out to the DA in November. The DBM told the DA the fund was meant to complement its national rice program in anticipation of the enactment of RA 11203.

The DA then crafted a proposal, later approved by the DBM, according to government sources. ***Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas***

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: A12 & A2

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

New DA chief wants to double farmers' income

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

NEWLY installed Acting Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar is targeting to double farmers' income in five years and grow agriculture production by at least 3 percent annually in keeping with President Duterte's directive of improving the lives of Filipinos.

Dar said the President had ordered him to boost the performance of the Philippine agriculture, which expanded by an average of only 1.1 percent in the past decade.

He said farm production growth should be at least 3 percent to 4 percent to ensure ample food supply and meet the food requirements of the country's population, which has been expanding at an annualized rate of 1.8 percent.

"If your production growth is only 1.1 percent, how are you going to feed your growing population? You will always have a deficit," Dar said in his first news briefing on Tuesday.

"At the end of his [Duterte] term, he wants to leave a legacy of uplifting the livelihood and the quality of life of our farmers and fishermen," Dar added.

The new agriculture chief said he will prioritize the implementation of programs which will be bankrolled by the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

See "DA chief," A2

DA chief. . .

Continued from A12

The P10-billion fund was created by Republic Act (RA) 11203 to improve the competitiveness of the local rice sector.

He also said he is keen on expanding areas planted with hybrid rice to improve farmers' productivity.

Strategy

THE DA will adopt as its overarching goal the attainment of food security instead of food sufficiency in light of the liberalization of the local rice industry, Dar said.

In shooting for food security, the DA is now amenable to importing the shortfall in domestic production to avert shortages.

The new agriculture chief said the DA will craft programs around eight paradigms that make up the "new" thinking for Philippine agriculture.

These are modernization of agriculture, industrialization of agriculture, promotion of exports, farm consolidation, road map development, infrastructure development, higher budget and investments for agriculture, and legislative support.

The new DA chief said he will review the existing programs of the department and look for ways to "reinvent" and "revitalize" these initiatives to ensure the country's food security.

Dar said he will roll out projects enticing the private sector to invest more in agriculture.

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• SALAMIN NG KATOTOHANAN •

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: 9

Target ng DA sa loob ng 5 taon

DOBLENG KITA SA MGA MAGSASAKA

SISIKAPIN ni bagong talagang Agriculture Secretary William Dar na doblehin ang kita ng mga magsasaka at mangingisda sa loob ng limang taon.

Sa isang pulong balitaan sa DA, sinabi ni Dar na target niya na pabilisin ang implementasyon ng Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Program (RCEP) sa ilalim ng Rice Tariffication Program alinsunod sa kautusan ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte.

Ito, aniya, ay upang matiyak ang tuloy-tuloy na pag-usad ng agriculture modernization and industrialization sa bansa.

Sinabi ng bagong kalihim na kailangang magpokus sa pagpapalakas sa exports ng agricultural products.

Bukod dito, dapat din, aniya, itong sabayan ng farm consolidation, roadmap development at mga kinakailangang infrastructure development, at dahil mangangailangan ito ng malaking pondo, hinikayat niya ang mga mambabatas na magpasa ng batas na nakasentro sa pagpapalakas ng agrikuktura.

Samantala, hinimok ni Dar ang lahat ng non-performing employees sa kagawaran na magtrabaho.

Sinabi ng DA chief na pursigido siyang ipatupad ang nais ng Pangulo na gawin ang lahat ng kinakailangang interbensiyon upang magkaroon at mapanatili ang seguridad sa pagkain sa bansa.

Kasunod nito, pinaalalahanan ni Dar ang kanyang mga tauhan na anuman o sinuman na makahahadlang sa malaking gawain na ito ay walang puwang sa departamento.

Inilahad din ni Dar ang kanyang planong gawin sa first 100 days, kabilang ang agad na pagtulong sa mga magsasakang naapektuhan ng umiiral na Rice Tariffication Law, na nagreklamong nalulugi sila dahil bumaba ang buying price ng palay.

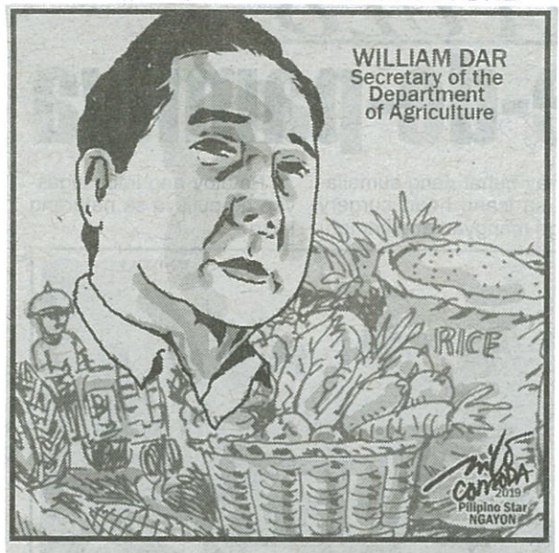
Pangarap din niyang maging agri-preneurs ang lahat ng farmers at fisherfolks dahil lubos lamang na uusad ang ekonomiya kapag nalunasan na ang kahirapan sa kanayunan.

Nagpasalamat naman si Dar kay dating DA Sec. Manny Piñol sa mga nagawa nito at nangakong ipagpapatuloy ang magagandang nasimulan nitong proyekto. **BENEDICT ABAYGAR, JR.**

Pilipino Star
NGAYON
Diyaryong disente ng masang intelihente

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: 4

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE



Editoryal

Malaking hamon sa bagong Agriculture chief

TINALAGA ni President Duterte si William Dar na bagong Agriculture secretary kapalit ni Emmanuel Piñol na magiging pinuno naman ng Mindanao Development Authority. Hindi na bago sa DA si Dar sapagkat pinamunuan na niya ito noong 1998-1999 sa ilalim ng Estrada administration. Naging presidential adviser on food security din siya ni Estrada. May sapat na kaalaman sapagkat nagtapos na may karangalan sa UP-Los Baños, Laguna. May doctoral degree rin siya sa horticulture sa nasabing unibersidad.

Masusubukan ang expertise niya ngayon at maaaring mahigitan ang nagawa ni Piñol sa loob ng tatlong taong pamumuno sa DA. Marami pang hindi nagawa si Piñol at inaasahang sa pagkakapili kay Dar, maipagpapatuloy ang mga hindi natapos na gawain. Marami pang dapat gawin sa agri sector at siyempre pa ang kalagayan ng mga magsasaka.

