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PA Joey Concepcion with newly appointed Agriculture Secretary William Dar.

Leaving no Filipino farmers behind

Three years have passed since I was given the opportunity to extend my advocacies for the micro, small and medium entrepreneurs in the country as the presidential adviser for entrepreneurship. Since President Duterte got elected, our President has been active in promoting inclusive growth, the kind of development which should and must be felt by all Filipinos from all sectors.

Given the task, I am in a unique position to work closely with the government and the private sector and encourage collaborative work to achieve the goals we have established for the common good of our countrymen which is inclusive prosperity.

NEGOSYO PILIPINAS ANGAT LAHAT!

JOEY CONCEPCION

Last Aug. 21, after the appointment of Agriculture Secretary William Dar, we had an insightful meeting together with Go Negosyo adviser for agripreneurship and Mindanao development programs Ginggay Hontiveros-Malvar, and SL Agritech Corp. president and Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chamber president Henry Lim Bon Liong.

During the meeting, Secretary Dar shared his vision for the agriculture sector: *"Inclusive agribusiness is the way forward. From here on, we will always consult with industry leaders and any consensus that we arrived at, that will be our shared decision for the goal of the country. We will reinvent and reorient Philippine agriculture and direct it towards the path of modernization and industrialization, with the aim of making it more productive, competitive, sustainable, resilient and inclusive. And let us not forget the aim of increasing the incomes of farmers and fisherfolk. Our twins Ani and Kita must be nurtured. Masaganang Ani or high productivity and Mataas na Kita or prosperous income for All."*

Our discussion revolved around further efforts to harness strong public-private partnerships, inclusive business with and for Filipino farmers, and support Sec. Dar's developmental plans and reforms for the agriculture sector.

During some of his press conferences, Sec. Dar mentioned that he is mandated to alleviate the lives of our farmers and fisherfolks. Now that he is the DA chief, we know that this mandate from the President will become a reality during Dar's term because since the new DA head has been a strong ally in our advocacy for the sector. I personally believe that Sec. Dar is an excellent addition to the administration as it pursues inclusive growth for all Filipinos in all sectors.

Secretary Dar also mentioned his plan for his first 100 days in office, with specific priority points. He expounds on his eight paradigms which he calls the "new thinking for agriculture." This includes modernization of agriculture, the industrialization of agriculture, the promotion of exports, farm consolidation, roadmap development, infrastructure development, higher budget and investment for agriculture, and legislative support.

With the vision to form an agri-entrep private sector alliance with the champions of the agriculture industry, the Office of the Presidential Adviser for Entrepreneurship, in conjunction with DA, plans to help small farmers through continuous mentorship and other technical support which would be supplemental for our MSMEs and farmers.

Agreed upon during the meeting was the formation of a stronger private sector group to help the DA realize its mission of bringing prosperity to our farmers. Thus, we will establish an alliance of agriculture stakeholders to provide support and assistance to Sec. Dar.

Some of the agriculture champions we will tap are Henry Lim Bon Liong (SL Agritech Corp.); Sabin Aboitiz (Aboitiz Group); Feliciano Torres (Yazaki-Torres Manufacturing Inc.); Justin Uy (Profood International Corp.); Simon Bakker (Kennemer Foods); Winston Uy (Universal Leaf); Tennyson Chen (Bounty Fresh); Rosalind Wee (W Group of Companies); Chit Juan (Kape Isla Coffee Corp.); Toto Barcelona (Harbest); Ruth Novales (Nestle); and Danny Fausto (DVF Dairy Farm).

We, in Go Negosyo, are willing to work with Sec. Dar in his mission to strengthen our agriculture sector. Our program, the Kapatid Agri Mentor ME Program which we do in partnership with the DA has reached all regions in the country and aims to help agri-entrepreneurs through agri-based associations and cooperatives by capacitating them in various areas of business. Since its launch in 2017, KAMMP was able to bring the program to all 16 regions, successfully trained more than 2,500 farmers, and produced graduates in close to 1,000 agri-based cooperatives and farmer associations.

Moreover, Go Negosyo, through the enhanced partnerships with the private sector leaders and stakeholders, particularly in forging 3Ms (money, market, and mentorship) in agribusiness, is set to further expand its ongoing partnership with the DA to bring prosperity for all farmers in the country.

I believe that Secretary Dar is an asset to the administration as he pursues inclusive growth for all Filipinos in the agriculture sector. I express my full support for Secretary Dar and we hope to achieve the shared goal through the strengthened partnership of Go Negosyo and the Department of Agriculture to further serve our farmers and fisherfolks, agricultural cooperatives and associations, and MSMEs in the country.

We have to improve the lives of our farmers and make the sector more sustainable despite its many challenges. If we really want to change the landscape of prosperity for our country, we must pay attention and give importance to our farmers and other players in agriculture.

Through the formation of an alliance, we can forge a stronger effort to ensure that innovation in the field is supported through programs that will sustain growth.

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DA mulls lower P17/kilo buying price for palay

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

Amid the drop in prices, Agriculture Secretary William Dar is considering the proposal of Sen. Cynthia Villar, chair of the Senate committee on agriculture and food, to trim the buying price for palay (unhusked rice) to P17 per kilogram from the current P20.70.

The National Food Authority (NFA) increased its buying price for palay last year to help farmers keep up with rising production cost.

"That was done during the crisis in 2018 so I think we will have to revisit that," Dar told reporters on the sidelines of the rice tariffication hearing yesterday.

It was in September 2018 when the interagency NFA Council came up with additional incentives that will allow farmers to sell their palay for as much as P20 per kilo in a bid to beef up the agency's buffer stock.

The increase in the buying price prompted NFA to sell at a higher price of P37 per kilo to select government agencies and local government units, a move which Villar questioned.

"The LGUs are complaining because they are buying for their prisoners, hospitals and for their disaster relief and yet they are buying at more expensive prices. You should remove that resolution," she said.

NFA administrator Judy Dansal said the P37 buying price was approved on the basis of the cost of production and cost of transfer, among others.

"Actually we are selling with our retailers at P27 per kilo, but when the tariffication law was implemented, the council also approved a new pricing policy so we can improve our financial viability and condition," Dansal said.

Dar has already instructed the NFA to review its existing pricing guidelines.

NFA continues to buy palay from farmers at P20.70 per kilo, much higher than the buying price of private traders which already dropped to as low as P14 per kilo.

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The 'new thinking' and dealing with climate change

First of two parts

WAYS OF THE OASIS
DR. WILLIAM DAR

WHENEVER the subject of the gravest challenges agriculture is currently facing is discussed, globalization and climate change usually come out as the top two.

Globalization is already evident in farm and food imports entering the country, posing challenges to the country's farmers, fisherfolk, agribusiness enterprises and agripreneurs. But globalization also presents a huge opportunity, as there are many export markets that could be supplied with agricultural-based products from the Philippines.

As for climate change, every actor and stakeholder in the agriculture sector treating it as a "new normal" is an absolute necessity. For the Department of Agriculture (DA), this means being pro-active in dealing with the effects of expected climate events, like the El Niño and La Niña. In Vietnam, it is already a practice among agricultural units to assist rice farmers in adjusting their planting schedules based on the expected effects of droughts.

So, DA should also be quick to act on the effects of unexpected or sudden climate events. It is for this reason that promoting crop insurance also as a tool to make smallholder farmers more resilient to the effects of climate change is among the measures I am pushing as your servant-leader in agriculture at the DA.

Stronger ties with the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) will also help the DA in coming up with measures to assist smallholder farmers and fisherfolk in dealing with extreme weather events.

While it is completely impossible for farmers and fisherfolk to avoid or even minimize losses from extreme weather events, we could put in place measures to make them recover and eventually become resilient. As for those who are hardly affected by extreme weather events, we can make them more resilient so they could serve as models and knowledge generators on how to deal more effectively with the effects of climate change.

Local government units should also be part of the collective action to help farmers deal with the effects of climate change, with the DA taking the lead or providing the broad strokes.

Just this Tuesday, the DA through its Regional Field Office 1 (Ilocos Region) turned over rice, corn and vegetable seeds worth P18.1 million to farmers in the region, in the presence of Senators Imee Marcos and Bong Go. This is on top of the DA's Sure Loan Assistance of P25,000 per farmer provided at zero interest payable in three years. When she was the governor of Ilocos Norte Marcos was very active when it comes to assisting smallholder farmers. She and Go support pro-farmer legislation.

Also, it was reported from Laoag, Ilocos Norte that on August 26, the rainfall in the area reached about 500 millimeters in just three hours, which is almost the monthly average locally. Upon hearing this, I told senators Go and Marcos and other local officials present there that this was proof that climate change is already making its impact, and that we should all prepare for that.

Bad news from IPCC

It looks like the bad news on climate change will never come to an end, which is a good way to remind all actors and stakeholders in the agriculture sector to really take collective action. Failure to do so could endanger locally-produced food supplies, and with almost every country in the world already affected by extreme weather events, we just cannot rely solely on imports to feed our growing population.

Just recently, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Climate Change and Land made alarming conclusions that governments and the general public should take into account. The report was commissioned in 2016 and was prepared by three working groups composed of 107 scientists from more than 50 countries. Half of the authors who contributed to the report were from developing nations, which are expected to bear more of the brunt of the effects of climate change.

Among the excerpts from the latest IPCC report that alarmed me were the effects of extreme climactic events on the agriculture sector.

"Climate change has already affected food security due to warming, changing precipitation patterns, and greater frequency of some extreme events. In many lower-latitude regions, yields of some crops (e.g., maize and wheat) have declined, while in many higher-latitude regions, yields of some crops (e.g., maize, wheat and sugar beets) have increased over recent decades," the report said.

