CLIPPINGS FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2020

A. SEC. WDD QUOTED

THE DAILY TRIBUNE
Food trade boost coming

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
Bohol gets P380-M agri projects
DA pulls all stops vs Panama disease

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL
Devastating banana disease alarms DA

B. DA FAMILY

MANILA BULLETIN
Customs, BAI supervise disposal of ASF-infected meat products from China
Chocolate-powered change: How cacao transformed Quezon's 4th district

MANILA STANDARD
'Rice farmers lost P75B in 2019
Customs disposes shipment of ASF-Positive food items

THE DAILY TRIBUNE
Step up ASF prevention, LGU told

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
More seeds distributed under RCEF

BALITA
Inangkat sa China: Meat products na may ASF, sinunog

TEMPO
ASF-infected meat disposed in Cavite

C. AGRI-RELATED STORY

MANILA BULLETIN
Agri-TALK: Produce your own kangkong seeds

MANILA STANDARD
PILMICO helps revive aquaculture in Capiz
Rice liberalization led to boom in rice imports – Lawmaker
PH chocolates to be featured in Amsterdam

THE DAILY TRIBUNE
Students, learning and visits

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
DOT positions Isabela as agro-ecotourism site
Pilmico helps revive aquaculture in Capiz
Valenzuela opens first fishing village

BANDERA
Leyte, Samar ban pigs from 'ASF' areas

D. FOREIGN STORY

No stories

THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

Date: 16 FEB 2020 Page: B10

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Food trade boost coming

We need to have a systematic and longterm strategy to develop and promote exports of both raw and processed agricultural and fishery products

By Maria Romero
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The Department of Agriculture (DA) is pushing for more exports of farm and fishery products to realize the goal of propeling the country's long overdue agri-industrialization.

Following a recent meeting with the Export Development Council (EDC), Agriculture Secretary William Dar said the government will partner with more organized farmers' and fishers' groups to further increase the country's food exports.

"We need to have a systematic and long-term strategy to develop and promote exports of both raw and processed agricultural and fishery products," Dar said.

"With the DA's new thinking for Philippine agriculture, we can do much better if we bring our resources together. The way forward really is for the government to strongly partner with the private sector," he added.

The EDC is the export promotion arm of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) mandated to institutionalize the national export drive that will enable the country's products to compete globally.

Diversified value chain

Meanwhile, Dar challenged the country's exporters to diversify their products to include emerging "export winners" like fresh and processed tropical fruits, natural rubber, and other coconut products like coconut water and coco sugar.

The secretary also emphasized the need for an "aggressive and sustained export promotion" as he urged the private sector to help small farmers and fisherfolk through the "big brother-small brother" approach.

"Exports of agri products should not depend on surplus production to supply the international market. We need to have the economies of scale on-farm production that will give us sustained quantity and quality of export products," Dar underscored.

Thus, he instructed the concerned DA agencies to boost its partnership with agribusiness firms, small and medium enterprises and organized farmers' and fishers' to develop more innovative and competitive agri-fishery export products.

Numbers need fixing

The latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that top Philippine agriculture exports reached $5.875 billion from January to November 2019, with bananas accounting for 30 percent at $1.77 billion.

Coconut oil exports came in second, at $837.6 million during the 11 months, followed by processed food and beverages, pineapple, tuna, processed tropical fruits, desiccated coconut, seaweeds and carrageenan, fresh and preserved fish, and unmanufactured tobacco.

With the DA's new thinking for Philippine agriculture, we can do much better if we bring our resources together. The way forward really is for the government to strongly partner with the private sector.

The figures showed that farm and fishery products accounted for 9.1 percent of the country's total exports, worth $64.583 billion from January to November 2019.

Meanwhile, electronic products remained as the country's top foreign exchange earner with exports totaling $36.563 billion.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

Date: 16 FEB 2020 Page: B3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Bohol gets P380-M agri projects

The Department of Agriculture has released P380 million worth of agriculture and fishery projects to Bohol as part of efforts to further improve the province's farm sector.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar turned over P60 million worth of various agri-machineries, inputs and projects under the Special Area for Agriculture Development program to Acting Governor Rene Relampagos.

Under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), Bohol received P106 million, comprising of inbred seeds (P16 million), agri machineries for 100 farmers (P80 million) and trainings (P10 million).

On top of that, Dar committed P42 million to the province for mangrove rehabilitation, nursery facilities, and seedlings propagation.

The Land Bank of the Philippines also turned over P11.75 million for the Expanded Survival and Recovery Assistance program, which benefited 750 rice farmers tilling one hectare and below.

"Bohol will be part of the second tranche of this cash assistance," Dar said.

For the fisheries sector, the regional office of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Research allotted P40 million for various projects.

The Bureau of Soils and Water Management also turned over the Land Suitability Map for coffee and cacao.

BSWM will partner with the Bohol State University (BSU) for a soils and water conservation program.

Dar committed P5 million for the food development project particularly on ube production as well as P5 million for soils and water conservation.

– **Louise Maureen Simeon**

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL
Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: B3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

DA pulls out all stops vs Panama disease

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The Department of Agriculture is calling for the cooperation among banana farmers and exporters to help address the lingering Panama disease or Fusarium wilt in a bid to further boost exports of the commodity.

"We will strongly collaborate with all banana farmers, big and small, and local chief executives to find a long-term and sustainable solution to solve the Panama disease, and at the same time increase the exports of fresh bananas and other by-products," Agriculture Secretary William Dar said.

"We are tapping the services of noted Filipino banana expert Agustin Molina, formerly of Bioversity International, for these efforts," he added.

The Panama disease is caused by the soil-borne fungus Fusarium oxysporum that enters the plant's roots, and colonizes the xylem vessels, blocking the flow of water and nutrients, which leads the plant to wilt and die.

Molina said some of the major issues confronting the industry are lack of viable lands, impact of climate change, shift in market conditions, and emergence of new competitors.

He added that the effect of the mild drought experienced in 2019 is still being felt in the early months of 2020.

In 2015, about 15,000 hectares out of 84,000 hectares planted to Cavendish banana were affected by Panama disease.,

"We are awaiting the results of geomapping being conducted by the DA-RFO 11 to validate the extent of infestation in Davao del Norte," said Dar.