Malaking hamon kay Dar ang pagpapaunlad sa agrikultura at magagawa lamang ito sa pakikisalamuha niya sa mga magsasaka mismo. Kailangang malaman niya kung ano ang mga problema ng magsasaka at ang kalagayan sa kabukiran. Imposibleng mapaunlad ang sakahan kung hindi magtutungo sa linang ang namumuno. Kailangang madama ng namumuno ang totoong nangyayari sa kabukiran para makagawa siya ng mga paraan para masolusyunan ang problema.

Sa panahon ni Piñol, dumanas ang bansa ng kakapusan sa bigas at nagmahal pa. Nasimot din ang stock ng NFA rice at ang resulta, lumobo pang lalo ang presyo ng commercial rice. Halos walang mabili ang mamamayan. Ang dating NFA rice na ang presyo ay P39.00 ang kilo ay naging P42.00. Walang masulingan ang mga kakarampot ang suweldo, hindi makasapat ang kanilang kinikita sa biglang pagtaas ng bigas.

Paunlarin ni Dar ang agrikultura. Kahit hindi na niya hangarin na makapag-export ng bigas ang bansa gaya noong dekada 60, ang mahalaga, sagana sa bigas ang bansa at hindi natutuliro ang mamamayan kung saan bibili. Kung maraming ani, hindi na kailangang umangkat pa sa Thailand, Vietnam, at China.

Noong nakaraang taon, nag-alok ng tulong ang Japanese government para sa pagpapaunlad ng mga magsasakang Pinoy, sana magpatuloy pa ito. Kailangang mabuhusan ng tulong ang mga magsasaka. Bigyan sila ng mga binhi ng palay na madaling anihin at agad napapakinabangan. Gumawa ng irigasyon. Sana magawa ito ng bagong DA secretary.

PEOPLES JOURNAL Tonight
http://www.journal.com.ph

Date: AUGUST 7, 2019 Page: 10

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Dar seeks to double agri folks' income

By CORY MARTINEZ

NEWLY-APPOINTED Agriculture Secretary William Dar yesterday called for cooperation in finding more ways to make smallholder Filipino farmers and fisherfolk more prosperous, with the ultimate goal of doubling their incomes in five years.

In a press statement, Dar sought for cooperation in order to achieve President Rodrigo Duterte's aim for a food-secure Philippines.

Dar also thanked President Duterte for giving him the privilege to serve the country anew as acting secretary of the Department of Agriculture.

"I strongly believe in his advocacies to make the country food secure and to bring more development to the countryside by making smallholders farmers and fisherfolk more prosperous," Dar said.

He explained that there should be a development and meaningful implementation of programs and projects that will result in increased agricultural productivity, competitiveness, and profitability taking into account sustainability and resilience for agriculture smallholders.

"One important law that has to be properly implemented is the Rice Tariffication Law including that of its Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF)," Dar added.

At present, Dar said, there are a number of factors causing low farmer and fisherfolk income.

Among these are high production cost, limited cropping diversification, low productivity, low- income elasticity and volatile commodity prices.

"And those challenges are in turn caused or compounded by numerous factors ranging from the low use of inputs, poor soil health, effects of climate change, among others," Dar stressed.

To realize the vision of President Duterte for a food-secure Philippines and to double the income of farmers and fisherfolk, Dar proposed a strategy built around eight paradigms that also make up the "new thinking" for agriculture.

The eight paradigms include the modernization of agriculture; industrialization of agriculture; promotion of exports; and farm consolidation.

Others are roadmap development; infrastructure development; higher budget and investments for agriculture; and legislative support.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6
Abante
UNA SA BALITA

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: 2

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

DA chief: Nasaan ang ₱4B ng mga magsasaka?

IPINAG-UTOS ni acting Agriculture Secretary William Dar ang audit ng P4 bilyong pondo para mapataas ang produksyon ng mga magsasaka.

Nais ni Dar na malaman kung saan napunta ang bahagi ng Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) na dapat pakinabangan ng mga magsasaka mula sa taunang koleksyon ng taripa sa imported rice.

Nitong 2019, nagpalabas ang Department of Budget and Management (DBM) ng P5 bilyon para sa RCEF, kung saan ginamit ng DA ang P1 bilyon para sa loan sa mga magsasaka.

Pero ang balanseng P4 bilyon, hindi makita ni Dar kung saan napadpad.

"Iyong P4 billion, nasaan po? Sabihin na natin na and'yan, they just have to properly account," saad ni Dar.

Balak ng acting secretary na gamitin ang pondo sa unang 100 araw niya sa DA na mapabilis ang implementasyon ng RCEF at turuan ang 3 milyong magsasaka tungkol sa programa.

Sinabi ng kalihim na dahil tatlong taon na lamang ang termino ni Pangulong Duterte, gusto niyang mag-iwan ng legacy tulad ng pagpapalaki ng kita ng magsasaka at mangingisda.

Si Dar, isang horticulturist, ay dating nagsilbing agriculture chief sa panahon ni dating Pangulong Joseph Estrada.

Ang pinalitan ni Dar na si Emmanuel Piñol ay tinalaga naman bilang chairman ng Mindanao Development Authority (MinDa).

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL
Date: AUGUST 7, 2019 Page: B1 & B3
LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
PART 1 of 2

Inflation cools to 2-year low 2.4% in July

By CZERIZA VALENCIA

Growth in consumer prices further eased to 2.4 percent in July, the slowest in two years, on the back of cheaper rice, fuel and utilities, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said in a report yesterday.

July's headline inflation slid further from 2.7 percent in June and 5.7 percent a year earlier, bringing the year-to-date average to 3.3 percent, still well within the government's target range of two to four percent this year.

This was the lowest level since also hitting 2.4 percent in July 2017.

In a briefing, National Statistician Dennis Mapa said inflation is expected to sustain its slowdown or stabilize in the coming months, noting that declines to flat growth were seen in price movements across commodity groups in July.

Price drops were most pronounced in the heavily weighted food and non-alcoholic beverage index, which slowed to 1.9 percent in July from 2.7 percent in June.

Likewise, the index of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels eased to 2.2 percent in July from three percent in June; as well as in transport, which slowed down to 0.7 percent in July from 1.6 percent in June.

In particular, index-heavy rice prices contracted for the third straight month to 2.9 percent in July. The last time rice prices declined was in June 2016.

Growth in the prices of vegetables also declined significantly to 3.4 percent in July from 9.5 percent in June.

Declines were also recorded in the cost of power as well as in liquefied petroleum gas at negative 0.5 percent and negative 5.9 percent, respectively.

In transport, the index for petroleum for personal transport declined by 2.8 percent while that for domestic airfare declined by 11.5 percent.