"Climate change has resulted in lower animal growth rates and productivity in pastoral systems in Africa. There is robust evidence that agricultural pests and diseases have already responded to climate change resulting in both increases and decreases of infestations. Based on indigenous and local knowledge, climate change is affecting food security in drylands, particularly those in Africa, and high mountain regions of Asia and South America," it added.

Importance of land

Also, a press release issued on August 8 by IPCC also underscored the importance of land remaining productive, but stated that cultivation of crops for renewable energy and planting of trees in empty lands, called afforestation, may also have shortcomings in addressing the effects of climate change.

"Land must remain productive to maintain food security as the population increases and the negative impacts of climate change on vegetation increase. This means there are limits to the contribution of land to addressing climate change, for instance through the cultivation of energy crops and afforestation. It also takes time for trees and soils to store carbon effectively. Bioenergy needs to be carefully managed to avoid risks to food security, biodiversity and land degradation. Desirable outcomes will depend on locally appropriate policies and governance systems," the IPCC statement added.

The IPCC report also said that about a third of world food production is lost or wasted, varying among regions. Addressing that issue would reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve food security.

When it comes to solutions, the IPCC, in the press statement, recommended measures to address issues from the social and economic dimensions, like increasing incomes.

"Reducing inequalities, improving incomes and ensuring equitable access to food so that some regions [where land cannot provide adequate food] are not disadvantaged, are other ways to adapt to the negative effects of climate change. There are also methods to manage and share risks, some of which are already available, such as early warning systems," it added.

This is where resiliency comes in as a solution to help smallholder farmers and fisherfolk, agripreneurs and agribusiness enterprises cope with the effects of climate change, which forms part of the "New Thinking for Agriculture." Alongside resiliency, the New Thinking for Agriculture seeks to make agriculture smallholders and enterprises productive, competitive and sustainable, while making agriculture growth truly inclusive.

I also believe a modernized and industrialized agriculture sector could help smallholders, agripreneurs and agribusiness enterprises deal effectively with the extreme weather events. I will discuss more of those in the second installment of this series.

To be concluded next week.

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Council may scrap NFA incentives for planters

AGRICULTURESecretary William D. Dar said the National Food Authority Council (NFAC) may remove the P3-per-kilogram incentive of the government for farmers who sell their unhusked rice to the state-run food agency.

Dar said reverting the National Food Authority's (NFA) buying price for palay to P17.70 per kg, from the current P20.70 per kg, will allow the government to buy more rice from planters.

He said the incentives were approved by the NFAC to allow the food agency to compete with traders who bought local rice at higher prices.

"[The grant of incentives] was done during the crisis in 2018, so I think we will have to revisit that formally in the NFA Council," Dar told reporters on the sidelines of a Senate hearing on Wednesday.

The NFAC approved the buffer stocking incentive (BSI) of as much as P3 per kg last October to help the NFA beef up its buffer stock, which was almost wiped out last year.

Sen. Cynthia A. Villar said it is high time for the NFA to remove the BSI since the 2018 "artificial rice shortage" is over.

"The buying price was increased because the private sector hiked their prices," Villar said at the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food hearing on Wednesday. "I think it is the right time to revert your buying price to P17.70 per kg since the problem last year is over."

The NFA was able to purchase more palay from farmers after it raised its buying price to P20.70 per kg and became more competitive against traders.

Selling to LGUs

AT the hearing, Villar told the NFA to cut the price of rice it sells to local government units (LGUs) and other agencies to a range of P27 to P32 per kg, from the current P37 per kg.

Villar said LGUs and even private entities will buy more rice from the NFA and allow the food agency to roll over its funds.

"The LGUs [local government units] buy rice for their prisoners, for hospitals and disaster relief operations. And then [the NFA is] selling rice to them at a high price?" she said.

"Why doesn't [the NFA] sell its stocks to LGUs? So remove that resolution that increased the selling price of rice sold to local governments," she added.

During his first week in office, Dar said the NFAC will review the current price of the NFA for rice it sells to LGUs and private entities.

The NFAC hiked the food agency's selling price by P10 to P37 per kg in May, in order to trim NFA losses as it incurred higher operating costs after implementing the BSI in October 2018.

Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas

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The desolation of PHL agriculture: Can Secretary Dar reverse its continuing stagnation?

Rene E. Ofreneo

LABOREM EXERCENS

INDICATORS of the collapse of Philippine agriculture are not difficult to find. Official statistics indicate growing agricultural trade deficits, declining GDP share and grinding rural poverty everywhere. Most worrisome, there are reports in various regions that there is an acute shortage of agricultural workers because majority of the millennials and those belonging to the younger generation Z have been avoiding farm work like a plague. The Philippine farming population is aging and fading away.

CONTINUED ON A7

THe agricultural sector is facing an existential sustainability issue. How will the newly appointed Agriculture Secretary William Dar handle this challenge? Will he end up like Secretary Manny Piñol, who waged a losing fight against the economic technocrats who pushed for the all-out liberalization of the rice sector without any clear transition program for the domestic palay producers?

The desolation of the agricultural sector started in the 1980s. The government, during the last years of the Marcos administration and the second half of the decade under President Corazon Aquino, surrendered to the IMF-World Bank's "structural adjustment program" conditionality: deregulate the agricultural sector and phase out government credit and price support to the sector. Agriculture Secretary Arturo Tangco, architect of the Masagana 99, was bitter as the rice self-sufficiency program quickly wilted. Under the SAP austerity, funding for rural infrastructures and irrigation systems also dried up, further weakening the productivity of the sector. The 1980s was a disaster decade for the agricultural sector.

In the 1990s, the desolation of the agricultural sector continued under the SAP-driven agricultural deregulation program. This time, the deregulation program was reinforced by the decision of the government to be one of the founding members of the World Trade Organization. As part of its commitment to the WTO, the government placed the whole sector under the tariff regime, meaning the private sector can come in and import any agricultural product.

However, the WTO allowed rice to be temporarily exempted from the coverage of the tariffication program. The rationale given: the Philippines needed some time to transform its rice sector to become globally competitive. In this regard, the Congress rushed the passage of the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act to help modernize the fishery sector and the production of rice and other crops. And yet, AFMA turned out to be a disaster itself. Poorly funded and poorly implemented, AFMA failed to stop the downward collapse of agriculture.

Meanwhile, another poorly implemented agricultural program came into being—the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program. The CARP's enabling law was passed in

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1988, and yet, three decades after, Dar is still in process of "completing" CARP's implementation. Worse, majority of the Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries have remained poor, or just a little better than the landless rural poor. Incidentally, the latter (e.g., ambulant agricultural workers, camote miners, slash-and-burn hillside farmers, coastal fisherfolks, etc.) are more numerous than the ARBs. And yet, there are no clear alternative programs for these landless rural poor.

One reason for the continuing poverty of the ARBs is the failure in transformation. Secretary Dar mentioned the importance of making farmers "agri-preneurs". Yes, farming is business and should be managed in a professsional and business-like manner. For this, the ARBs and small farmers should possess the skills and know-how on how to prepare and implement a farm business plan. But who will help them acquire these skills and knowhow? The agricultural extension officers? These extension officers have been placed under the command of the LGUs, no thanks to the Local Autonomy law. It is also doubtful if these extension officers are trained to become trainers in this field.

Partnership with the big corporations? This is a controversial proposition. The "corporative" proposal during the time of President Joseph Estrada was severely criticized by farmer leaders, who believed that the proposal is a gift to the big corporations that want to access and manage the lands of the small farmers without being dragged into excruciating land cases under CARP. For example, there are numerous land and employment conflicts over the contract growing arrangements that big banana exporters in Mindanao have concluded with the small farmers holding the certificates of land ownership awards or CLOAs over these lands.

To summarize, one does not need rocket science to determine the root causes of agricultural stagnation. Foremost among these is the SAP-driven and WTO-reinforced agricultural deregulation program, aggravated by the mangled and never-ending implementation of CARP and various modernization programs.

Also, most of the government programs for agriculture in the past have been criticized to be graft-ridden, e.g., distribution of fertilizer and farm inputs intended for small farmers ending in the hands of LGUs in the cemented cities of Metro Manila. One will not be surprised if the green light given to the big rice importers under the Rice Tariffication law will be used by the unscrupulous to under-declare imports and avoid paying the right amount of duties. Is this one explanation why rice prices have not gone down substantially, and yet, palay prices have been diving down at or below production cost, pushing palay farmers out of farming.

To complete the picture on the desolation of the agricultural sector, one must add here the environmental problems: continuing erosion of the resource base, deforestation, soil degradation and the weak fortification of the countryside against climate-change risks.

May kinabukasan ba ang ating agrikultura at magsasaka? Does agriculture have a future? More in the next issue.

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• SALAMIN NG KATOTOHANAN •

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DA SA MGA KAKATAY NG BABOY: SUNDIN ANG ANIMAL WELFARE ACT

INATASAN ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na itama ang pinaniniwalaang maling pagpatay sa mga alagaing baboy na naapektuhan ng hindi pa matukoy na sakit sa isang lugar sa Antipolo, Rizal.

Ayon kay DA Secretary William Dar, pinagsabihan na nito ang mga tauhan sa ground zero command na mahigpit na sundin ang wastong protocol at mga alituntunin na itinatadhana ng batas alinsunod sa Animal Welfare Act sa pagde-populate sa mga baboy na umano'y nagkasakit.