"We are glad that several major growers are planting disease-resistant varieties and so the impact is minimal on them, while the small and independent farmers feel the brunt of Fusarium wilt," he added.

Despite the presence of the Panama disease, Dar said banana remains among the country's top exports, earning $1.77 billion from January to November 2019 and $1.38 billion in 2018.

"What more if we could solve the decades-old Panama disease that has been plaguing banana farms in Mindanao," Dar said.

"That is why we at the Department of Agriculture are reaching out to all growers and exporters, local government units, and other industry stakeholders to forge stronger and more sustainable collaboration to put Panama disease to rest," he added.

Dar recently instructed the heads of concerned DA agencies such as the High Value Crops Development Program, Agricultural Credit and Policy Council and the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) to work and craft with industry players a banana export roadmap.

He likewise cited the need for a strategy to effectively control Fusarium wilt.

Dar said the DA shall hold a stakeholders' meeting to include all small, independent, medium, and big players in the industry, as well as LGUs, concerned DA agencies and DOST- PCARRD.

The meeting will discussed proposed stricter phytosanitary measures to manage, control and contain the Panama disease, including setting up foot baths and tire dips.

Dar said the DA would provide intervention measures for growers whose farms are disease-infested.

The agency shall also conduct more farmers' trainings on plant health and nutrition.

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL
Everybody's Newspaper

Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: 6

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Devastating banana disease alarms DA

By Cory Martinez

AGRICULTURE Secretary William Dar has called on all banana growers and exporters, local government units (LGUs) and other stakeholders to forge a stronger and more sustainable collaboration to fight the Panama disease plaguing the banana industry.

Dar made the call even as he recently directed the heads of High Value Crops Development Program (HVCDP), Agricultural Credit and Policy Council (ACPC), and the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) to work and craft with industry players a banana export roadmap, and a strategy on how to effectively control Panama disease or Fusarium wilt.

The decade-old Panama disease continuously infest banana farms in Mindanao.

The disease is caused by the soil-borne fungus Fusarium oxysporum that enters the plant's roots, and colonizes the xylem vessels, blocking the flow of water and nutrients. Thus, the plant wilts and dies.

"We will strongly collaborate with all banana farmers, big and small, and local chief executives to find a long-term and sustainable solution to solve the Panama disease, and at the same time increase the exports of fresh bananas and other by-products," Dar said.

"We are tapping the services of noted Filipino banana expert, Dr. Agustin Molina, formerly of Bioversity International, for these efforts," he added.

Meanwhile, Dr. Molina said some of the major issues confronting the industry are lack of viable lands, impact of climate change, shift in market conditions, and emergence of new competitors.

Molina added that despite the damage due to Panama disease, mild drought, and production decline, the value of banana exports even expanded due to better prices and higher quality of Philippine bananas.

"The effect of the mild drought experienced in 2019 is still being felt in the early months of 2020, " Molina said.

In 2015, about 15,000 hectares out of 84,000 hectares planted to Cavendish banana were affected by Panama disease.

Dar, on the other hand, said they are awaiting the results of geo-mapping being conducted by the DA-RFO 11 to validate the extent of infestation in Davao del Norte.

"We are glad that several major growers are planting disease-resistant varieties and so the impact is minimal on them, while the small and independent farmers feel the brunt of Fusarium wilt," Dar added.

However, Dar said despite the infestation of the disease, fresh banana remains as the country's major farm export.

He said based on the records of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the commodity earned for the country US$1.77 billion, from January to November 2019, making it the top farm export item, and US$1.38 billion in 2018.

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
Date: FEB. 10, 2020 Page: 13

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Customs, BAI supervise disposal of ASF-infected meat products from China

By BETHEENA KAE UNITE

The shipment of meat products found to be infected with African swine fever (ASF) has been disposed of at a facility in Cavite, the Bureau of Customs said Saturday.

The bureau said the shipment that contains dumplings, pork-chicken balls, and roast chicken wings was already disposed on February 7 at the facility of Integrated Waste Management at Terece Martirez, Cavite.

It was furthered that the food items were disposed of through a heat-assisted method called Thermolysis or Thermal Decomposition.

An interagency team composed of officers from the Customs bureau, Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and the Philippine Coast Guard administered the transfer of the ASF-positive food items and witnessed its disposal.

It can be recalled that the shipment consigned to Dynamic M Intl. Trading, Inc. arrived at Manila International Container Port (MICP) in December last year from China. It was alerted on the same month.

It was then seized last January 24 after the Veterinary Quarantine Services (VQS) of BAI found a sample of pork-celery dumpling to be ASF-positive.

The shipment was initially inspected by the Bureau of Customs at the Designated Examination Area in MICP, and was transferred to the consignee's warehouse at Goldkey Bldg., Toklong, Kawit, Cavite for the conduct of 100 percent physical examination by the interagency team.

The transfer was a requisite to provide BAI the proper cold storage facility to ensure proper inspection of the meat products, and for them to conduct proper tests.

The bureau said it has taken a cue from the expertise of BAI for the disposal of the shipment. Acting on the disposal plan, the food items were disinfected first by the BAI and transported the same to the facility of Integrated Waste Management in Cavite for thermal decomposition.

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: B-3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Chocolate-powered change: How cacao transformed Quezon's 4th district

By YVETTE TAN

Cacao is a prime commodity, with global trade valued at almost US$50000 million as of 2018, and is estimated to reach about US$60000 million by 2025. Most of the current supply comes from Africa, though other countries around the equator, including the Philippines, are looking to cash in on this lucrative crop.

As of 2017, the Philippines ranked 72nd in terms of export, contributing less than 0.01% to the global market share. This means that there is a large room for growth in the local cacao industry.

Dr. Angelina "Helen" Tan, Representative 4th District of Quezon Province is hoping to take advantage of this. Quezon is known for its coconut industry. Coconut is harvested five times a year, which means there are idle months where farmers could be making more money. This spurred Tan to search for a high value product that could be intercropped with coconut. "When I was elected in 2013, I was looking for an agricultural project for the farmers. I found out that cacao is suited for intercropping," she says. "I thought it would make a good project because cacao is easy to care for, requires minimal investment and labor, and [propagation] is easy to teach. There's also a local and global demand, so you have a sure market."

Tan admits that another reason the project appealed to her was because she loved chocolate. But then, who doesn't?