Consumer prices grew slower both within the National Capital Region (NCR) and areas outside NCR at 2.3 percent and 2.4 percent, respectively in July, from three percent and 2.6 percent, respectively in June.

In regions excluding the NCR, inflation remained steepest in the Mimaropa region at 4.9 percent and lowest in Central Visayas at 1.1 percent.

Mapa said inflation in Mimaropa defies the national trend primarily because of logistical issues in the distribution of goods and services.

Turn to B3

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL
Date: AUGUST 7, 2019 Page: B1 & B3
LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
PART 2 of 2

Inflation... From B1

"We observed that in the regional inflation in 2019, Mimaropa is quite an outlier for this year. One particular reason we are seeing is because Mimaropa consists mainly of island provinces so transportation may have an impact on goods and services. This could be validated on the ground. The reason why we are reporting Mimaropa is so that local government units can check and do something about it," he said.

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said that with the continued deceleration in the headline inflation rate, the government expects the annual average to settle within the target range.

"We welcome this decelerating trend in prices but we remain on guard against possible upside risks such as adverse weather conditions, possible entry of the African swine fever, and uncertainty in the global oil market, among others," said Socioeconomic Planning Secretary and NEDA chief Ernesto Pernia.

Citing a report from the weather bureau, he noted that prevailing monsoon season is seen lasting until September, during which six up to nine tropical cyclones are expected to enter the country in the third quarter. Still, in the fourth quarter, three up to five cyclones may visit the country.

"Government agencies such as Department of Agriculture, Department of Trade and Industry, and the National Food Authority should ensure sufficient supply of basic food commodities, in view of the expected tropical cyclones that will enter the Philippine area of responsibility," said Pernia.

He also urged the concerned government agencies to intensify market surveillance amid the temporary ban imposed by the Food and Drug Administration on the importation of pork products from countries with reported cases of African swine fever.

These include Hong Kong, North Korea, Germany and 17 other countries.

"The concerned authorities should intensify its market surveillance to ensure the compliance of importers and retailers with the government's directive. The government should also ensure that there is sufficient production of pork and other meat products locally as the threat of the epidemic is seen to continue in the near term," Pernia said.

The Manila Times

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: B1 & B4

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

PH inflation eases to 2.4% in July

BY ANNA LEAH E. GONZALES

THE Philippines' headline inflation further decelerated to 2.4 percent in July, its lowest in more than two and a half years, on the back of lower prices of food and non-alcoholic drinks.

In a briefing on Tuesday, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said last month's rate was slower than the 2.7 percent recorded in June and the 5.7 percent registered in July 2018.

The latest figure — the lowest since December 2016's 2.2 percent — falls within the 2.0- to 2.8-percent range earlier projected by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas and the 2.2- to 2.6-percent range forecast of analysts surveyed by *The Manila Times* on Monday.

National Statistician and Civil Registrar General Claire Dennis S. Mapa called food items and non-alcohol drinks — which recorded a 1.9-percent rate — as the "main driver in the downward trend of inflation in July 2019."

Food groups that contributed to the downtrend were rice (-2.9 percent in July from -1.7 percent in June); corn (-3.0 percent from -4.0 percent); oils and fats (2.5 percent from 2.9 percent); vegetables (3.4 percent from 9.5 percent); and sugar, jam, honey, chocolate and confectionery (-1.4 percent from 2.2 percent).

"For rice, this is the third month this year that a negative rate has been recorded. [Prices at this month last year] were really high, so we are [really expecting] negative inflation," Mapa said.

The slower annual increases in

➤Inflation B4

■ A customer inspects apples at the stall in Quinta Market in Quiapo, Manila, on Tuesday, the day the Philippine Statistics Authority announced that headline inflation eased to 2.4 percent last month. PHOTO BY ENRIQUE AGCAOILI

The Manila Times

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: B1 & B4

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

PART 2 OF 2

■ INFLATION FROM B1

PH inflation

housing, water, electricity, oil and transport rates also contributed to the continued slowdown. Month-on-month, inflation inched up by 0.2 percent in July from 0.1 percent in June.

Higher monthly increases were noted in the indices or alcoholic beverages and tobacco (0.8 percent); clothing and footwear (0.4 percent); furnishings, household equipment and routine house maintenance (0.3 percent); health (0.4 percent); and education (2.1 percent).

Malacañang welcomed the latest inflation data, attributing it to President Rodrigo Duterte's "strong political will," and expressed optimism that prices would continue to ease this year.

In a statement on Tuesday, Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo reiterated the government's commitment to implement macroeconomic policies that would benefit the nation.

"We are confident that disinflation will continue as we remain on guard in monitoring the prices of basic goods and commodities," he said.

Still on guard

For its part, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said it expected inflation to settle within the government's 2.0- to 4.0-percent target this year.

"We welcome this decelerating trend in prices, but we remain on guard against possible upside risks, such as adverse weather conditions, possible entry of African swine fever (ASF), and uncertainty in the global oil market, among others," Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto M. Pernia said in a statement.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) had said it expected the southwest monsoon, or *habagat*, to peak until September.\

It added that a maximum of nine tropical cyclones were expected in the third quarter, while another three to five could enter the Philippines in the fourth.

"Government agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture, Department of Trade and Industry, and the National Food Authority should ensure sufficient supply of basic food commodities in view of the expected tropical cyclones that will enter the" country, Pernia said.

He also said that, as part the government's continued efforts to prevent the entry of ASF, the Food and Drug Administration suspended imports of pork products from Hong Kong, North Korea and Germany, as well as from 17 other ASF-infected areas.

"The concerned authorities should intensify its market surveillance to ensure the compliance of importers and retailers with the government's directive. The government should also ensure that there is sufficient production of pork and other meat products locally as the threat of the epidemic is seen to continue in the near term," Pernia added.

WITH CATHERINE S. VALENTE

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: B1 & B10

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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Inflation hits 2-yr low; BSP seen to cut rates

By Ben O. de Vera and Daxim L. Lucas
@InquirerBiz

Stable food prices, especially declining retail prices of rice, further eased inflation to a two-year low of 2.4 percent in July, the government reported Tuesday.

The increase in prices of basic commodities last month matched the rate posted in July 2017. Last month's headline inflation rate was also the lowest recorded since the 2.2 percent in December 2016.

"The main driver in the downward trend of inflation in July was food and nonalcoholic beverages," National Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa told a press conference.

In the case of rice, the Filipino staple registered a third straight month of declining prices—down 2.9 percent year-on-year in July, 1.7 percent in June and 0.7 percent in May, he said, noting that the last time that rice prices declined year-on-year was in June 2016.