Ito ay kasunod ng reklamo ng ilang residente sa Barangay Cupang, Antipolo hinggil sa paraan ng pagpatay sa mga baboy na hinihinalang nagkasakit na isinako at inilibing ng buhay at saka tinabunan ng lupa gamit ang backhoe.

Bukod pa rito, ipinag-utos na rin ng opisyal na muling paigtingin ang quarantine operations sa mga lugar kung saan may mga napaulat na mga baboy na namatay dahil sa hindi pa matukoy na sakit na nakaapekto sa mga ito.

Siniguro naman nito na may tulong o ayuda na ibibigay ang kagawaran sa mga nawalan ng mga alagang baboy kung saan may makukuhang P3,000 cash assistance ang backyard raisers na maaapektuhan at kapag napuksa ang virus sa lugar ay bibigyan din ang mga ito ng mga bagong biik bilang pagsisimula muli ng kanilang negosyo. **BENEDICT ABAYGAR, JR.**

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MinDA to push fruit tree farming

By **ALI G. MACABALANG**

COTABATO CITY – Buoyed by the success of its recent fruit festival in Baguio City, the Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA) is pushing fruit tree farming drive to boost farmers' income and promote reforestation.

The campaign aims to achieve the state of a "Richer and Greener Mindanao," according to Secretary Manny F. Piñol, the new MinDA chair.

In a meeting in Davao City on Tuesday, Piñol said group leaders and representatives of fruit producers from various areas in Mindanao agreed with his concept of "hitting two birds with one stone."

"May income na ang farmer, may effective National Greening Program pa," Pinol quoted a leading fruit producer as saying at the meeting.

The MinDA fruit festival Aug. 24 to 25 in Baguio, which Piñol organized in collaboration with Baguio Mayor Benjamin Magalong, sold close to 30 tons of durian, mangosteen, lanzones, rambutan, pomelo and other fruits.

Hundreds of consumers reportedly swarmed the two festival venues, and bought out all the fruits in less than two days. News about the festival prompted local government units in Pangasinan, Laguna and Metro Manila to express interest in hosting subsequent events.

At the Tuesday meeting, Piñol ordered MinDA workers to gather data on the actual state of the fruit industry in the island region.

"Statistics on the total number of fruit trees and the projected volume of harvest will have to be gathered and infused in a database so that well-planned marketing programs can happen," he said.

Under the program fruit farmers will be clustered by commodity so that they could share effective farming practices and modern technology.

With the support of the Department of Agriculture's (DA) regional offices, periodic workshops will be held so that the industry will be "elevated from just producing fresh fruits to processing and value adding," Piñol said.

"A profitable fruit industry could have a profound contribution to the efforts of government to plant more trees," he pointed out.

He recalled that during his stint as governor of North Cotabato, he espoused "the planting of fruit trees, instead of industrial tree species, for the government's National Greening Program."

"Instead of spending billions to pay for reforestation contractors to plant industrial tree species in the deforested areas of the country, a program marked by failures rather than successes because of corruption, government only needs to distribute fruit tree seedlings to farmers for free," he said.

Under the program, the government provides free fruit tree seedlings to farmers.

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Rody special powers eyed vs rice import surge

By PAOLO ROMERO

Sen. Cynthia Villar, chair of the Senate committee on agriculture and food, hinted yesterday that President Duterte may have to exercise his special powers to contain the suspicious surge in rice imports that allegedly caused the decline in the price of local rice and adversely affected farmers.

Villar and her committee started their inquiry into the effects of Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law that scrapped restrictions on rice imports and replaced this with a 35 percent tariff.

She said that Section 7 of the law allows the President to increase, reduce, revise or adjust the existing tariff by as much as 100 percent to make imported rice less competitive than homegrown rice.

The law also empowers the President for a limited period and/or a specified volume to allow the importation at a low tariff in the event of any imminent or predicted rice shortage.

She, however, said such powers can only be exercised when Congress is not in session.

"These are special powers of the President, we'll lobby that these be exercised," Villar told reporters after the hearing.

Villar, however, said there are still ways to help the farmers even as she described as exaggerated reports that palay prices are plunging.

Resource persons during the Senate hearing pointed out that palay prices went down to P17 per kilo but Villar said the National Food Authority (NFA) buys palay at that price from local farmers who get a P5 per kilo profit.

The Rice Tariffication Law that was enacted last February after the lapse in 2017 of the 1995 agreement with the World Trade Organization (WTO) allowing the Philippines to restrict rice imports to protect local farmers.

RA 11203 also created the P10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), which is meant to finance the mechanization, training and provision of inbred seeds to farmers.

During the hearing, Villar said the law would actually benefit farmers and its initial adverse effects should have been short-lived and minimal if the concerned agencies have not been dragging their feet in implementing the law that mandated the training of farmers in the modern methods of planting rice.

"There are many things that can be done to help our rice farmers, not just under the law, but through other means if only the DA (Department of Agriculture) and the NFA love our farmers more," Villar said.

Since the law took effect this year, prices of palay have reportedly plunged to as low as P12 per kilo, which was attributed to the influx of rice imports under the new liberalized regime.

Leonardo Montemayor, a former agriculture secretary and currently president of the Federation of Free Farmers, told the inquiry that from January to July this year or shortly before and after the law was signed, rice imports reached 2.4 million metric tons (MT) based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority. The volume represents 17 percent of the Philippines' total demand for rice, which is higher than what should have been taken in a country that is 90 to 93 percent self-sufficient in rice, he said. – **With Rhodina Villanueva, Louise Maureen Simeon, Ding Cervantes**

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COMPETITION FROM IMPORTED RICE

FALLING PALAY PRICES WORRY LUZON FARMERS

By Inquirer Northern Luzon
@InqNational

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—Toto Mandap, a rice farmer in Apalit town, Pampanga, has to mill his harvest and sell it for P1,900 per cavan to avoid traders who buy palay (unhusked rice) at between P8 and P10 a kilogram.

Mandap tills a 1.5-hectare of well-irrigated farm at Barangay Cansinala in Apalit, which is beside the Pampanga River.

While he harvests 100 cavans, he said the low buying price of palay put him on the losing end so he had to sell milled rice to his friends for P38 per kg.

Farmers in the provinces of Nueva Ecija, Pangasinan, Isabela and Ilocos Norte said the average farm-gate price of palay fell to as low as P7 per kg.

To cope with the rising production cost, Lyndon Madrid, a farmer from Ilocos Norte said he would rather mill his palay and sell its byproducts, such as rice bran at higher prices.

Records from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) also showed a downtrend in palay prices across the country this month.

In an advisory issued on Wednesday, the PSA said the average farm-gate price of palay dropped to P17.62 per kg from P17.72 in the previous week.

New law blamed

Ignacio Ortiz, chair of Alyansa ng Magbubukid sa Gitnang Luzon-Nueva Ecija, said the new low price was a result of the rice tariffication law (Republic Act No. 11203). The law has opened the country to importation of cheap rice that has been flooding the local market.

"Rice liberalization has caused so much damage to farmers," Ortiz said in a statement.

On Wednesday, women farmers' group Amihan and rice watch group Bantay Bigas called for the repeal of RA 11203 during a public hearing led by the Senate committee on agriculture and food.

The two groups said rice retail prices remained unaffordable to poor consumers since the National Food Authority (NFA) rice was almost unavailable to consumers.

This forced consumers to buy commercial rice at P36 to P50 per kg, the groups said.

considered the rice granary of the Cordillera, are also reeling from the effects of rice tariffication.

The farm-gate price of palay in Kalinga dropped to P10 per kg, the farmers said, as they sought seed subsidy on hybrid rice varieties. They said hybrid rice varieties produced higher yield and were more resistant to diseases and insects.

Incentives

At the Senate hearing, Sen. Cynthia Villar, committee chair, proposed to remove the incentives given by the NFA to farmers when buying palay to allow the agency to purchase more of the crop as prices continued to fall.

She also said the NFA's buying price for palay should be reverted back to P17 per kg from P20.70 to help more farmers.

The move will give immediate relief to rice producers as the average farm-gate price of palay declined anew to P17.62 per kg as of the second week of August. Compared to the year-ago rate of P22.28 per kg, this was lower by 20 percent.

In some provinces, palay prices have decreased further. In Cavite, palay was sold at an average of P12 per kg. In Davao and Surigao del Sur, prices were at an average of P14.99 and P14.35 per kg, respectively.

While the NFA has been surpassing its procurement targets as of late, the onset of the harvest season in September is expected to drown the market with both imported and local rice, which will add to farmers' woes.

The NFA offers a buying price of P17 per kg, but this can increase to P20.40 and P20.70 per kg for individual farmers and farmer cooperatives, respectively, when incentives for drying and delivery are included.

The agency's procurement activities are an important safety net for rice farmers as some traders have already adjusted their buying price to as low as P13 per kg following the entry of more affordable imported rice in the market.

Given funding restrictions, however, the NFA would not be able to cover all farmers if it continues with its incentive program. —REPORTS FROM TONETTE OREJAS, ARMAND GALANG, LEILANIE ADRIANO, YOLANDA SOTELO, VILLAMOR VISAYA JR., KARLSTON

The Manila Times

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4 million bags of rice rotting in NFA depots

BY JAVIER JOE ISMAEL

THE National Food Authority (NFA) admitted on Wednesday that it has 4 million bags of imported rice stocked in its warehouses, the reason why it has not been buying *palay* (unmilled rice) from local farmers.

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■ ROTTING FROM A1

4 million

This was uncovered during a Senate hearing by the agriculture and food committee chaired by Sen. Cynthia Villar. The inquiry was held to determine the impact of the liberalization of rice importation, exportation and trade.