Introduction before propagation

Tan had a game plan. The first thing she did was hold the First Cacao 4th District Summit in February 2015. The Summit's purpose was to introduce the crop, its money making opportunities, and the realities and challenges of cultivating it. The aim was to find farmers who would be part of the project long term. The project organizers didn't expect it to be easy: Quezon farmers were used to coconut farming, where not much effort is required until harvest time five times a year. "I had to show them that if they decided to plant cocoa, they would have my support all the way," Tan says. "All I need to know was if they were willing to give it a try."

Tan hired an agriculturist who worked with technical resource persons from various government agencies like the Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Science and Technology (DoST), among others. The farmers were asked to submit

POTENTIAL MONEYMAKER–With proper government support, Philippine cacao has the potential to make a splash worldwide.

PART 1 OF 4

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: B-3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

a letter of intent and were asked to attend hands-on training sessions, which included the basics of natural farming including farm layout, composting, and making organic fertilizers and pesticides. Farmers are taught how to collect rainwater to augment the lack of water in the area. Seedlings of UF18, BR25, and ICS40 varities were provided for free, and were even transported to the farms without charge. All they had to do was express interest and attend the training sessions.

They named the project "Sariling Sikap" because a chunk of it came from their own hard work. "I asked the DA for a year to help me establish a nursery but they took a while so on my own, I hired an agriculturist who specialized in cacao. We established our own nursery and gave the seedlings away for free to the farmers," Tan says.

Each farmer got 300 seedlings for a hectare of coconut land, half of the recommended 600 seedlings minimum for intercropping per hectare. The project also provided continuous technical assistance, with agriculturist regularly visiting the farms for monitoring and validation. About half a million trees were planted across 10 municipalities, with almost 2000 farmers participating in the project. They harvested their first batch in 2017.

Post-processing

After their first harvest, they started tapping government agencies, this time for technical support in product development. By that time, they had steady buyers for their beans, which sold for the global price of P35/kilo wet, with P5 going to the organization and the rest going to the farmer, and P130/ kilo dried and fermented.

Though the farmers were starting to earn from their crops, that wasn't the project's ultimate goal. "Our vision was to make value-added products aside from tablea, chocolate, cacao oil, and vinegar. We wanted to utilize everything, from the pods to the leaves," Tan shares. "Do you know how coconut is called the 'tree of life' because you can utilize every part of it? Cacao is like that. You can make money from it in many different ways."

Tan put up a drying, fermenting, and processing center using her own funds. She also funded the machines needed. They're currently at the stage where they're setting standards and protocols for each farmer to follow to ensure quality. This includes traceability, which the project hopes to parlay into terroir, or how a particular area's soil and climate affects its agricultural products, in the future. "Each farmer's

PART 2 OF 4

FREE SEEDLINGS TO INTERESTED FARMERS–Dr. Angelina "Helen" Tan, Representative 4th District of Quezon Province, with a farmer who received free cacao seedlings as part of the Sariling Sikap program.

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
Date: FEB 16, 2020 Page: B-3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

PART 3 OF 4

harvest is tested for quality in a DOST facility because we want to compare what each farm's product tastes like before and after roasting... The farmers also get to taste their products so they know what to look out for," Tan says. "We're hoping to set a unique taste for our product."

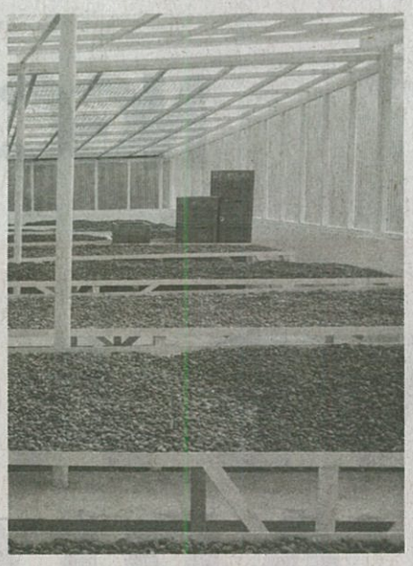
So far, they have been able to produce tablea, as well as 70% and 80% chocolate bars. The focus on high quality chocolate bars is intentional. Most Filipinos don't know that what they think of as 'chocolate' is actually mostly sugar. Dark chocolate, meanwhile, is considered a superfood and can find a place in a healthy diet. Tan wants to introduce the Filipino public to high quality, healthy chocolate at reasonable prices. "I want farmers to be able to afford their own product, so they can taste the fruits of their hard work," she says. "I want to train Filipinos to eat the healthy kind of chocolate."

Constant support is key

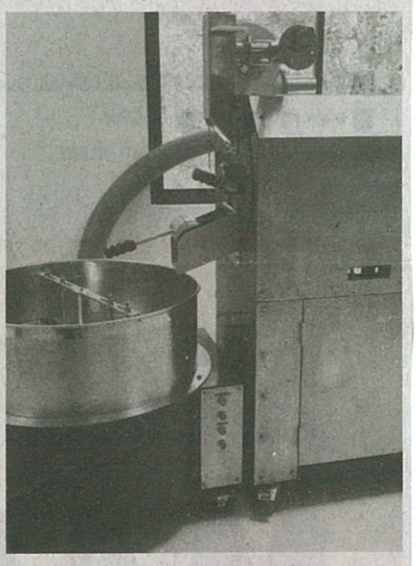
The farmers continue to receive support throughout the entire process. Further training included modules on Good Manufacturing Practices and Entrepreneurship conducted by the DTI. The Project acquired a service vehicle to pick up harvests from even the furthest barangay for free, all the farmer had to do was dial a number for his product to be picked up and brought to the processing center. The beans are bought by Tan's Four K Kakao Farm (named after the four Ks in her life-her three children and one grandson), which also provides extra training and support when needed. "A common problem is that after the farmers have planted and the crops have become productive, government agencies aren't able to pay attention to them anymore," Tan says. "You need to support them all the way-from getting FDA licenses to finding clients. This is the level of commitment I promised them."

The farmers also support themselves, forming an organization called Kakao Integrated Development for Livelihood and Transformation (KIDLAT). There are plans to also involve the local women's livelihood group, Four K (Kababaihan para sa Kaunlaran at Kapakanan ng Bayan) when it's time to manufacture the high quality

CONTINUOUS SUPPORT-Aside from free cacao seedlings, Sariling Sikap participants get round-the-clock support from municipal agriculturists and technical staff from different government offices.