As such, market watchers are all but certain that the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas will take advantage of the stable price environment to further cut interest rates tomorrow and give the local economy a growth boost.

In a statement, the central bank said the July 2019 rate of price increases "is consistent with the BSP's prevailing assessment that inflation will continue to decelerate in the third quarter before firmly settling within the target range of 3 percent, plus or minus 1 percentage point for 2019 and 2020."

With its policy-making Monetary Board set to decide on interest rates on Thursday, the central bank said that ample domestic food supply conditions have supported the continued easing of price pressures.

The Philippine Statistics Authority's Mapa said that rice prices last year were "really high" such that they dropped during the past three months.

The government had also attributed the dip in prices to the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law since March, which allowed easier entry of cheaper imports to slash domestic rice prices.

Also, Mapa pointed to a year-on-year decline in prices of corn, sugar, jam, honey, chocolate and confectionery, while price increases eased for oils and fats, vegetables and other food products that month.

Besides food, Mapa said the other contributors to July's lower inflation included slower year-on-year increases in prices of firewood, charcoal and jeepney fare, while prices of domestic air fare, petroleum and fuels for personal transport equipment, electricity and LPG declined that month.

For his part, ING Bank Manila's senior economist Nicholas Mapa said the latest data provided evidence of a continued

INFLATION HITS 2-YR LOW

FROM B1

trend of slowing inflation in the Philippines.

"With the US Federal Reserve cutting rates by 25 basis points last Wednesday, it is widely expected by the market that the Philippine central bank will [also] be cutting rates this Thursday," he said.

BSP Governor Benjamin Diokno earlier told Bloomberg News that he saw up to 50 basis pints worth of rate cuts for the balance of 2019.

"We welcome this decelerating trend in prices but we remain on guard against possible upside risks such as adverse weather conditions, possible entry of the African swine fever and uncertainty in the global oil market, among others," Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto M. Pernia said in a statement.

"Government agencies such as the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Trade and Industry and the National Food Authority should ensure sufficient supply of basic food commodities in view of the expected tropical cyclones that will enter the Philippine area of responsibility," added Pernia, who heads the state planning agency National Economic and Development Authority. INQ

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

AUG. 07, 2019 / PAGE: A4

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MASAGANANG ANI 300 was officially launched last July 29, 2019. Present during the launch were SL Agritech Corp. Chairman and CEO Dr. Henry Lim Bon Liong; Go Negosyo Adviser for Agripreneurship and Head of Mindanao Development Programs Ginggay Hontiveros-Malvar; Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Ariel Cayanan; Dr. William Dar; members of the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and farmers from Nueva Ecija and Pampanga.

GO NEGOSYO AND SL AGRITECH CORP. PARTNER FOR 'MASAGANANG ANI 300'

Go Negosyo, led by Presidential Adviser for Entrepreneurship Joey Concepcion, partners with SL Agritech Corporation, led by Dr. Henry Lim Bon Liong, for the ***Masaganang Ani 300 Award*** which acknowledges and recognizes the efforts of outstanding rice farmers by harvesting more than 300 cavans or 15 metric tons in one hectare using SLAC commercial hybrid rice seeds.

SL Agritech Corporation has been continuously promoting the use and benefits of hybrid rice in the country. Lim Bon Liong who is also the President of the Federation of the Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, introduced the hybrid rice technology which is said to be the most viable option in increasing the rice productivity without the additional land area.

Go Negosyo has been supportive of the programs for agriculture development. **"I still believe that agriculture is a game-changer. The goal is to empower all farmers and turn them into enterprising agripreneurs"**, PA Joey Concepcion.

Dr. Henry Lim Bon Liong also shared his vision for the farmers and the Philippine agriculture.

Ginggay Hontiveros-Malvar, Go Negosyo Adviser for Agripreneurship and Head of Mindanao Development Programs opened the launching ceremony in behalf of PA Joey Concepcion. Dr. Frisco Malabanan, Senior Technical Consultant of SLAC; Mr. Joji Co, President of the Philippine Confederation of Grains Association; and Usec. Ariel Cayanan of the Department of Agriculture; and some farmers also joined the launch.

Farmers who will successfully yield not less than 300 cavans or 15,000 kilograms per hectare will receive cash prizes, trophy, and freebies in the second quarter of the cropping year.

Qualifications for farmer nominees are as follows:

Nominees of the ***Masaganag Ani 300 Award*** must possess all the following qualifications:

- A Filipino citizen with good moral character as duly certified by the Barangay Chairman;
- Must not be an employee of SL Agritech Corporation, Go Negosyo, Department of Agriculture and any Local Government Unit;
- Must be a farmer by principal occupation and with land area of at least 1 hectare.

Must have a complete record or document of his/her farm operations including expenses, production protocol as well as photos.

For more information, please contact Ms. Joh Dungca at +63917-3169404, or e-mail joh_dungca@yahoo.com.

Dr. Henry Lim Bon Liong, SL Agritech Corp. Chairman and CEO, and President of the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Ginggay Hontiveros-Malvar, Go Negosyo Adviser for Agripreneurship and Head of Mindanao Development Programs

Farmer leaders from Central Luzon were also present at the launch and contract signing.

PARTNERS FOR PROSPERITY. ***Masaganang Ani 300*** **acknowledges and recognizes efforts of outstanding rice farmers by harvesting more than 300 cavans or 15 metric tons in one hectare using SLAC commercial hybrid rice seeds.**

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
Date: JUL 07, 2019 Page: 12 11

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Inflation cools down to 2.4% in July

By **CHINO S. LEYCO**

The rate of increase in consumer prices further eased last month, sliding to its slowest level in over two-years, amid decelerating food costs particularly rice, and reductions in electricity rates, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed yesterday.

The country's headline inflation cooled down to 2.4 percent in July, the lowest rate in 31-months, from 2.7 percent in the previous month, and 5.7 percent in the same month last year.

The July figure brought the year-to-date inflation to 3.3 percent, within the national government's target of 2.0 percent to 4.0 percent this year and the economic managers' assumption of 2.7 percent to 3.5 percent.

The weaker inflation was due to slower price increases in food and non-alcoholic beverages (decelerated to 1.9 percent from 2.7 percent) and housing, water, electricity, gas ▶11

ENCOURAGING TREND – As inflation eases, experts see the pace of infrastructure projects, such as the Metro Rail Transit 7, picking up. (Mark Balmores)

Inflation cools down... ◀1

and other fuels in July 2019.

Rice deflation was also observed for the third consecutive month, reaching -2.9 percent in July.

In addition, slower annual increments were noted in the indices of the following commodity groups: alcoholic beverages and tobacco, 8.8 percent; housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels, 2.2 percent; furnishing, household equipment and routine maintenance of the house, 2.9 percent; health, 3.2 percent; and transport, 0.7 percent.