NFA Administrator Judy Carol Dansal admitted that the agency could not buy rice from local farmers because of the flood of grains stocked in their warehouses.

When asked by Sen. Maria Imelda Josefa "Imee" Marcos if the agency has indeed 9 million bags of imported rice rotting in warehouses, Dansal answered, "Four million *na lang* ma'am (Only 4 million)."

"Sabihin po natin ang totoo. Kaya hindi kayo bumibili o nagbebenta kasi santambak pa 'yung imported (Let us be truthful. [NFA] is not buying or selling because of the huge stocks of imported rice in your possession])," Marcos said.

Dansal admitted that the government imported 1.2 million metric tons (MT) of rice last year to fill up its dwindling buffer stock. Of this, 290,000 MT have not been sold.

She informed the committee that from January to August this year, the NFA purchased 293,642 MT of rice worth P6 billion. Last year, the agency bought a measly 4,046 MT.

Based on her computation, Marcos said 4.5 million bags of rice are equivalent to 225 million kilos, which could be sold for P6.7 billion at P27 per kilo.

Villar said the NFA should have immediately sold its stocks so that it would have money to buy the produce of local farmers.

"You are supposed to buy and sell to stabilize the prices of rice. *Kasama kayo sa magulo kaya tayo nagkaganito. Ang tao sinisisi na kayo* (You are part of this mess. People are blaming you)," Villar told the NFA official.

Dansal, however, maintained that the NFA was complying with its mandate to buy palay from local rice farmers.

Villar said there have been complaints that the NFA refuses to buy from local farmers.

The senator also warned against the slow disbursement of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), a component of the Rice Tariffication Law that seeks to upgrade farmers' competitiveness.

"If we do not give RCEF a chance to be fully implemented and deliver on its promise to improve the competitiveness of our agriculture sector, I don't think we can ever make it," Villar said.

"In this age of liberalization, our farmers will continue to fear competition because they were not given the chance to improve their ways."

The Committee on Agriculture and Food, along with the committees on finance, trade, commerce and entrepreneurship, yesterday continued its inquiry on the implementation of Republic Act 11203or the "Rice Tariffication Law."

The law calls for RCEF to receive P10 billion a year for the next six years from tariffs collected on liberalized rice imports. The funds will be used to expand farm mechanization and increase farmers' access to financing, inputs and technical know-how.

Villar said of the first P5 billion released for RCEF, only P1 billion has been credited to farmers.

"Now that Philippine authorities can no longer limit the entry of imported rice, we impose tariffs and collect the amount to spend for programs that will help improve our farmers' productivity and profitability under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund," the senator emphasized.

She pointed out that the Rice Tariffication Law helps meet the Philippines' 1995 commitment to the World Trade Organization, to do away with quantitative restrictions on rice imports.

"We were under a QR (quantity restriction) system for 22 years. To my mind, we were given more than enough time to improve but we did not improve. Our farmers and fisherfolk continue to suffer in poverty while smugglers and cartels continue to enrich themselves," Villar said.

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Editorial

PCA offers half-measures to boost coconut industry

COCONUT farming is one of the biggest sectors of Philippine agriculture, and unfortunately, perhaps the poorest. The solutions offered this week by the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) are not without some merit, but still fall far short of what is needed to improve the industry and the livelihoods of coconut farmers.

Earlier this week, PCA Administrator Gonzalo Duque briefly outlined the agency's strategy to boost the country's coconut sector. The PCA, Duque explained, would be focusing on a search for available land where new coconut farms could be established. In contrast to the PCA's usual strategy of directing most of its efforts to the Visayas and Mindanao, the search would be centered on Luzon; the provinces of Quezon and Pangasinan were suggested as promising prospects.

In the meantime, the Department of Agriculture is promoting the practice of multicropping to help extend farmers' incomes. This involves planting other crops in the spaces between the coconut trees, which the farmer can harvest along with the coconuts, or in the gaps between coconut harvests. PCA chief Duque suggested intercropping would be an important part of the strategy for establishing new coconut farms, as it takes several years for a young coconut tree to reach a productive state.

> *"It defies basic economics to increase the supply of a commodity in an attempt to increase its price, which is what the PCA is proposing to do by establishing new farms."*

The main driver behind these initiatives, according to the PCA, is the persistent low price of *copra*, the dried kernel of the coconut. Prices for copra have been declining steadily since January 2018, and have been unstable for much longer than that. From a price of about P40 per kilogram three years ago, the price of copra has slumped to about P16 per kilogram now.

The low price for their harvest has had a punishing effect on the Philippines' 3.5 million coconut farmers. The average income for a coconut farmer is now about P1,500 per month. That is about P50 per day. By contrast, the lowest poverty line, according to the United Nations, is $1.25 per day, or about P65. For many coconut farmers, their meager earnings have led them into a debt trap; forced to borrow to make ends meet, their income is insufficient to pay for anything but outstanding loans, forcing them to borrow again and again harvest after harvest.

That is obviously completely unacceptable, but the PCA's plan to address it seems to be a contradiction. It defies basic economics to increase the supply of a commodity in an attempt to increase its price, which is what the PCA is proposing to do by establishing new farms.

That plan also overlooks one of the most serious problems cited by coconut farmers themselves, which is the age of most existing farms. A coconut palm tree has a productive life of about 50 years, and the majority of farms throughout the country is approaching or has already reached that age. Planting new trees is the indicated solution, but not a practical one for most farmers. Coconut palms take approximately seven years to mature, and in order to allow them space to grow properly, older trees usually have to be removed. This leaves the farmer without his primary source of income for that amount of time, and for Filipino farmers, whose average age is about 57 years, the wait is simply not justifiable. Intercropping does offer a partial solution, but its success is dependent on the nature of the land and the level of support provided the farmer, who likely has no resources at all to apply to the establishment of a secondary crop.

The PCA's intentions are good, but its strategy thus far leaves too many unanswered questions. The agency should either rethink its approach, or if it has more in mind than what it has been divulged so far, share that information with the people whose livelihoods depend on it.

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Cassava digger proves worth

THE Cassava Digger developed by the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) has found favor with upland farmers in Alfonso Lista, Ifugao.

Cyril Cattiling, a 56-year-old cassava farmer who owns and tills 54 hectares of land for the crop, said the Cassava Digger allows him and members of the of Ifugao Tapioca Growers Association (ITGA) to harvest the crop faster and with less damage, since shovels are not used and the manual method of pulling the plant is not employed.

Cattiling is the president of Ifugao Tapioca Growers Association (ITGA) and farm manager of Yao Jia Xi Corp. which supplies cassava granules to San Miguel Corp. (SMC). ITGA has successfully organized all cassava growers in the municipality while Yao Jia Xi provides planting materials and shares technology to ITGA farmer-members.

Cyril Cattiling poses beside the Cassava Digger pulled by a farm tractor in his farm in Alfonso Lista, Ifugao. The Cassava Digger was developed by the Postharvest Development and Mechanization and manufactured by ACT (Machineries and Metal Craft) Corp. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

It was in a corn congress in Tagaytay where Cattiling met engineer Donald Mateo of PHilMech who introduced him to the Cassava Digger manufactured by ACT (Machineries and Metal Craft) Corp., the partner of PHilMech in the development of the equipment.

Cattiling said that under the manual system of harvesting cassava, it took two weeks and 15 laborers paid at P250 per day to harvest the crop from one hectare. With the Cassava Digger, it takes only two days and nine laborers to harvest cassava from one hectare. **CONRAD M. CARIÑO**

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Cagayan eyes exporting eels

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

AN increase in eel production in Cagayan Valley (Region 2) could allow the region to export more of the fish to the world market and increase supply in the domestic market.

According to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)-Region 2 (Cagayan Valley), there are five eel species in Cagayan Valley and efforts to conserve natural eel stocks to assure the continuous harvest of the fish.

Since the 1970s, the harvest of wild eel worldwide has been declining but the increasing catch of eel in Region 2 is a welcome development.

In its Stock Enhancement of Elvers Program (SEEP), BFAR-Region 2 has concentrated its efforts to ensure eel population in the wild remains viable.

Aeron Mayor, BFAR-Region 2 aquaculturist, said the elvers (young eel) were distributed in Aparri, Gattaran, Baggao, Peñabalanca, Rizal, Piat and Sto. Niño in Cagayan; San Pablo, Tumauini, Aurora and Jones in Isabela; Bambang, Bagabag, Bayombong and Diadi in Nueva Vizcaya; and Diffun, Cabarroguis, Aglipay, Maddela and Nagtipunan in Quirino.

"Our activity primarily aimed to increase the capacity of the eel population to regenerate and mitigate the possible decline of supply due to over exploitation, high fishing pressure, indiscriminate fishing and difficulty in enforcing regulatory activities on eel species," Mayor said.

In the previous years, there was a massive spike in demand for elvers in the global market that led to a huge increase in its buying price to as high as P45,000 per kilogram. This led to the unabated gathering of eel by local consolidators who transported elvers to Manila for export. Mayor said this prompted the government to issue Fisheries Administrative Order 242, banning the export of elvers less than 15 centimeters in length.

He added the regulation was enacted to encourage eel grow-out ventures that have increased the benefit to those in the eel value chain. "Our stocking continues as we conduct information and education campaigns to increase community awareness on on the importance of eel resources and the need for its conservation and management."

Mayor said as a highly valued fishery commodity, dried eels retail for as high as P1,000 per kilo in the local market while live eels are preferred by Chinese and other Asian migrants. A delicacy in Japan, eels are also preferred by the Chinese and Koreans who believe that its blood is a source of "strength" for men.