HIGH TECH-One of the Sariling Sikap's investments include a bean drying facility where cacao beans can be processed for utmost quality.



CHOCOLATE MAKING-The Program's investments in the value-added products making process include a chocolate making machine.

INVOLVING THE WOMEN-Part of Sariling Sikap's goal is to involve local women in chocolate making livelihood projects.

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: B-3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

PART 4 OF 4

chocolate bars. "I tell them that until they're at a level where they can compete in the market, they have my full support," Tan says.

Product development

Tan already has studies of Sariling Sikap's flagship product name and packaging. It's called Tangerine for three reasons: her favorite color is orange, its first three letters are the same as her last name, and most importantly, because she wants to incorporate local products like mangoes, oranges, and calamansi, which have orange hues, into the chocolate.

Upon the recommendations of chocolate experts from Belgium, where some of the best chocolate is made, the product will be marketed as "single origin tree to bar," highlighting the cacao's coming from just one are, as well as the farmers' journey from the planting of the cacao to its processing. "I keep telling [the farmers] that coconut traders get rich because they just buy the nuts but sell the byproducts," Tan says. "For this cacao project, I want everything to go to the farmers. They produce everything and we help them find a market."

Help for farmers

Since it takes 1½ to two years for a cacao tree to start bearing fruit, it's only now that the project has officially started. And while it may take a while for the farmers to see big results, they have already noticed small differences in their daily lives after their involvement in the Sariling Sikap project.

Many farmers report that the still minimal money they've been making from cacao harvests have helped augment their daily expenses, especially during the months in between coconut harvests. Tan hopes that their earnings will further rise once they begin drying and fermenting their own beans. "My goal is to capacitate them," she says. "I want them to understand that farmers can also be businessmen, even if they just studied up to grade school or high school."

To further help the industry, Tan has recently authored "An Act Establishing a National Program for the Cacao Industry and Appropriating Funds Therefor," which is slated to be deliberated at the Eighteenth Congress this year. "We have huge funds for high value crops but these are seldom successful because of a lack of investment," she says. "There's a gap in government programs. There's a need for monitoring and evaluation."

Though cacao is a high value crop, Tan says that it lacks program focus. "There's a global demand for cacao which Africa currently has trouble meeting," Tan says. "We have the right soil and climate suitable for planting cacao, so why doesn't the government create and fund a comprehensive program for the development of this industry?"

She cites her program as a template, saying that it can be done on a national scale, as long as the proper protocols are observed. "I think the government can do that," she says.

Sariling Sikap has been gaining traction outside District 4 as well. Farmers from other municipalities, and even other provinces, have asked if they can avail of the training, and those with productive cacao farms have asked if they can sell their products to four K Cacao Farm as well. The DOST and DTI has been sending farmers to Sariling Sikap for benchmarking, and private individuals have been inquiring about training as well. Tan says that they charge private individuals a minimal fee for lessons and seedlings, with the money going to staff salaries and the day upkeep of the program.

I took a few years to set up, and now that it's beginning to gain traction, Tan is rightfully proud of what she's helped the District 4 farmers accomplish. "Being a farmer myself, I want their lives to change for the better," she says. "We started this from scratch, and it's like a dream that's slowly being realized."

Manila Standard

Date: 16 FEB 2020 Page: A3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

'Rice farmers lost P75b in 2019'

MABALACAT CITY—The Bantay Bigas rice watch group, the Amihan National Federation of Peasant Women and Anakpawis Party-list on Friday said Filipino rice farmers lost at least P74.8 billion in 2019 due to low farmgate prices of palay.

The three groups blamed this on the implementation of Republic Act 11203, or Rice Liberalization Law.

"It has been a trend, since the country joined the World Trade Organization in 1995, when there was even the slightest buzz of arrival of imported rice, farm gate prices at the barrios are forced down by traders, throwing farmers into bankruptcy and indebtedness. It is worse now, because it was institutionalized by RA 11203," said Rafael Mariano, former Anakpawis Party-list lawmaker.

Anakpawis stated that it opposed the law during its deliberation at the Lower House and as alternative primarily pushed for the Rice Industry Development Act (Rida) bill during the 17th congress.

The bill, now House Bill 477 being pushed by Gabriela Women's Party Representative Arlene Brosas, proposes the authentic development program for the national rice industry, involving the three-year allocation of P495 billion, which includes P185 billion for its core programs and P310 billion for the procurement program of the NFA.

Willie Casas

Manila Standard

Date: 16 FEB 2020 Page: A4

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

CUSTOMS DISPOSES SHIPMENT OF ASF-POSITIVE FOOD ITEMS

THE Bureau of Customs has disposed a shipment of food items from China that were found positive for African swine fever.

The food items—dumplings, pork-chicken balls and roast chicken wings —were disposed of via thermolysis or thermal decomposition at the Integrated Waste Management facility in Trece Martires, Cavite.

The shipment, consigned to Dynamic M International Trading Inc., arrived at the Manila International Container Port on Dec. 11, 2019 from China.

Customs operatives seized the shipment on Jan. 24, 2020 after the Bureau of Animal Industry's Veterinary Quarantine Services found a sample of pork-celery dumpling to be positive for ASF.

The BOC said the food items were first disinfected by BAI before these were transported to Cavite for disposal.

Last month, Mindanao has recorded its first African swine fever outbreak, with the entire Davao region put on lockdown and at least 13,000 hogs culled.

The Department of Agriculture has imposed border control across Northern Mindanao to prevent the entry of pork and pork-based products from Davao and Caraga.

The outbreak began in the town of Don Marcelino in Davao Occidental on Jan. 31 after about 1,000 pigs died of the disease.

Northern Mindanao has the third largest swine industry in the country, data from the Department of Agriculture showed, accounting for nearly a million swine population with a total estimated value of P25 billion.

Agriculture chief William Dar said commercial and backyard hog growers in Davao region have already incurred an estimated P79.81 million in revenue losses after the dreaded ASF outbreak

President Rodrigo Duterte earlier ordered all government agencies and local government units to ensure the "strict" implementation of the DA's nationwide zoning plan for ASF to control and contain the spread of the fatal hog disease.