"We welcome this decelerating trend in prices but we remain on guard against possible upside risks such as adverse weather conditions, possible entry of the African swine fever, and uncertainty in the global oil market, among others," Socio-economic Planning Secretary Ernesto M. Pernia said.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) expects the Southwest monsoon or Habagat to peak in the period July to September 2019.

Moreover, the agency said that 6 to 9 tropical cyclones are expected in the third quarter, while another 3 to 5 tropical cyclones could enter the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) in the last quarter of 2019.

"Government agencies such as Department of Agriculture, Department of Trade and Industry, and the National Food Authority should ensure sufficient supply of basic food commodities, in view of the expected tropical cyclones that will enter the PAR," he said.

As part of the government's continued efforts to prevent the entry of African swine fever (ASF) into the country, the Food and Drug Administration temporarily banned the importation of pork meat products from Hong Kong, North Korea, and Germany, alongside 17 other ASF-infected areas.

"The concerned authorities should intensify its market surveillance to ensure the compliance of importers and retailers with the government's directive. The government should also ensure that there is sufficient production of pork and other meat products locally as the threat of the epidemic is seen to continue in the near term," Pernia noted.

Malacañang is confident the country's inflation will continue to ease amid its commitment to implement macroeconomic policies beneficial to the nation.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the Palace welcomed the latest drop in the inflation rate, and vowed to remain on guard in monitoring consumer prices.

"We are confident that disinflation will continue as we remain on guard in monitoring the prices of basic goods and commodities. Filipino consumers can rest assured that the Duterte administration will continue to work tirelessly in implementing macroeconomic policies which will have a positive impact that can be felt by our nation," he added.

Panelo has credited President Duterte and the economic team's hard work and political will for ensuring the downward trend of the inflation rate. (With a report from Genalyn D. Kabiling)

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

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: 2

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

7 TONELADANG FOSSILIZED GIANT CLAMS NABAWI SA NORTH NEGOCC

NABAWI ang halos pitong toneladang fossilized giant clams (Tridacna gigas) na nagkakahalaga ng PHP28 milyon ng awtoridad sa Escalante City, Negros Occidental kamakailan.

Ayon sa report na inilabas ng Negros Occidental Police Provincial Office, natagpuan ang mga fossilized giant clams sa bahay ni Jasper Bacaron sa Hacienda Juliana sa Barangay Washington bandang alas-5 ng hapon noong Agosto 2.

Ininspeksiyon ang lugar ng mga tauhan ng Escalante City Police Station na pinangunahan ni Lt. Col. Necerato Sabando Jr., Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources- Negros Occidental provincial director Marian Jill Abeto, at Escalante City Executive Assistant Rolen Cabus.

Ayon sa police report, ikinumpisal ni Bacaron kay Cabus na ang may-ari o buyer na kasalukuyang pang pinaghahanap ay residente ng Barangay Vito sa kalapit na siyudad ng Sagay.

Hindi na inaresto si Bacaron dahil kusang loob niyang isinuko ang giant clams sa mga pulis.

Inilagay ang mga nabawing fossilized giant clams sa kustodiya ng BFAR-Provincial Fishery Office sa siyudad na ito.

Ang "Tridacna gigas", na kilala sa tawag na "manlot" o "taklobo", ang pinakamalaking buhay na hindi gumagawalaw na bivalve mollusk sa mundo. Ito ay makikilala na pinakamahinang species ng International Union for Conservation of Nature dahil ito ay nahaharap na sa high risk na maaaring mawala na.

Nitong Abril 2019, inaresto ang tatlong residente ng Sagay City nakinasuhan dahil sa pagtatago ng halos 1.5 tonelada ng fossilized giant clams.

Mayroon sila umanong buyer na nagalok na bumili ng clams sa halagang PHP1,000 bawat kilo.

Ayon sa Section 102 ng Republic Act 10654 o binagong Philippine Fisheries Code ng 1998 na ilegal ang manguha, mamingwit, mag-ani, magbenta, bumili, magtago, magbiyahe, mag-export, mag-forward o maglabas ng aquatic species na nakalista sa Appendix I ng Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna, o ang mga nasa kategorya ng International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. **PNA**

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL
Everybody's Newspaper

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: 4

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Improving watershed ecosystem mgm't

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the National Irrigation Authority have signed a Memorandum of Agreement for the effective management and development of the 143 watersheds supporting the National Irrigation Systems in the country.

NIA administrator Ricardo Visaya and Environment nd Natural Resources Sec. Roy Cimatu inked the agreement at the DENR Central Office in Diliman, Quezon City.

By virtue of the DENR Memorandum Circular 2008-05, the guidelines in the preparation of Integrated Watershed Management Plans and programs of all watersheds in the country, regardless of their classification, size, use, and administrative jurisdiction, was issued.

In this regard, there is a need to establish and delineate the respective responsibilities of the DENR and NIA over watersheds and reservations, for purposes of effective management and development of programs and projects toward the sustainable existence of irrigation systems within the said areas.

Similarly, the concept of Watershed Ecosystem Management from ridge to reef approach, including vulnerability assessment, must be harmonized and adopted.

The MoA provides that in coordination with DENR and Forest Management Bureau, NIA would identify and recommend priority watersheds and reservations supporting irrigation projects which require immediate rehabilitation and development.

In collaboration with the DENR and other concerned agencies and instrumentalities, NIA would also secure appropriate environment clearances and permits from the DENR/ field offices as necessary for the protection of watersheds and reservations.

Moreover, the Agency would recommend qualified NIA field personnel to be deputized by the DENR as Environment and Natural Resources Officers, in accordance with the existing forestry laws, rules, and regulations.

In this regard, NIA is to assist the DENR in the preparation of IWMP and programs related to the management, protection, development, and rehabilitation of such watersheds and reservations.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

Date: AUGUST 7, 2019 Page: 11

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GOTCHA

JARIUS BONDOC

How they fought rice cartels, price spikes a century ago

That the average age of Filipino farmers is 60 was reported two years ago, so the figure needs updating. Sons leave the tillage for easier work, perchance as *municipio* fixer, *jueteng* runner, or jitney barker. Farming is so neglected it has lost appeal. Irrigation and harvest facilities are scant, fertilizer and pesticide so costly. Farmers are at the mercy of middlemen. To please consumers, agencies import food rather than assist producers. Kickbacks are taken from paving farm-to-market roads.

In rice the government is set to boost farm yields and end imports, long overdue. But resisting change, appointees are into old moneymaking rackets. All the more farmers will be turned off. Many present mistakes had been committed before, and tested solutions forgotten. Authorities never learn.