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Villar, Imee slam NFA on rice storage

SENATORS Cynthia Villar and Imee Marcos on Tuesday castigated the National Food Authority for failure to buy palay from local farmers due to huge storage of imported rice in their warehouses.

Villar, chairman of the Senate committee on food and agriculture, and Marcos doubted the NFA deliberately prolonged the storage of rice to make it appear they were rotten.

With this condition, she said the NFA can sell the rice to their favorite rice traders.

Villar said this was done by the former NFA administration when they auctioned the alleged rotten rice and sold them at P22 per kilo.

Marcos, meanwhile, said there were 4.5 million bags of imported rice which were being stored by the NFA. She said this is equivalent to 225 million kilos or a total of P6.75 billion for P27 per kilo.

Macon Ramos-Araneta

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DA strengthens containment of hog disease

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has tapped other government agencies in enforcing an order prohibiting the transport of hog and pork products from localities affected with the still unidentified hog disease.

In its latest bulletin, the DA said it is coordinating with the Department of Finance, Department of Transportation, Department of Interior and Local Government, Philippine National Police, the military as well as with provincial governors and mayors to ensure the suspected pathogens will not spread any further.

"The measures include continued surveillance of swine farms, particularly backyard operations and guiding farmers on how to implement good husbandry practices, including bio-security measures, to promote good animal health," the bulletin added.

Cut the risk. Movement of hogs from areas affected by the unidentified disease is being monitored by various agencies.

The DA said the incident should not affect prices of pork in the market as there is enough supply of meat safe for human consumption.

Establishments are required to secure permits from the National Meat Inspection Service or local government units.

The bulletin said all of the backyard hog raisers hit by the disease in Bulacan and Rizal are practising swill feeding, making it a potential cause of the problem.

"Swills are considered solid waste the handling, transport and disposal (of which) are regulated by the Solid Waste Management Act. Thus transport, handling, disposal and sale of swill without proper permits and not in accordance with the existing regulations are unlawful," the document warned.

The DA said earliest results of the confirmatory lab tests from Europe to identify the disease would come within the week or next and the latest could be in three months.

The Department of Budget and Management is set to release a P187-million fund as indemnity to hog raisers whose pigs were culled and for the development of diagnostic kits to monitor animal diseases. - ***J. Macapagal***

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DBM vows release of P4B rice fund

Aid to farmers. P5 billion of the P10-billion for this year was released last December.

BY VINCE NONATO

THE Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said it would release the remaining P4-billion allocation for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund, after Sen. Cynthia Villar questioned the failure to complete the P10-billion funding mandated for this year.

At the Senate agriculture committee's hearing yesterday, DBM Assistant Secretary Rolando Toledo said P5 billion was already released last December in anticipation of the enactment of the Rice Tariffication Law, which took place February.

Another P1 billion was released to the Agricultural Credit Policy Council of the Department of Agriculture.

"Given the P5 billion released last year, plus the balance of P1 billion in the ACPC, what we will release is P4 billion)," Toledo said.

He did not specify the schedule of release.

Villar, agriculture committee chair, sought clarification on an earlier claim by the DBM that the P4-billion balance was released in January.

The rice tariffication law lifted restrictions on the importation of staple grain and allowed the President to impose tariffs instead.

To address the plight of local farmers whose livelihoods would be affected by the anticipated influx of cheaper rice, the law provided for the allocation of P10 billion a year to the RCEF for the next six years..

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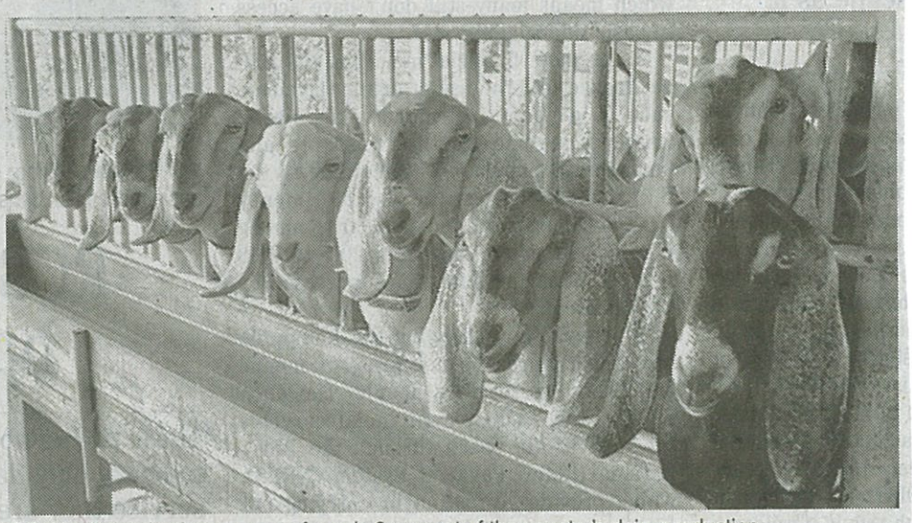
USDA earmarks P1.56B for local dairy

NDA also aims to address the concern through increased support to the local industry by distributing dairy goats to some 750 farmers and offspring of the original animals procured for some 1,150 second line beneficiaries



GOAT milk production accounts for only 3 percent of the country's dairy production.

The Philippine dairy industry got a much-needed boost when it received P1.56 billion from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to boost the infrastructure and technology in local goat milk production.

Under the United States Public Law 480, more known as Food for Peace program, the US government provides food commodities to countries that need assistance to fight hunger and malnutrition.

According to the National Dairy Authority (NDA), project funding was approved by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) in 2018.

The policy direction and implementation of the program is executed by the Department of Agriculture (DA) via the NDA.

At the project launch on Wednesday in Quezon City, NDA Administrator Marilyn Mabalde said the USDA-funded dairy project aims to procure and distribute 7,875 heads of dairy goats to identified beneficiaries in new and existing dairy areas across 69 provinces nationwide.

"There is a need to increase support to the local dairy goat industry to suffice the increasing market demand for milk. Farmers in the rural areas would have more livelihood opportunities on goat farming (through this project)," Mabalde said.

Goat milk is gaining ground in the local market with its higher nutritional value compared to other milk.

The project also hopes to establish 75 dairy goat farms with shared facilities. The equipment that will serve as a source of local dairy goats, including 10 mini milk processing plants, for farms that lack such facilities. Also, six semen collection and processing centers will be built.

The program aims to supply 1.2 million liters of goat's milk in feeding programs with the farmer recipients serving as milk suppliers.

NDA statistics show that goats are the smallest contributors to local dairy production. Inventory was pegged at 13,975 heads.

Of the total milk production of the local dairy industry for the last 5 years, an average of 64 percent came from dairy cattle, 33 percent from carabaos and only 3 percent from goats.

According to Mabalde, majority of the country's annual dairy requirement is supplied by importers and processors, making dairy products the country's third largest agri-import. Although local production continues to increase yearly, she said it is still not enough to cover local demand.

NDA also aims to address the concern through increased support to the local industry by distributing dairy goats to some 750 farmers and offspring of the original animals procured for some 1,150 second line beneficiaries.

Goat milk is gaining ground in the local market with its higher nutritional value compared to other milk. Consumers find it easy-to-digest and do not trigger allergic reactions.

Maria Romero

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Hog raisers have 6 months to sell pigs

The move is a preventive measure following the seizure of 'hot meat' at the city's boundary

By Joseph Cortes

The Quzon City local government has ordered the closure of piggeries within its jurisdiction.

This was the directive made by Mayor Joy Belmonte following the seizure of 6,000 kilos of "hot meat" at the city's boundary at San Mateo Road on Monday night.

However, QC Veterinary Office chief Dr. Ana Cabel said there have been no reported cases of deaths by hogs in the city.

The move is only being implemented as a preventive measure, she added.

Meanwhile, the Departments of Health (DoH) and Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will be inspecting the site where 500 confiscated pigs in Antipolo, Rizal were buried.

Bureau of Animal Industry director Ronnie Domingo said it was imperative that the hogs were immediately culled.

Dr. Ed Janairo, DoH-Calabarzon director, said the site should be 25 meters away from sources of potable water, so that the remains will have no affect on the health of residents.

DENR Undersecretary Benny Antiporda said studies are now being made to determine the appropriate distance of the site from houses.

In Quezon City, hog raisers were given six months to move their animals or sell them.

Cabel said they will not be confiscating any pigs.

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Poultry farmers see possible shift away from pork consumption if ASF fears spread

THE poultry industry said it expects sagging prices to be supported by any shift away from pork consumption if a still-unconfirmed disease detected in pig farms spreads beyond its current containment area.

"In the next few weeks... it will become clear as to the impact (of the hog disease), but there is no doubt... there will be an impact because of substitution," United Broilers and Raisers Association (UBRA) President Elias Jose M. Inciong said in a phone interview.

"I expect chicken prices to largely move independently of hog, unless (the hog disease impact) worsens," he said.

Poultry have decreased in the past two weeks due to competition from imports. He said average prices for regular-sized chicken fell to P100 per kilo from P104 previously, while the average price for prime-sized chicken fell to P103.93 from P106.63.

"*Magulo kasi ngayon ang* trade *dahil nga atras abante ang mga* growers *dahil mataas ang* inventory *ng* imported. *Syempre* they are not as confident about loading. *Pag mataas ang* price signal *naglo*-load, *pagni*-nerbyos, *aatras*" (Growers have no firm view of the market because imported chicken inventories are high. When price signals are pointing higher they load up on production but they can reverse themselves at the slightest sign of worry about the market).