"The African swine fever, despite having no known effect to humans, is a severe and highly contagious viral disease affecting domestic and wild pigs, with a case-fatality rate approaching 100 percent, caused by a resistant virus with no developed cure to date," the President said in his Administrative Order No. 22.

THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Date: 16 FEB 2020 Page: A1 & A2

Step up ASF prevention, LGU told

By Kristina Maralit

Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Eduardo Año has directed all local government

Turn to page A2

This is an urgent matter that should be prioritized by LGU to save lives and save livelihood

From page A1

units (LGU) to step up their efforts in preventing and controlling the spread of the African swine fever (ASF) virus in their localities.

In a statement, Año said the DILG, together with the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), are strictly monitoring the LGU' adherence to President Rodrigo Duterte's Administrative Order (AO) 22, issued on 5 February, tasking them to strictly implement the National Zoning and Movement Plan for the prevention and control of ASF in connection with the DA Administrative Circular 12, series of 2019.

P800 million out of the P1 billion President's Contingent Fund for indemnification and operations have also been released.

"This is an urgent matter that should be prioritized by LGU to save lives and save livelihood. It is during this time that we intensify the cooperation of the LGU's and the national government," the DILG chief said in a statement.

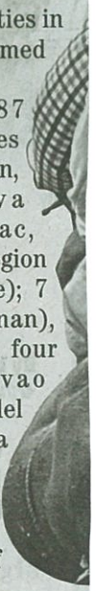
"It is the duty of the LGU to ensure that the public is safe from food-borne illnesses. LGUs are the ones overseeing meat inspection and meat transport according to the quality and safety standards of the DA," he added.

Año then ordered LGU to follow the priority areas for action prescribed by the DA including the development and strengthening of their respective ASF Prevention and Control Plans, conducting of proper public awareness on ASF, surveillance and border control and movement management.

LGU must also provide operational and logistic support to local veterinary offices, give alternative livelihood for affected farmers, and update their swine inventories.

The DA has so far listed 120 municipalities or cities in 14 provinces with confirmed ASF cases.

Eighty-seven 87 municipalities or cities are in Region III (Bulacan, Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Aurora, Tarlac, and Bataan), 13 in Region IV-A (Rizal and Cavite); 7 in Region I (Pangasinan), four in Metro Manila-, four in Region XI (Davao Occidental and Davao del Sur), four in Cordillera Administrative Region (Benguet and Kalinga), and one in Region XII (in the Province of South Cotabato).



Affected farmers may avail of the national government's support including the DA's free laboratory testing for ASF and indemnification fund of P5,000 per farmer.

P800 million out of the P1 billion President's Contingent Fund for indemnification and operations have also been released.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
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Date: 16 FEB 2020 Page: B3

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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

More seeds distributed under RCEF

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The government has released more seeds to farmers under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) following the liberalization of the rice industry.

As o the end of January, the Philippine Rice Research Institute had distributed 1.24 million bags of certified seeds under the RCEF.

Under the program, the seeds will be planted on 609,000 hectares for the dry season.

More than 480,000 farmers in major rice-producing areas nationwide have already benefited from the RCEF seeds component.

"PhilRice commits to continue reaching out to more farmers to provide them certified seeds as an intervention to help increase yield and reduce cost amid the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law," PhilRice deputy executive director Flordeliza Bordey said.

The law provides for financial assistance for rice farmers to be sourced from the tariff collection of the P10 billion RCEF. Around P3 billion has been allocated for distribution of inbred seeds.

It led to the opening up of the market to cheap rice imports which resulted in the drop of palay (unhusked rice) farmgate prices in several rice-producing areas.

Despite the challenges with the recent rollout of the RCEF, the distribution of the remaining seeds continues as the government lays down plans for 2020 wet season and 2021 dry season.

"For the 2020 wet season, we have allotted 2.5 million bags of seeds and 1.7 million bags for 2021 dry season distribution," Bordey said.

Philrice plans to develop farmer-trainers to augment the RCEF extension service program amid the limited budget and personnel.

Farmer-trainers will be a critical group of farmers who will disseminate information.

Youth engagement will also be prioritized this year," PhilRice deputy executive director for development Karen Barroga said.

Balita

Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: 2

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

INANGKAT SA CHINA

Meat products na may ASF, sinunog

Sinira na ng pamahalaan ang kargamentong produktong karneng nahawaan ng African swine fever (ASF) na nanggaling sa China, kamakailan.

Sa pahayag ng Bureau of Customs (BoC), ang nasabing meat products ay sinunog sa Integrated Waste Management sa Trece Martirez, Cavite, kamakailan.

Ayon sa BoC, ang nabanggit na produkto ay kinabibilangan ng dumplings, pork-chicken balls, at roast chicken wings.

Sinira ang nasabing mga produkto sa pamamagitan ng thermal decomposition.

Kabilang sa nangasiwa sa nasabing pagsusunog ang mga tauhan ng BoC, Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) at Philippine Coast Guard.

Matatandaang naharang ang nasabing kargamentong naka-consign sa Dynamic M International Trading, Inc., nang palabas na sana sa Manila International Container Port (MICP) nitong nakalipas na Disyembre ng nakaraang taon.

Pormal na kinumpiska ang kargamento nang matuklasan ng pamahalaan na positibo sa virus.

Betheena Kae Unite

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

Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: 13

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

ASF-infected meat disposed in Cavite

A shipment of meat products found to be infected with African Swine Fever has been disposed in a facility in Cavite, the Bureau of Customs said yesterday.

The BoC said the shipment that contains dumplings, pork-chicken balls, and roast chicken wings was disposed last Feb. 7 at the facility of the Integrated Waste Management in Trece Martires City.

They were disposed through a heat-assisted method called thermolysis or thermal decomposition.

An interagency team composed of officials from the BoC, Bureau of Animal Industry, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, and the Philippine Coast Guard administered the transfer of the ASF-positive food items and witnessed its disposal.

The shipment consigned to Dynamic M International Trading Inc. arrived at Manila International Container Port in December last year from China. It was alerted the same month.

It was seized last Jan. 24 after the Veterinary Quarantine Services of the BAI found a sample of pork-celery dumpling to be ASF-positive.

The shipment was initially inspected by the BoC at the Designated Examination Area at the MICP and was transferred to the consignee's warehouse at Goldkey Building, Toklong, Kawit, Cavite for the conduct of 100 percent physical examination by the interagency team.