A century ago US colonial officials encountered farm and food crises. From the Philippine Commission report of 1903 can be gleaned repeats of history: pestilence, rice price spikes, trade cartels, emergency imports, wastage. As background, some causes were similar: outbreaks of human and work animal diseases, unrest and counter-insurgency, and shortage of seeds and farm labor. Excerpts:

"In November 1902 the price of rice rose rapidly in Manila and the provinces, and information reached the Commission that a syndicate had been formed by certain merchants to corner this food of the people and to control its price. The situation warranted extraordinary action... On the 4th of November 1902 the Commission passed Act No. 495 ... appropriating $2,000,000 Mexican to defray the expense of buying and distributing rice at a reasonable price to the inhabitants... By the terms of the law the rice was bought and distributed for cash at a price which would cover all expenses. Subsequently the restriction as to price was repealed. In attempting to buy rice in Saigon, the source of rice supply nearest to the Philippines, the Commission was informed that supply there was exhausted. Application was made to the consul at Bangkok for Siam rice and also to the consul at Calcutta for Calcutta rice. It was found necessary to go into these distant markets because the syndicate evidently controlled the Saigon market.

"The purchases of rice, with the cost of storing, distribution, and wastage, did not prove to be profitable. An especially severe loss was suffered in the rice purchased at Calcutta. We bought there what was called 'first-class famine rice.' On arrival this proved to be an inferior quality of red rice, which soon developed weevils and in its deteriorating condition had to be sold at a considerable loss. It was probably necessary to go as far as Calcutta to break the corner, but it would have been wiser to buy a better quality of rice.

"None of the rice in question was given away; it was held in Manila and sent to the various provinces as word was received from the governors that the local dealers were raising the price of rice beyond what was reasonable. Our purchases in Siam and Calcutta broke the corner, and rice fell in price... A large part of the Calcutta purchase was sold to a firm having control of certain small coastwise steamers of small draft which plied from port to port and peddled out cargoes of the poor rice through Chinamen. The contract of sale forbade, under bond penalty, disposition of the rice at a price greater than $6.50 Mexican per picul of 137 pounds, plus actual cost of freight.

"The purchases of rice under Act No. 495 in Mexican money amounted to $1,815,974.81. And the sales amounted to 1,567,642.00. Loss from wastage and poor Calcutta rice: P248,332.81.

"...The loss to the Government, at the then prevailing rate, was thus about $100,000 gold. Considering that by this action rice at a reasonable price was secured to six million of people for one season when they were threatened with starvation prices, the money was not badly spent. The losses sustained by the syndicate who attempted the corner was sufficient to prevent another combination of the kind...

"Anticipating that the small rice acreage, due to the absence of cattle and other causes, would not be sufficient to furnish food for the inhabitants during the year 1903, the Commission passed an act to provide against the danger of famine dated Nov. 12, 1902, and numbered 517. It was made the duty of municipal presidents in all the towns to call meetings of the people ... to secure the necessary seed and to plant quick-growing crops of corn, camotes (i.e., sweet potatoes), rice, and other food plants. Each president was authorized temporarily to allot public land for planting seed and reaping the crop... Monthly reports of their proceedings under the act were required.

"...In parts of the islands the municipal councils exceeded their authority and made the failure to plant crops criminal offenses, and punished persons by imprisonment... From the last of January until late in August there was a drought in the islands of unusual length; and with the drought a pest of locusts came."

* * *

Catch *Sapol* radio show, Saturdays, 8-10 a.m., DWIZ (882-AM).

Gotcha archives: *www.philstar.com/columns/134276/gotcha*

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The Manila Times

Date: August 7, 2019 Page: A4

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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

The small rice farmer is a dead man walking

MIDWEEK COMMENTS

MARLEN V. RONQUILLO

IF a palay buyer does not care about the moisture content of the palay he is buying, newly harvested palay can be had for a price of between P10 to P12 per kilogram.

"Dry" or the desirable palay with a moisture content of 14 percent or less (this can be stored in warehouses for milling during the off-palay season), is being sold for between P14 to P17 per kg, with P17 per kg as the top price. To get the top price of P17 per kg, the farmer-seller has to bring the palay to the buying stations of the private buyers and shoulder the cost of transport.

More, the farmer-seller does not only assume the cost of transporting the palay to the buying stations. He has to take care of drying his palay to meet the 14 percent moisture content. With the Philippine farming setting notorious for its lack of silos and dryers, a farmer has to wait for the sun and available basketball courts to dry newly harvested palay. Do you have the luxury for this if you are drowning in production-related debt?

After all the effort, a farmer aiming for the top price of P17 per kg for his palay is just as hopeless as the farmer unloading his newly harvested palay at P12 per kg. The P5 per kg difference is eaten up by drying costs, waiting costs and transport expenses. Either at P12 per kg or P17 per kg, the result is the same — selling at a loss. What if that desperate farmer is scheduled to pay what he owes the informal lender, the *usurero*? And at terms worse than 5/6?

Amid the promises of President Duterte to suspend rice imports during the harvest season, amid the farcical boosterism from senators on the would-be impact of the Rice Tariffication Law, amid the general indifference of the so-called public intellectuals on the fate of the small rice farmers post-tarrification, there is only one reality in the rice farming areas — the brutish and nasty impact of the rice tariff law. The collective grief is palpable. Across the farming areas of Central Luzon and much of the country, the small farmer is a dead man walking.

My 92-year-old mother, a Huk fighter in the last war who was at the frontline during the bloody retaking of the old Pampanga Sugar Mill garrison from the Japanese, has defined post-tariffication life in our farming area as "worse than the Japanese occupation."

The incessant boosterism about the raising of P10 billion a year from the rice tariffs, which would be dedicated to farm support, does nothing to lift the hopes of the grief-stricken farming areas. And the farmers have worries as big as the falling palay prices. Even rice importation is now at the mercy of scammers.

According to the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), rice imports in the post-tariffication regime are being undervalued, and this may result in the failure to raise the P10 billion required yearly from farm support.

While figures from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) indicate that imported rice at 25 percent broken should arrive at Philippine ports with a landed cost of $391 per metric ton, the collection figures of the Bureau of Customs indicate otherwise — a landed cost of $227 per metric ton, that is, if the imported rice was indeed, of the 25 percent broken variety .

FFF said that most of the imported rice has been of the 5 percent broken and this costs higher — at $422 per metric ton.

The undervaluation is done for one obvious reason, to cheat on the taxes and depress the amount that the government would collect under the rice tariff regime and, ultimately, depress the amount that would be — theoretically — allocated to support the small rice farmers bludgeoned by the rice tariff policy.