According to the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS), imported dressed chicken in cold storage amounted to 21,905.8 metric tons (MT) as of July 22, 2019, while domestically-produced dressed chicken amounted to 8,976.84 MT. Imported supply was 40% higher year-on-year.

The Department of Agriculture has not yest ruled out several suspected diseases currently affecting the backyard hog farm sector, nor has it identified the areas affected. News reports from Taiwan last week placed the outbreak in Rizal and Bulacan. The reports also said Taiwan authorities have imposed special baggage checks on travelers from the Philippines to guard against the possible entry of African Swine Fever (ASF).

The DA said it has started to cull hog populations in affected areas and imposed restrictions on the movement of live animals. It expects lab results to confirm the disease in a few weeks.

"In due time we will tell the public... but even before the arrival of the confirmatory lab test results, as I've said (we will take) all preventive measures, all quarantine measures, all food safety measures are now in place nationwide," Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar told reporters on Wednesday. — **Vincent Mariel P. Galang**

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DA studying financing plan for direct palay buyers

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it is considering providing low-interest financing for rice inventory purchases by entities seeking to source palay, or unmilled rice, directly from farmers.

"We'll provide traders, cooperatives, local government units and other stakeholders a new inventory financing program from LANDBANK at 2% interest, provided they buy directly from farmers," Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar said during a public hearing on the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law.

Mr. Dar said that he will also look into restoring the palay buying price to P17 per kilo, from P20.70 for farmer organizations, and P20.40 for individual farmers with incentives added. He added P17 will also be the basis for the new financing program.

"We will process this but that is the direction," he said in a chance interview.

"The incentive system was (offered) during the crisis situation in 2018, so I think we will have to revisit that formally in the NFA [National Food Authority] council so that during this period we can cover and really buy more palay at P17 per kilo," he said.

The incentive system was implemented in October 2018, which added a P3.00/kg buffer stock incentive on top of the P0.20/kg drying, P0.20/kg delivery, and P0.30/kg Cooperative Development Incentive Fee.

Asked to comment, Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) Chairman Rosendo O. So noted that the NFA should be able to absorb the entire domestic harvest, with the season due to begin next month.

"*Ang* harvest time *talaga kasi is* next month. *Dapat kasi ngayon yung mga binebenta* (palay) *kaya i*-absorb *ng* NFA... *kasi konti lang ito kasi may* P1 billion *pa sila... so kung may ganong problema kailangang pumasok ang* NFA," he said. (The harvest is next month. Palay sold today should be absorbed by the NFA... it's only a small volume and the NFA still has P1 billion... if there are problems in selling palay, the NFA should step in.) —
Vincent Mariel P. Galang

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Senate seeking accounting of RCEF disbursement

THE Senate Committee on agriculture and food was told at a hearing Wednesday that very little of the initial release of funds for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) went to farmers, with 80% captured by the Department of Agriculture (DA) National Rice Program.

The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) in December 2018 released P5 billion for the RCEF, a component of the Rice Tariffication Law which by law is entitled to P10 billion a year from rice import tariffs, of which Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar said P4 billion was allocated to the National Rice Program.

"With respect to the P4 billion initially released to the Department in December last year, it is reported by our officials that around P2.8 billion has been utilized for farm mechanization; of which P2.75 billion was spent on production-related farm machinery," Mr. Dar told the panel on Wednesday.

"P241 million for small-scale irrigation facilities was given to 6,658 farmer groups and cooperatives in all regions in the country; roughly P1 billion went for the same program, benefiting 181,526 farmers; the remaining P200 million had been spent for buffer stocking for quick response."

The Rice Tariffication Law was enacted in February, going into the books as Republic Act No. 11203.

The DA added that the DBM sourced the P5 billion from unprogrammed funds, which it said may be used fully or partially for rice programs.

Senator Cynthia A. Villar, the committee chair, also asked the DA to report on the utilization of the P7-billion budget for the National Rice Program.

"*Alam ko may* P7 billion *kayong* Rice Program, *dapat 'yun ang ginamit niyo pero ang ginamit niyo* P4 billion *ng* RCEF (I know you have P7 billion in funding for the Rice Program, but you ended up using P4 billion from RCEF)," she said.

"*Wala naman ditong ibinigay kung san dinala 'yung* P7 billion. (I have yet to see an accounting of the P7 billion)" — **Charmaine A. Tadalan**

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DBM to release more money for rice fund

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas @jearcalas

AFTER months of uncertainty, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said it will release the remaining P4 billion for a fund that will bankroll initiatives to help planters cope with the influx of cheap rice imports.

The DBM said, however, that it will only disburse the amount once the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) certifies that there is excess government money which can be allocated for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

During a Senate hearing, Budget Assistant Secretary Rolando U. Toledo settled the score over the controversial P5-billion fund that the DBM released to the Department of Agriculture (DA) in December.

Toledo said the P5 billion, which was released through special allotment release orders (Saro), was a supplement to the DA's national rice program.

See "Rice fund," A8

P4B

The remainder of a fund to bankroll initiatives to help farmers cope with the surge of cheap rice imports.

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Rice fund. . .

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The DBM released the money to support farmers in anticipation of the passage of the proposed rice trade liberalization law.

Since the DA has already returned P1 billion of the said P5 billion, the DBM owes rice farmers P4 billion. The DBM disbursed P5 billion for the RCEF last month.

Toledo also clarified that the P5 billion released to the DA through the Saro could not be considered as part of the RCEF since Republic Act (RA) 11203, which mandated its creation, had not yet been passed when the money was given. The money, he said, was sourced from the national government's extra unprogrammed funds.

"So [the DBM] still has to release another P4 billion [this year]," he said during the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food hearing on Wednesday.

"But the release of the P4 billion is subject to the excess revenue collection. Because it is in the unprogrammed funds and that's [what was prescribed] in the [2019 General Appropriations Act]," he added.

'Immaterial'

HOWEVER, senators were quick to point out that the DBM must not wait for excess revenues to allocate funds for the RCEF. Sen.Cynthia A. Villar said the national government must give farmers P10 billion regardless of the government's revenue collection.

"What is in the law is P10 billion. It is immaterial if you have excess revenue. You cannot reason out [the need for] excess revenue because we agreed that we will not pass the RCEF if [the allocation] is not P10 billion a year," said Villar, who chairs the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food.

"So you owe farmers P4 billion because you made the mistake of giving funds immediately to the DA. You should release that P4 billion without any condition," she added. Toledo said the DBM still needs the BTr's certification that the government has excess revenues before releasing the P4 billion, since the RCEF consists of unprogrammed funds under the 2019 General Appropriations Act (GAA).

"It is in the provision of the 2019 GAA and we must follow it. We just wait for the certification of BTr and [we will] release that P4 billion," he said.

For months now, the DA and the DBM have been debating on whether the P5 billion is part of the RCEF despite the failure of Congress to pass the proposed rice trade liberalization law before the end of 2018.

The DBM had argued that the P5 billion was part of the RCEF but the DA said it was a supplementary fund for its national rice program.

Warning

THIS developed as Sen.Risa Hontiveros moved to fast-track the subsidies for rice farmers, warning against the negative effect of the entry of cheap imported commercial rice on local planters.

"Government should immediately release subsidies and assist rice farmers," the senator said in Filipino after a joint hearing of the committees on agriculture and food, finance, trade, commerce and entrepreneurship.

She pressed for faster and additional subsidies for rice farmers to help them mitigate the negative effects of RA 11203.

The senator said that while the law was expected to increase the supply of cheap commercial rice during the lean months of July to September, it also posed risks to planters as it cuts the farm-gate price of unhusked rice.

Hontiveros cited computations indicating that around 42,000 farming households will fall into poverty if subsidies are not immediately given by the government.

The average loss of the poor and nonpoor rice farming households are P8,700 and P19,700 respectively, while the average gain is P5,300 and P3,900, respectively. In short, the savings from cheaper rice consumed by rice farmers could not offset the loss from the lower price of the palay they sell.

She also noted that the RCEF will have to be implemented for several years before it could improve the competitiveness of planters. In contrast, Hontiveros noted that the "income shock" is immediate, estimating that at a rate of P5,500 per hectare per planting capped at 2 hectares, decoupled payment will cost the government P10.6 billion annually.

The senator said government must not delay the grant of assistance to rice farmers as they could end up losing income, and be plunged deeper in debt and poverty due to the drop in farm-gate prices.

At the same time, she suggested the need for urgent reforms in the rice trade liberalization law. Hontiveros noted that under the law, tariff collections from rice imports must exceed P10 billion before direct financial assistance could be extended to farmers.

"For instance, it is expected that tax collection from rice imports this year will not be lower than P13.5 billion. I will urge [national government] to advance this money and not wait for 2020. We have the money as agencies have been underspending," the senator said in Filipino.

She also prodded the National Food Authority (NFA) to buy the local farmers' rice as part of their buffer stock at a relatively competitive price while they wait for the needed subsidies to be distributed.

Higher budget

MEANWHILE, President Duterte vowed to prioritize farmers during the last two years of his term.

Speaking during an event at the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) in Quezon City, Duterte also called on agrarian reform beneficiaries to support the development of the farm sector.

"This year, the one with the highest budget allocation is education then the Department of Public Works and Highways. Maybe in my last two years, I will prioritize you, farmers," he said in a speech during the 31st anniversary celebration of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) and Certificates of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) Distribution.

Duterte also led the ceremonial distribution of CLOAs to agrarian reform beneficiaries.