The transfer was a requisite to provide BAI the proper cold storage facility to ensure proper inspection of the meat products and to enable them to conduct proper tests.

The BoC said it has taken cue from the expertise of BAI for the disposal of the shipment. Acting on the disposal plan, the food items were disinfected first by the BAI and transported the same to the facility of Integrated Waste Management for thermal decomposition. **(Betheena Kae Unite)**

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: 25

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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Agri-Talk

By ZAC B. SARIAN

Flowering *kangkong*. The trick is to allow the kangkong to mature without harvesting the shoots for home use or for the market.

Kangkong ready for harvesting for sale.

PRODUCE YOUR OWN *KANGKONG* SEEDS

(Memoirs of an Agri Journalist)

YOU CAN produce your own upland *kangkong* seeds for planting. You just allow your plants to mature and bear flowers that will eventually produce seeds. The seeds you harvest will readily germinate whether you plant them direct in the plot are in a plastic seedling tray.

Upland *kangkong* produces a lot of seeds. The trick is not to harvest the shoots for cooking so that they will produce seeds. Dry the seeds before planting. If you don't plant them immediately, store them in the refrigerator.

You can make a little business by producing *kangkong* seeds for sale. You can sell the seeds to hobbyists in weekend markets, garden club meetings and some other occasions.

One easy way to sell your seeds is to master the techniques in growing *kangkong*. Then you can lecture on how to grow kangkong before audiences consisting of garden lovers whether just beginning or veteran in the field. You should be ready with your seeds if there are attendees who would like to grow their own *kangkong* immediately after your lecture.

You can make a little business by producing *kangkong* seeds for sale. You can sell the seeds to hobbyists in weekend markets, garden club meetings and some other occasions.

Of course you will probably make more money if you grow your seeds to produce *kangkong* for sale in the market. One fellow we know from Cagayan de Oro plants three kilos of seeds every three days in long plots that he himself manages. One kilo of seeds which costs him ₱250 could produce ₱1,500 to ₱2,000 worth of shoots in a growing period of 20 to 25 days.

He was smart enough to get a stall at the public market that he rents for ₱14 a day. The stall is managed by his wife who sells their *kangkong* not only to end-consumers but also to other stallholders and outsiders for their own requirements. What is god about *kangkong* is that it is well liked by the masses as well as the well-to-do.

In some food chains, adobong *kangkong* is a regular dish. In beer gardens, crispy *kangkong* is a favorite *pulutan*. *Kangkong* is also used in many other food preparations in the home and restaurants.

Visit my blog, zacsarian.com, for practical farm tips, ideas and interesting agri-people. Email me at info@zacsarian.com.

Manila Standard

Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: C2

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

PILMICO HELPS REVIVE AQUACULTURE IN CAPIZ

ABOITIZ food business unit Pilmico Animal Nutrition Corp. recently turned over 1.3 million bangus fry to help Capiz fishermen rebuild their typhoon-depleted fish stocks.

Pilmico's Aqua Feeds team, in partnership with the Roxas City government and Sagana Agricultural Supply, launched Bangon Capiznon to provide fish farmers in Capiz province the necessary seed stocks and technical support to revive its aquaculture production.

Roxas City, dubbed as the country's "seafood capital" due to its abundant fish and seafood production, was one of the places severely damaged by Typhoon Ursula that ravaged the country in December 2019.

For farmers engaged in cage operations, their fry allocation will be reared in assigned nurseries and will be distributed to them once their fish reach three to five inches—the suitable size for stocking in cages.

"True to our brand promise of being a Partner for Growth, Pilmico is here to assure our fish farmers that, together, we can recover and revive the aquaculture industry here in Capiz," said Richard Rafio, category manager for aqua of Pilmico Feeds.

Roxas City councilor and presiding officer for agriculture and fisheries Moreno Gonzaga lauded Pilmico and its initiatives for helping the affected fish farmers. Pilmico is the first feed company in Roxas City to give direct support to its aquaculture operators.

"This will greatly help not only Roxas City residents, but also in the recovery of the entire Capiz," said Gonzaga.

Pilmico partners in Capiz with Pilmico Aqua Feeds Category team members inspect bangus fry.

Manila Standard

Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: A3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

RICE LIBERALIZATION LED TO BOOM IN RICE IMPORTS—LAWMAKER

By Willie Casas

WHILE the Rice Liberalization Law spelled doom for Filipino rice farmers, the measure led to a significant boom in the rice importation business, Gabriela Women's Party Rep. Arlene Brosas said.

Brosas said the number of import clearances issued by the Bureau of Plant Industry surged by 160 percent in 2019, from just 1,705 in 2018 to 4,513 in 2019.

The actual figure could be higher since importers who smuggle rice were not accounted for.

"Rice liberalization law, which marks its first year today, made rice importers happier and rice farmers poorer. *Kumikitang kabuhayan ang importasyon ng bigas habang sadsad ang kabuhayan ng ating mga magsasaka at manggagawang nakasandig sa lokal na produksyon ng bigas*," Brosas said.

"The surge in rice import clearances alone indicate that rice importation has been a very lucrative area for businesses. If anything, the law appears to be Duterte's sweetheart deal for rice importers," she added.

The top 10 rice importers in the country today include Arvin International Marketing, Davao San Ei Trading, and Puregold Price Club, Inc. This is based on the list obtained by Gabriela Women's Party from the Department of Agriculture.

Total volume of imported rice also soared by 60 percent to 2.245 million metric tons, of which 1.8 million metric tons were recorded since the Rice Liberalization Law was enacted.

"We are literally flooded with rice imports with no regulation at all except for the sanitary and phytosanitary clearances. This is alarming since external crisis situations would leave us with no rice to eat for being too dependent on importation" Brosas said.

"*Halimbawa, nagkaroon ng matinding pest* infestation *sa* Vietnam *na* top rice source *natin o di kaya'y magkaroon ng gera. Tiyak na* instant *ang magiging krisis sa bigas, tapos wala nang pipilahang* NFA rice *dahil inalis na ito sa ilalim ng batas*," she added.

Brosas is the principal author of HB 476 seeking the repeal of the Rice Liberalization Law, as well as HB 477 or the Rice Industry Development Act (RIDA) which will ensure the country's rice self-sufficiency.