The connivance, corruption and collusion at the ports to undervalue the rice imports and depress revenue collection from the rice tariff law is all-too-obvious, even with the FFF's reluctance to make a direct accusation that rice imports have been a source of corruption.

Question: Why would corrupt parties collude to depress the revenue from the regime of rice imports amid the general suffering of small rice farmers? Because nobody minds that kind of suffering and small rice farmers have been declared as losers early on. Another answer. Because all (without exception) of the institutions that are supposed to support small rice farmers have all betrayed the small rice farmers. In a previous column, I cited the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) as Exhibit A. The state-owned bank was created to support small farmers and agrarian reform beneficiaries. But it has opted to grant $85 million in unsecured loans to bankrupt Hanjin than lend to small farmers and agrarian reform beneficiaries. Today, the LBP is on lending overdrive, propaganda-wise, to cover up the anti-farm bias of its lending policies and ease the presidential ire.

Of course, the institutions that have betrayed the small farmers would expect no day of reckoning. You can kick the dying small rice farmers again and again and again and there would be neither backlash nor blowback. He Land Bank can pretend to ramp up its loans to farmers and agrarian reform beneficiaries — on paper — and go on its merry way of screwing them. If you look closely at the advertorials of the Land Bank on its supposed lending, you will readily notice its banking con. There are no glowing stories on stand-alone loans to small farmers and land reform beneficiaries. Because there are none. It would rather lend to bankrupt Hanjin than to small farmers.

Even in Congress, the party-list representatives who are supposed to represent the peasantry are either pseudo-farmers or phony farmer groups.

Given all of these assaults and acts of brutalization, there is no way forward for today's wretched of the earth. I recently read the Case-Deaton study on "deaths of despair," the story of marginal white, rural Americans dying from opioids, suicide and alcohol. Our own version of "deaths of despair" — this time involving small rice farmers pushed to a real state of desperation — is not far behind.

The Manila Times

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: B3

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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Farmer finds success in agri-preneurship through science, thirst for learning

"A FARMER has to be a scientist. You have to do a lot of observing. You don't just plant and plant."

This is the philosophy that farmer-turned-agripreneur Ruben Ragas lives by.

His farm in Cabadbaran City, Agusan del Norte is proof of his careful and meticulous planning.

Determined to improve his knowledge and skills, Ruben continuously attended seminars and technical courses related to farming. His one-year stint with the Federation of Agrarian Reform Communities further taught him basic knowledge and skills on effective farming and efficient marketing strategies.

Equipped with farm resource and basic entrepreneurial experience, Ruben hoped to further grow their family's livelihood. Through LandBank-assisted Baug CARP Beneficiaries Multi-Purpose Cooperative (BCBMPC) in Magallanes, Agusan del Norte, Ruben was able to buy seedlings and farm-inputs from a P15,000-loan from the coop. Over the next few years, he went to BCBMPC for more capital, including a P50,000 loan, to help him buy another half-hectare of land. He has also since then diversified into raising *tilapia* and various livestock.

In February this year, Ruben and his family launched *The Ragas Farm* where visitors are allowed to pick their choice of fruits and vegetables and buy them at significantly cheaper prices than retail market price.

Ruben is now also an educator and life coach sought after by institutions to conduct lessons and seminars for aspiring agri-entrepreneurs. For his accomplishments in farming and inspiring drive to succeed, Ruben was awarded by Landbank as "Ulirang Magsasaka" in the 2015 *Gawad sa Pinakatanging Kooperatiba*.

THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

Date: AUG 07, 2019 Page: B11

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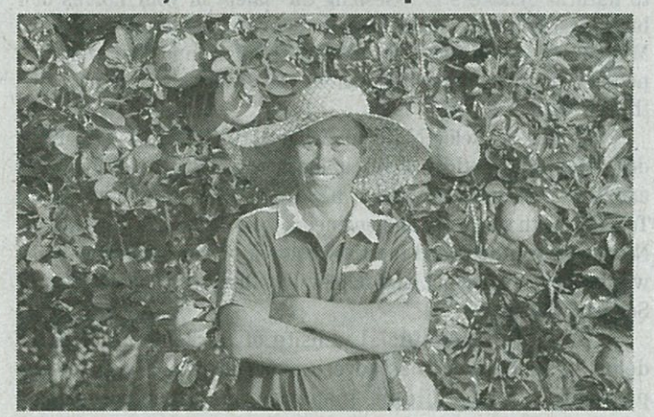
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

BCDA, LandBank lease pact at NCC



The Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) and its partner MTD Clark Inc. recently signed a memorandum of agreement (MoA) with the Land Bank of the Philippines Leasing and Finance Corp. (LLFC) to establish leasing and financing facilities for government agencies intending to locate inside the National Government Administrative Center (NGAC) at the New Clark City.

MTD Clark Inc. Chairman Isaac David and LLFC president and chief executive officer Francisco Leonor Jr. led the signing ceremony. BCDA president and CEO Vivencio Dizon and LLFC assistant vice president and Legal Counsel Marla Barcenilla witnessed the signing.

Under the agreement, BCDA, MTD and LLFC will collaborate on a framework to provide a viable option for government agencies to avail of LLFC's leasing and financial facilities for the acquisition of an office building or office spaces in NGAC.

"The MoA will be historic in a sense that it will not only greatly assist the fast-tracking of the New Clark City development but will open new doors for government agencies to avail of this novel instrument, which has not been fully utilized in the Philippines," Dizon said.

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business
AUG 09, 2019 / PAGE: A10
LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

editorial

R&D will move PHL farm sector forward

THE jump in the country's innovation ranking in this year's edition of the Global Innovation Index (GII) to 54th from 73rd last year is a spectacular feat. The latest ranking reflects the ingenuity and, more important, the resourcefulness of Filipinos. This is because the improvement in ranking was achieved despite the fact that the Philippines remains a laggard in terms of research and development (R&D) spending in Southeast Asia.

The latest data on annual public R&D spending in the Philippines remains miniscule—at less than 1 percent of GDP. The latest available figure from the World Bank placed the country's public R&D expenditure at a dismal 0.14 percent as of 2013. This is lower than the spending of other Southeast Asian countries like Singapore and Malaysia, which set aside 2.1 percent and 1.13 percent of GDP respectively for R&D activities.

It does not help that the country's policies hardly attract new businesses, particularly R&D firms. The GII, which was published by the World Intellectual Property Organization, noted that the weak areas of the Philippines are concentrated in the innovation input side. According to WIPO, these include the ease of starting a business, ease of getting credit, expenditure on education and global R&D companies.