While the President did not specify what particular budget item he was referring to, the proposed budget for the DA next year is P56.8 billion, making it the eighth department with the highest budget allocation.

The proposed DA budget for next year is 14.38 percent higher than this year's budget of P49.67 billion, but it is a far cry from the P333 billion sought by the agency.

In March, then Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol said the President had instructed him to submit a budget proposal for 2020 that is "10 times bigger" than its present budget of almost P50 billion.

During the event, the President acknowledged DAR's gains in the implementation of CARP in the past three decades, but stressed the need to achieve the ultimate goal of the program.

"As we highlight our accomplishments and milestones in implementing CARP, let us never lose sight of the primary aim of this program, which is to uphold the welfare of our landless farmers, promote social justice, and attain sound rural development through the equitable distribution of all agricultural lands across the country," he said.

He also said the administration will continue to correct the historical injustice brought about by the misallocation of funds that resulted in social injustice and sluggish rural economy. ***With reports by Butch Fernandez and Bernadette D. Nicolas***

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INAMIN ni Bulacan Consumer Affairs Council, Inc., President Jose Sosa na bumaba ng P7.00 hanggang P8.00 kada kilo ang presyo ng bigas sa merkado matapos na ipatupad ang rice tariffication law.

Bawas ng P7-P8 kada kilo

PRESYO NG BIGAS BUMABA

Mula sa pahina 1

Ito mismo ang ipinagmalaki ni Sosa sa harap ni Senadora Cynthia Villar, Chairman ng Senate Committee on Agriculture and Foods, matapos dumalo sa pagdinig ng komite ukol sa pagdinig ng pagpapatupad ng naturang batas.

Ayon kay Sosa, malaking pasasalamat para sa mga mamamayan at consumer ang naturang batas dahil lubhang nakatulong ito para mabawasan ang gastusin sa pang-araw-araw na pamumuhay lalo na sa presyo ng bilihin.

Tiniyak naman ni Villar na gagamitin niya ang kanyang oversight powers bilang isang halal na senador para matiyak na naipatutupad ng tama ang batas.

Bukod dito, sinabi pa ni Villar na ipamomonitor din niya sa Department of Agriculture (DA) at iba pang ahensiya kung talagang bumababa ang presyo ng mga bigas sa merkado.

Gayunpaman, pinabulaanan ng senadora ang anumang mga komento o pahayag na ipinalalabas ng National Food Authority (NFA).

Aniya, normal na ganito ang maging reaksiyon ng NFA lalo na't nabawasan ang kanilang trabaho.

Subalit, tiniyak ni Villar na kikita naman ang pamahalaan ng mas malaki para maitulong o mapakinabangan ng mga magsasaka sa pamamagitan ng mga taripang babayaran ng sinumang nais na mag-angkat ng bigas mula sa ibang bansa.

VICKY CERVALES

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DENR AT DOH IINSPEKSIYUNIN ANG PINAGLIBINGAN NG MGA BABOY SA ANTIPOLO

NAKATAKDANG inspeksiyunin ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) at Department of Health (DOH) ang pinaglibingan nang nasa 500 pinatay na baboy sa Antipolo, Rizal.

Ayon kay Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) Director Ronnie Domingo, kinailangan kasing mailibing nang mabilisan ang mga baboy.

Sa pahayag naman ni DOH-Calabarzon Director, Dr. Ed Janairo, dapat lagpas sa 25 metro ang layo ng hukay sa daluyan o pinagkukunan ng tubig para hindi makaapekto sa kalusugan ng mga tao ang pag-agnas ng mga baboy.

Para naman kay Environment Usec. Benny Antiporda, pag-aaralan nila ang lalim ng hukay at distansiya nito hindi lang sa ilog kundi maging sa kabahayan.

Pilipino Star
NGAYON
Diyaryong disente ng masang intelihente

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NFA kinastigo ng Senado sa imbak na imported rice

Kinastigo kahapon ng ilang senador ang pamunuan ng National Food Authority (NFA) dahil sa mga naka-imbak pa ring imported na bigas at hindi pagbili ng palay mula sa mga magsasaka.

Napagsabihan nina Senators Cynthia Villar at Sen. Imee Marcos ang NFA dahil sa hindi pagbili ng palay sa mga magsasaka gayong bahagi ito ng kanilang mandato.

Hinala nina Villar at Marcos, sinasadya ng NFA na patagalin ang pag-iimbak ng bigas para palitawin na nabulok saka iyon ibebenta nang mura sa paboritong rice trader.

Dati na umanong ginagawa ng NFA ang nasabing kalakaran lalo na noong hind pa pumapasa ang Rice Tariffication Law.

Sa timbre kay Marcos, nasa 9 na milyong bags ng imported rice ang hindi inilalabas ng NFA.

Giit nina Villar at Marcos, dapat ibenta ito ng NFA para magkaroon ito ng pera na pandagdag sa annual budget bukod pa sa P7 bilyong ibinibigay ng gobyerno para ipambili ng palay mula sa mga magsasaka.

Inamin ni NFA Administrator Judy Carol Dansal na may 4-na milyong bags ng imported rice ang kanilang imbak pero sinisikap daw nila iyong ibenta.

Sinabi naman ni Villar na banas na banas na ang mga magsasaka dahil sinasabi ng NFA na mataas ang moisture content ng kanilang palay kaya hindi binibili.

Ayon pa kay Villar, kahit basa ang palay dapat bilhin ng NFA dahil utos ni Pangulong Duterte na tulungan ang mga magsasaka. *(Malou Escudero)*

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'Hoarded' NFA rice in danger of rotting

By Marlon Purificacion

NATIONAL Food Authority Administrator Judy Carol Dansal admitted at a Senate hearing yesterday that there are four million bags or more than 200 million kilos of imported rice that remain stored in NFA warehouses.

"Sabihin po natin ang totoo. Kaya hindi kayo bumibili o nagbebenta kasi santabak pa yung imported," Senator Imee Marcos told the NFA.

Dansal replied that there are still stocks of imported rice that they want to sell so they could buy new local rice. "Ano po yung volume? Magkano ba talaga ang naimport dati?" Marcos asked.

Dansal said the government imported 1.2 million metric tons (MT) of rice but only 290,000 MT have remained unsold.

But when Marcos pressed the NFA whether there were indeed nine million bags of imported rice that are rotting in food agency's warehouses, the administrator said: "Four million na lang ma'am."

Based on her own computation, however, Marcos said 4.5-million bags of rice are equivalent to 225 million kilos or a total of P6.75 billion at P27 per kilo.

"So ibig sabihin 'andami nyong pera kung ibebenta nyo nang paspasan. Huwag hintayin na kunwari mabubulok at io-auction," the senator added.

Meanwhile Sen. Cynthia Villar once again confronted the NFA and accused the agency of campaigning against her senatorial bid in the last elections.

During the hearing on the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law, Villar pointed out the NFA's lack of concern for farmers who had to seek help from local government units (LGUs) to help boost the farming industry.

"Kaya kinumbinsi na namin ang mga LGU, bigyan na lang sila ng puhunan. Sila na mamili kasi yung mga LGUs siguro, nagpapaboto sila, gusto din naman nilang makatulong para iboto sila pagdating ng eleksyon," Villar said.

"Yung NFA kasi hindi nagpapaboto to e kaya wala kayong pakialam kung magalit lahat ng tao dito di ba?" she added.

The senator then asked, "Di ba noong kumandidato akong sanador, sinisiraan ako nyan ng NFA e na wag daw akong iboto kasi ako daw ang may kasalanan ng lahat ng ito. Tingnan mo ang dami kong boto. Walang nakinig kasi galit sa inyo ang mga tao."

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Abante
UNA SA BALITA

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'MUKHA KAMING PERA' - VILLAR

IGINIIT kahapon ni Senador Cynthia Villar sa Department of Budget and Management (DBM) na ilabas na ang P10 bilyong nakalaan para sa Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) na gagamiting pantulong sa mga magsasaka na naapektuhan ng Rice Tariffication Law.

"Basta wala kaming pakialam, basta i-release n'yo, mukha kaming pera eh. Gusto lang naming 'yung pera namin, wala na kaming pakialam sa process," pabirong sabi ni Villar kay DBM Undersecretary Rolando Toledo sa pagdinig ng Senate committee on agriculture and food hinggil sa implementasyon ng nasabing batas.

Nangako naman si Toledo sa komite na kanilang ibibigay ang natitirang apat na bilyong piso para makumpleto na ang P10 bilyong RCEF. Nabatid na una nang naglabas ang DBM ng limang bilyong piso kasabay ng isang bilyong piso para sa Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC).

"Given the five billion peso released last year, tapos may balance na one billion peso doon sa ACPC, so ang ire-release na lang namin is four billion peso. We will release the four billion peso," ayon kay Toledo.

Ginawa ni Toledo ang pahayag matapos siyang gisahin ni Villar, chairperson ng Senate committee on agriculture and food, hinggil sa hindi pa kumpletong paglabas ng pondo ng RCEF ngayong taon.

"Sabi niyo sa akin, ayaw niyo na mag-release ng limang bilyong piso ulit. Sabi niyo, itong na-release ngayon na limang bilyon piso, kasi nag-release kayo ng January ng limang bilyong piso. So 'yun na 'yung P10 bilyon," sabi ni Villar kay Toledo.

"So cinaclarify namin, ano bang mangyayari, ang gulo-gulo ninyo. So i-clarify ninyo."

Sa ilalim ng Rice Tariffication Law, bibigyan ng P10 bilyong ayuda kada taon ang mga rice farmer sa ilalim ng RCEP. Ang pondo ng RCEF ay mula sa kinokolektang taripa ng Bureau of Customs sa mga imported na bigas.