Manila Standard

Date: 16 FEB 2020 Page: C1

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

PH CHOCOLATES TO BE FEATURED IN AMSTERDAM

THE Philippines prepares its award-winning chocolate makers and cacao producers for a country exhibit in the Cocoa Trade Show & Chocolate Festival, also known as CHOCOA, at the Beurs Van Berlage, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, on Feb. 19 to 23, 2020.

The FoodPhilippines delegation is set to showcase eight Philippine producers and manufacturers of chocolates and other value-added cacao products including local brands that have earned global recognition.

It will be led by the Department of the Trade and Industry, through the Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions, in partnership with the Philippine Trade and Investment Center in Brussels, Belgium, and the Rural Agro-Industrial Partnership for Inclusive Development Growth Project, funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

"The Philippine chocolate and value-added cacao products have been making waves in the international market for its distinct flavor profile and high-quality beans," said CITEM executive director Pauline Suaco-Juan. "We want to make a statement that the Philippines is ready to take on the global cacao demand by showcasing some of our top brands in Netherlands, the world's leading importer of cacao beans."

The five award-winning Philippine firms with their brands attending the event are Malagos Agri-Ventures Corp., Auro Chocolates/Filipinas Oro de Cacao, Theo and Philo Chocolate Factory Inc., MS3 Agri-Ventures Corp. and Kablon Farm Food Corp.

The FoodPhilippines Pavilion will also sample products from Tigre y Oliva Chocolates (Tiger Craft Food and Beverage Co.), another emerging chocolate brand in the country. Likewise, Biao Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative and Kennemer Foods International, Inc. are also looking to showcase their cacao beans and other value-added products.

Malagos Chocolates is one of the frontline brands of the Philippines in the international market. Launched in 2012, the brand has made a name with its line of single-origin 100 percent, 85 percent, 72 percent and 65 percent dark and drinking chocolates, earning multiple awards from the Academy of Chocolates, International Chocolate Awards and Great Taste, among others. Now, they offer chocolate beer and chocolate variants with truffles and tropical fruits.

The Puentespina Farm, where its beans are cultivated, earned its heirloom status from the Heirloom Cacao Preservation Fund in 2019 for growing one of only 16 Heirloom Cacaos in the world. In 2017, Malagos Chocolates' cacao bean made it to the list of the "Best 50 Beans in The World" under the Cocoa Excellence Programme.

THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Date: 16 FEB 2020 Page: E35

Students, learning and visits

This lesson was a strong reminder about considering operations and long-term maintenance before a design is chosen and actually built

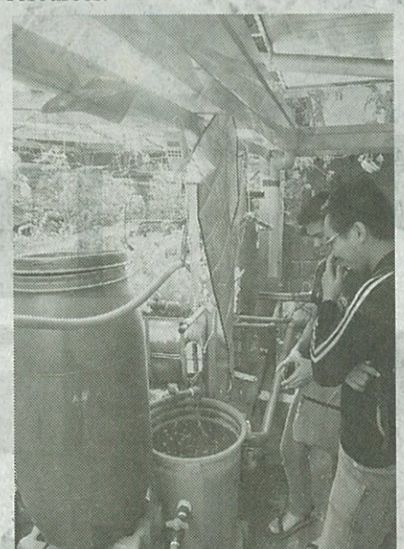
AgriFuture
Vincent Noel Aureus

Every now and then, the writer of this column receives messages from students asking if they can visit a backyard aquaponics farm. Their requests are accommodated – as much as possible – provided that schedule permits. The latest visitors were from Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP).

There were three of them, led by their team leader Joshua How. Interestingly, when asked if they're interest in aquaponics was for a school project, they replied both yes and no. Yes, it was for a project. No, it wasn't for school. And this got this writer curious since a lot of students tend to do work only because it is required for school.

As it turns out, the students were learning as much as they can about aquaponics because they were in the process of building a system for their church. They wanted to grow fresh and clean food for their community. Now that's definitely a worthy cause.

We then discussed design, construction, and operation problems that often come into play for first-timers. It was a fruitful exchange because key lessons were passed on as to how beginner mistakes can be avoided. For example, they thought about using concrete tanks but decided not to when – during the workshop they attended last 1 February – they found out that concrete tanks will likely have a substantial impact on the pH of the system. The advance information saved them from wasted time, effort and resources.



LEARNING the how to's Demonstrating how the re-mineralization tank works to the PUP students.

Next on their list was the utilization of media beds which has been more of the go-to design for backyard setups compared to Deep Water Culture (DWC) systems. The issue about media clogging fast, however, made them re-think the adoption of this design. To stress the point, this writer showed them a media bed full of pumice rocks that were already overwhelmed with solids buildup. There's a load bearing capacity limit that must be considered.

This lesson was a strong reminder about considering operations and long-term maintenance before a design is chosen and actually built.

How the re-mineralization tank works was also demonstrated. The aerators were turned off, solids were then allowed to settle at the bottom, the clearer water at the top portion of the tank was then drained, and that nutrient-rich water was introduced to the system. The radial flow filter was then partially drained (to refill the re-mineralization tank with solids-filled-water) and the aerators turned on again. This is how the minerals in fish waste are further biologically processed to make them available for plants to absorb.

Outside the four walls of a classroom With Joshua and his team posing for a photo.

Next in line was feeding the fish. Joshua and his friends were surprised to find out how big the fish actually were when the latter swam up to the water surface to eat the floating feeds. Stocking density, which means how much kilograms of fish per volume of water can stocked, was also reviewed. The list went on.

Before wrapping up, the wicking-bed portion of the backyard farm had sprawling stevia. This writer asked the students to taste the leaves. They were a bit hesitant at first but eventually agreed.

To their surprise, it was very sweet. They were then informed that stevia is often used as an alternative sweetener to replace regular sugar. Joshua and his friend responded that they will look into growing this plant because they had a lot of church members who were diabetic.

Thank yous were then exchanged and the students left, hopefully, better equipped as they start building their own system.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
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LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: B3

DOT positions Isabela as agro-ecotourism site

The Department of Tourism (DOT) is positioning the province of Isabela as a potential destination for agro-ecotourism, driven by its promising agriculture industry and diverse natural attractions.

"Your rich flora and fauna in the Sierra Madre Forest and Palanan rainforest, the Sta. Victoria Caves and long stretches of sandy beaches and coves in the Pacific Coast and not to mention the Philippine Rise for great dives, are exciting products that will draw the discerning eco-tourist interest," Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat said during the annual Bambanti festival in Isabella.