If reforms are not implemented immediately, the government must start increasing its R&D budget. Many of the projects that will boost R&D activities in the country are listed in the Public Investment Program prepared by the National Economic and Development Authority. However, halfway into the term of President Duterte, the government has yet to allocate money for the PIP initiatives, many of which are expected to boost farm productivity.

The farm sector is badly in need of more R&D activities not only because of the adverse impact of climate change on agricultural production but also because there is a pressing need to increase the income of planters. Recent policies, such as the country's shift to a more open rice market and the increase in cigarette excise taxes, make it more imperative for the government to allocate more funds for R&D. Rice farmers who will have to compete with imports may need to plant other crops, while tobacco farmers will have to make other products using their crop.

Encouraging rice farmers to plant other cash crops that are long-gestating will not work if there is no support, such as affordable credit and access to technology. Helping planters commercialize products from tobacco will require a lot of money. R&D is not a one-shot deal; it requires long-term commitment and support from the government if only to make the Philippines, particularly the farm sector, more attractive to potential investors.

The Duterte administration has set an ambitious goal of slashing poverty incidence to 14 percent by 2022. As the rate is now at 21 percent, the government must cut poverty incidence by 2 percentage points every year for the next three years. This cannot be done if this administration will not make the necessary changes in its spending priorities. Investments in R&D may not immediately yield results, but Filipinos will feel their impact beyond the term of President Duterte.

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

Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: 13

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Inflation dips to 2.4%

By CHINO LEYCO

The rate of increase in consumer prices further eased last month, sliding to its slowest level in over two-years, amid decelerating food costs particularly rice, and reductions in electricity rates, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed yesterday.

The country's headline inflation cooled down to 2.4 percent in July, the lowest rate in 31-months, from 2.7 percent in the previous month and 5.7 percent in the same month last year.

The July figure brought the year-to-date inflation to 3.3 percent, within the national government's target of 2.0 percent to 4.0 percent this year and the economic managers' assumption of 2.7 percent to 3.5 percent.

The weaker inflation was due to slower price increases in food and non-alcoholic beverages (decelerated to 1.9 percent from 2.7 percent) and housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels in July 2019.

Rice deflation also was observed for the third consecutive month, reaching -2.9 percent in July.

"We welcome this decelerating trend in prices but we remain on guard against possible upside risks such as adverse weather conditions, possible entry of the African swine fever, and uncertainty in the global oil market, among others," Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto M. Pernia said.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration or Pagasa expects the Southwest monsoon or Habagat to peak in the period July to September 2019.

Moreover, the agency said that 6 to 9 tropical cyclones are expected in the third quarter, while another 3 to 5 tropical cyclones could enter the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) in the last quarter of 2019.

"Government agencies such as Department of Agriculture, Department of Trade and Industry, and the National Food Authority should ensure sufficient supply of basic food commodities, in view of the expected tropical cyclones that will enter the PAR," he said.

Meanwhile, as part the government's continued efforts to prevent the entry of African swine fever (ASF) into the country, the Food and Drug Administration temporarily banned the importation of pork meat products from Hong Kong, North Korea, and Germany, alongside 17 other ASF-infected areas.

"The concerned authorities should intensify its market surveillance to ensure the compliance of importers and retailers with the government's directive. The government should also ensure that there is sufficient production of pork and other meat products locally as the threat of the epidemic is seen to continue in the near term," Pernia noted.

Pilipino Star
NGAYON
Diyaryong disente ng masang intelihente

Date: AUGUST 7, 2019 Page: 2

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Inflation rate bumagal pa

Bumagal pa ang inflation rate o bilis sa paggalaw ng presyo ng mga produkto at serbisyo sa bansa.

Sa datos na ilinabas ng Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), pumalo lamang sa 2.4% ang inflation rate nitong Hulyo, mas mababa sa 2.7% na naitala noong Hunyo.

Nananatiling top contributor sa mabagal na inflation ang hanay ng food and non-alcoholic beverages na may 31.6-percent share.

Kabilang din ang karne, isda, housing, tubig, kuryente at gasolina.

Sa labas ng Metro Manila, nananatiling mabilis ang paggalaw sa presyo ng mga produkto sa Mimaropa bagamat mas mababa ang 4.9-percent nito mula sa 5.2-percent noong Hunyo. Pinakamabagal sa Central Visayas sa 1.1-percent.

Ito na ang pinakamababang inflation rate na naitala ng PSA mula noong buwan ng Enero 2017. *(Rudy Andal)*

THE DAILY tribune
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Date: AUG. 07, 2019 Page: B12

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Mechanized harvesting of goji berries

THERE IS A GROWING NEED FOR MECHANIZED HARVESTING METHODS TO INCREASE EFFICIENCY

BEIJING, China – Researchers have developed a new method to facilitate mechanized harvesting of goji berries, according to the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences.

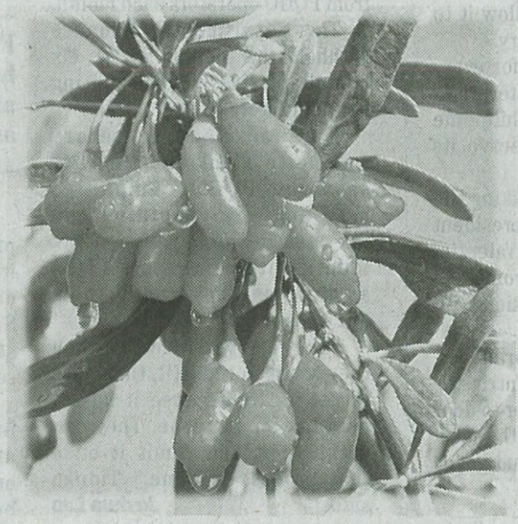
Chinese goji berries, also known as Chinese wolfberries, are increasingly sought after by consumers worldwide. Picking goji berries takes a lot of manual work and the manual cost accounts for half of its total production cost.

There is a growing need for mechanized harvesting methods to increase efficiency.

Researchers from the Nanjing Research Institute for Agricultural Mechanization, Ningxia Academy of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences as well as machinery manufacturing companies have solved the problem by proposing a new goji berry cultivation method and developing new harvesting equipment.

The cultivation method makes goji berries suitable for mechanized harvesting and the vibrating wolfberry-picking machine can pick more than 90 percent of the goji berries at a time, with a damage rate of less than 5 percent.

It can harvest around 144 goji berry trees in an hour, equivalent to the work of 30 goji berry pickers. The technology is expected to address the labor shortage and increase the efficiency of the goji berry industry, according to the academy.



GOJI berries.