Sabi ni Villar, hindi puwedeng ipitin ang DBM ang RCEF fund dahil nakasaad aniya ito sa Rice Tariffication Law.

"According to the law, in fact it is very specific, that we will not pass the law unless you give as P10B a year for the benefit of small farmers," sabi ni Villar. **(Dindo Matining)**

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WHY A TOTAL BAN ON AGRICULTURAL LAND CONVERSION IS TOTALLY WRONG

Last August 26, 2019, various newspapers reported on a certain lawmaker calling for a total ban on agricultural land conversion into residential, commercial, industrial, and other non-agricultural uses in a bid to ensure food security. It cited that "rapid urbanization and population growth have contributed to the problem of shrinking agricultural lands" and "farmers need farm lands to feed the country." It also said that "the measure aims to protect farm lands for which government already spend to irrigate" and that it is "critical for food security" since "prime agricultural lands are being targeted for conversion."

In its justification, the ban argued that "since agrarian reform was implemented in 1988 up to 2016, almost 100,000 hectares of agricultural lands, equivalent to the combined size of Metro Manila and Cebu City, have not produced food."

OSHDP respectfully disagrees with the good lawmaker. The organization believes that any bill calling for stopping agricultural land conversion based on wrong premises and assumptions is dangerous.

In a 2016 study conducted by the Center for Housing and Independent Research Synergies, Inc. or CHAIRS, it was found out that agricultural lands may actually be increasing rather than decreasing. The study found out that "current trends in land use point to an increasing amount of agricultural land. From 2007-2012, for every 1% increase in urban land, agricultural land increases 5%, presumably signaling a problem of agricultural productivity."

It further explained that "historically, agricultural land in the Philippines has been increasing, contrary to the belief that total agricultural land is losing to industrial, residential and commercial uses (including the pronouncements leading to the moratorium policy). It rose from 11,353,800 hectares (38.1% of total land area) in 2005 to 12,426,600 hectares (41.7% of total land area) in 2013. The proportion of arable land and permanent cropland has also been increasing over the years. Permanent cropland grew from 16.3% in 2005 to 17.9% in 2013. It could be seen that forest and shrub lands are giving way to agricultural lands. While built-up land indeed increased 1.25% or 375,000 hectares from 2003 to 2010, agricultural land increased 5.40% or about 1,620,000 hectares in the same period. Both may be seen as an effect of a growing population, with growing food, shelter and other economic needs."

Simply put, there is not enough evidence to show that the country's agricultural land is shrinking. CHAIRS also went further in its study to say that "the total area of converted agricultural lands, from 1988 to 2015, comprises 151,795.37 hectares, which represents 1.22% of the total agricultural lands in the country. It must be noted that the data corresponds to all purposes of conversion, i.e. residential, commercial, agro-industrial, institutional, industrial, mixed use, ecotourism and recreational. Based on 2008 data, 30% of cumulative land conversions were for purely residential use, and another 4.18% for socialized housing purposes, while the rest are for mixed uses."

"Likewise, the historical data of total approved land conversion applications from 1988 to present shows that it is in fact declining especially for the last five years. The 1.22%, accumulated over a span of 28 years, is insignificant to trigger a drastic policy reform such as a moratorium on land conversion. Particularly for the housing sector, which takes only about 30% of the total approved land conversion, there is no compelling reason for the proposed policy," CHAIRS added.

While it is recognized that food security is an important concern, agricultural land conversion ban is not the solution. There were many other factors mentioned in the study that must be addressed by government to help the agricultural sector. Among them is the sharp decline in employment in the agricultural sector where the mean age of famers stands at 57 years of age. Climate change and natural disasters also affected agricultural productivity as well.

A total ban of land conversion will certainly have an adverse impact on our economic development since land is the single, most basic resource of the country. We cannot solve one problem by creating another. Therefore, this bill on conversion ban must be set aside.

The Manila Times

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San Isidro farmers introduced to more best farm practices

THE Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF) and Cocolink held a series of agro-enterprise training sessions in San Isidro, Davao del Norte in the last week of July to share with coconut farmers more best farming practices.

Fifteen farmers who are members of the Laak Multipurpose Cooperative (Lampco) learned first hand how to make vermicast organic fertilizers with a demonstration on how to set up vermi beds and make foliar fertilizers out of fermented plant and fruit juices.

The training sessions also included nursery management, planting density, insect and weed control, and farm safety for workers.

Thirty cluster farm managers were given a leadership workshop to efficiently guide their groups.

"When farmer leaders are trained, their potential to address constraints related to their agro-enterprises are enhanced. Leaders are now engaging their members and other organizations to identify needs, resources and opportunities. This is critical to the success and sustainability of their businesses," said PEF area officer Mysol Carcueva.

In January this year, PEF, Cocolink, Lampco and the San Isidro local government signed a memorandum of agreement to enhance farm productivity, provide production loan for farmers, and improve the value chain in the area.

Coconut is the third most prevalent crop in the Philippines next to rice and corn, but most farmers of the crop remain poor from aging and senile coconut trees, fragmentation of farmers, lack of value-adding and pest problems.

The Philippine Coconut Authority said to level up the country's coconut industry, it would push for the expansion of lands planted to the crop while promoting value-added products from coconut.

Farmers who are members of the Laak Multipurpose Cooperative are taught how to vermicast organic fertilizers by representatives from Peace and Equity Foundation and Cocolink. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Manila Times

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Searca sets deadline for PhD scholarship applications

LOS BAÑOS, Laguna: Research scholarships offered to doctoral students by the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) with topics relevant to Searca's priority thrusts are still open for interested applicants until August 31.

Leah Lyn Domingo of the Searca public relations office said for fiscal year 2019-2020, priority would be given to research scholarship applications that are anchored on any of the topics defined by the project.

Domingo said under the project titled "Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration in the Asean Region: Responding to Food Security and Inclusiveness Concerns," the topics focus on priority commodities such as root and cash crops, fruits, vegetables and livestock, as well as value chain studies.

The scholarship is open to Filipinos and other Southeast Asians from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.

Domingo said Searca provides research funds not to exceed $4,500 and optional internship at the center for up to two months.

She said application requirements are posted online at www.searca.org.

"Those who will avail of the internship may be given additional scholarship funds to cover travel expenses to and from Searca, travel and accident insurance, and stipend during the internship period," Domingo said.

She said the scholars may use the resources and facilities available at Searca and its network of universities in Southeast Asia for their research. **LEANDER C. DOMINGO**

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Keep ASF virus out of Mindanao–Piñol

By Manuel T. Cayon @awimailbox
Mindanao Bureau Chief

DAVAO CITY—The porous borders of Mindanao are raising a huge concern among hog raisers as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) raised the number of countries stricken with African swine fever (ASF).

The Mindanao Development Authority (MinDa) has sounded the alarm against the entry of processed pork products from other countries where ASF outbreaks have been reported.

The MinDA said the FDA has added Hong Kong, North Korea, Lao PDR and Germany on the list of countries where it has banned the importation and distribution of all processed pork meat products. These countries were an addition from a previous list which included China, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Vietnam, Zambia, South Africa, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Mongolia, Moldova and Belgium.

"It is important to put safeguards to protect Mindanao from the entry of meat imports from China and other countries with ASF," said MinDA Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol during a meeting with veterinarians and hog raisers on Tuesday at his MinDA office.

The safeguards include control in the entry of frozen meats, manning of quarantine checkpoints and the recall of imported processed meats.

Local government units (LGU) must also be at the forefront of the strict prohibition of meat imports, Piñol added. They need to strengthen monitoring of shipment of animals and processed meat, adding the entry of undocumented animals and meat products may cause the spread of the ASF virus and other diseases.

Aside from the LGUs, he said, there must also be a consolidated effort among stakeholders. "There is the need for an island-wide orientation to safeguard Mindanao from entry of processed pork meats from other countries," the former agriculture secretary said.

He also called for a Mindanao-wide orientation among hog raisers on September 9 in Davao City to discuss measures to prevent the entry of the swine virus to Mindanao.

The forum would be a partnership with the Department of Agriculture to be participated by LGUs, backyard hog raisers, commercial hog raisers, veterinarians and quarantine officers. The forum would also serve as a venue to evaluate the data of the industry, assess the challenges confronting the Mindanao swine industry and its opportunities, the MinDA said.

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Turkey ready to assist BARMM agri sector

DAVAO CITY—The government of Turkey vowed to extend its assistance to farmers, agriculturists and leaders of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

In a press statement, the Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA), through Secretary Emmanuel Piñol, will forge an agreement with the government of Turkey through its ambassador to the Philippines Artemiz Sumer to help the region's agriculture sector.

Piñol said Sumer wants to start the Joint Exchange Program this September. He said Turkey's envoy told him that the assistance would be the West Asian country's "contribution" to the peace efforts of President Duterte in Mindanao.

According to the MinDA executive, governors, mayors, farmer leaders and agriculturists will undergo a seven-day short course, which includes exposure to modern agricultural places in Turkey.

The MinDa official said the trainings and exposures include grains production, dairy farming, as well as cattle- and goat-raising, which are seen to boost the potentials of the Philippines and the global halal markets. Scholars from the five BARMM provinces will be sent in five batches to Turkey.

Upon their return, they are expected to share and implement their acquired knowledge to boost the agriculture sector of the region.

Piñol said the Turkey International Cooperation Agency will conduct follow-through programs to ensure that inputs learned would be applied in their respective provinces they represent. ***Digna Banzon/PNA***