Puyat said Isabela could very well be a world-class agri-ecotourism destination with experiential tour packages in rice planting or harvesting, fruit picking, mushroom production, bee farming and fishing.

"The Bambanti is a truly unique festivity as symbolized by the scarecrow believed to dispel pestilence as well as celebrate the Filipino virtues of hard work, strong family values and love for its fertile soil which all helped Isabela become the Rice Granary of the North," Puyat said.

Puyat commended local tourism stakeholders, as well as the local government units, for their efforts sustainable tourism.

"To further foster sustainable and responsible tourism, the DOT has moved to capacitate the LGUs in developing their respective tourism development plans by conducting workshops and seminars on product development, accreditation, investment promotion, cultural heritage preservation and festival management," the agency said.

Meanwhile, Puyat reaffirmed the government's full support for its tourism infrastructure development through the convergence initiatives with the Department of Transportation and the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH).

Among convergence initiatives with DPWH in Ilagan City include the road to the Dairuk Hills in Santiago which will be completed this year at a cost of P55 million as well as roads leading to the Abuan-base River and the Japanese Tunnel.

"We forecast increased tourist arrivals in the area as we bank on the DOTr and the DPWH to fast track tourism-related projects, such as the night rating of the Cauayan and Tuguegarao airports and the completion of the Cagayan Airport," Puyat said.

Catherine Talavera

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: B3

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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Pilmico helps revive aquaculture in Capiz

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Roxas City councilor and presiding officer for agriculture and fisheries Moreno Gonzaga lauded Pilmico and its initiatives for helping the affected fish farmers.

Pilmico is the first feed company in Roxas City to give direct support to its aquaculture operators.

Through projects like Bangon Capiznon, Pilmico continues to advance business and communities, ensuring farmers are equipped with adequate solutions to grow and uplift their businesses.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
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LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Date: 16 FEB 2020 Page: 12

Valenzuela opens first fishing village

By MARC JAYSON CAYABYAB

A fishpen community was formally inaugurated as Valenzuela's first fishing village yesterday, offering a respite to the elderly and other enthusiasts to escape the city's bustle.

The city government yesterday inaugurated the P40 million development of Barangay Tagalag into the Tagalag Fishing Village, a breezy nook in the city where one can catch fish and enjoy the fresh air. The fishing village is bounded by the Polo and Coloong rivers in Valenzuela and the Meycauayan river in Bulacan.

The 101-hectare barangay has 22 fishponds and was declared a city ecotourism zone in 2016.

Its name was derived from the old Tagalog word "alog" which refers to the shallow part of a river that can be forded, according to Valenzuela local historian Jonathan Balsamo.

Migratory birds could be seen in the distance while fisherfolk and other fishing enthusiasts lean on the fence along the fishpen or sit under the shade of huts waiting for their catch to bite the bait on their fishing rods.

Mayor Rex Gatchalian said the fishing village was the city's "best kept secret" that he hoped to share with the rest of Metro Manila.

"There's a whole lot more to Valenzuela than our factories and warehouses. We have parks and open spaces, too," Gatchalian said.

The city developed the fishpen with a 1.3-kilometer boardwalk, light posts, and a fence adorned with statues of fish that can be caught there like *bangus*, *tilapia*, and *hito*.

Arnulfo Cruz, a fisherman in Navotas, said he hoped the Tagalag fishing village would not suffer the same fate as other fishpens in Malabon, such as the Dagat-Dagatan area where he used to catch fish as a young boy.

Dagat-Dagatan is now a residential area after it was reclaimed and converted as a resettlement area by former First Lady Imelda Marcos.

He said many fish ponds in Malabon have been converted into subdivisions.

"This hobby of ours allows us to bring home food that we can take pride of because we ourselves caught it. I can say proudly 'this was my catch, and it's delicious,'" Cruz said.

The development in the area drove up the prices of fish by P20 from the usual P100 per kilo of bangus and P80 per kilo of tilapia, fishing enthusiast Edwin Muli said.

The prices of fish were standardized in a public hearing with fishpond owners, said Balsamo, who also heads the Valenzuela city government's cultural and tourism development office.

Enthusiasts wait for fish to take the bait along the boardwalk of the Tagalag Fishing Village in Valenzuela City yesterday. Inset shows a man holding up his catch.
MARC JAYSON CAYABYAB

INQUIRER Bandera
BALITA • BUENAS • CHIKA

Date: FEB. 16, 2020 Page: 1,2

TACLOBAN CITY— Three provinces in Eastern Visayas have banned the entry of live hogs, pork, and pork-related products from areas where there are confirmed cases of the African swine fever (ASF).
>>PAGE 2

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

>>PAGE 1: LEYTE, SAMAR BAN PIGS FROM 'ASF' AREAS

The governors of Eastern Samar, Northern Samar, and Southern Leyte said they needed to impose a ban on live hogs, pork, and pork-related products coming from Mindanao, Luzon, and countries, where there are ASF cases, to protect their provinces from a disease that has affected the hog industry.

Governor Edwin Ongchuan of Northern Samar, in his Executive Order 01-02-20, said only pork and other pork-related products coming from Eastern Visayas would be allowed to enter his province.

Those delivering live hogs, pork, and pork products should also present documents like a meat inspection certificate from the National Meat Inspection Service and veterinary shipping permit, among others.

The total ban on pigs and pork products in Northern Samar started last February 6 and would be implemented for 150 days.

Eastern Samar Governor Ben Evardone ordered the creation of quarantine checkpoints in the towns of Lawaan, Guiuan, Oras, Taft, and Arteche, where the major entrance points to the province are located.

The checkpoints, he said, would be manned by personnel of the municipal agricultural services, police, and barangay tanods.

Southern Leyte Governor Damian Mercado also issued Executive Order Number 5 last Feb. 3 to extend to another 100 days the total ban on pork and other pork-related products coming from Mindanao and Luzon.

"To prevent the ASF from entering the province of Southern Leyte and to protect the local hog industry, there is an immediate need to extend the total ban on the transportation of pork and pork-related products from Luzon and Mindanao," Mercado said in his order.

"The entry of live hogs from Luzon and Mindanao into the province of Southern Leyte is hereby declared unlawful," the order added. — *Inquirer*