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THE PHILIPPINE STAR
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Coconut centers to be put up nationwide

The government is putting up coconut centers in 67 provinces to provide assistance to growers, the Department of Agriculture said.

The DA has signed an inter-agency memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the establishment of an agribusiness one-stop-shop called "Malasakit sa Magniniyog: Coco Center."

The agreement was signed by Agriculture Secretary William Dar and UCPB-CIFF Finance and Development Corp. (COCOFINANCE) and UCPB-CIFF Foundation Inc. president and chief executive officer Rehan Balt Lao.

It was also signed by the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA), United Coconut Planters Bank, Coconut Industry Investment Fund – Oil Mills Group, National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, Department of Trade and Industry, Land Bank of the Philippines, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp., Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office, Cooperative Development Authority, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Interior and Local Government, Department of Agrarian Reform, and the National Anti-Poverty Commission.

Under the MOU, a coco center will be established in the 67 coconut provinces of the country, starting with the Mindanao regions.

Lao said the company targets to finish at least 30 percent of coco center this year.

"The coco center will serve as a central location where assistance from partner agencies may be channeled to small coconut growers," the DA said.

It added the centers would also serve as a touchpoint for investors to directly link up with coco groups for the supply of finished products, raw materials and labor for coconut-related enterprises.

The DA said the ultimate goal of the cooperation is to uplift the living condition of small coconut farmers, particularly those who are considered among the poorest in the agricultural sector.

The agriculture secretary said the importance of institutionalizing farmers' cooperatives, stressing that it is time to elevate coconut farmers.

In addition, Dar said it is high time to professionalize farmers' cooperatives, which will not only focus on productivity, but will also carry out value-adding and marketing activities.

Data shows that Filipino coconut farmers produced 0.4 percent more last year at 14,779 metric tons (MT) compared to 2018's level of 14,726 MT.

— Catherine Talavera

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Brussels asks Manila anew to lift ban on pork imports

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas @jearcalas

BRUSSELS again appealed to Manila to lift the import ban it slapped on Belgian pork products, saying it has been able to contain the outbreaks of African swine fever (ASF) among wild boars in Belgium.

Belgian Ambassador to the Philippines Michel Goffin raised the matter with Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar during their recent meeting, according to a statement issued by the Department of Agriculture (DA).

"Ambassador Goffin [sought] for the lifting of the temporary ban on the importation of pigs and pork products from Belgium issued by the DA in 2018, as well as the accreditation of Belgian fruits," the DA said.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Livestock William C. Medrano committed to review the report submitted by Belgium to the department and cross-check it with the information from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

"We do not want it [Belgian import ban] to impede trade but food security is still our priority," said Dar.

Belgian live hogs and pork products are not allowed to enter the Philippines since October 2018, after Brussels confirmed ASF outbreaks in its wild boar population.

Brussels has been urging Manila to lift the blanket import ban, saying Belgian traders have been losing millions of euros due to the trade restriction.

Prior to the import ban, Belgium ships some 15,000 metric tons of pork products to the Philippines. The country's pork imports from Belgium in 2018 declined by 7.34 percent to 13,995.328 MT, from 15,103.634 MT recorded in 2017, Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) data showed.

"It is unfair to embargo the whole country when it was only a localized outbreak and has already been contained. It doesn't make any sense, and it is against the standards of the [OIE] and even against the spirit of the World Trade Organization," Goffin told the BusinessMirror in an interview in February 2019.

Last year, BAI told the BusinessMirror that it is being "prudent" when it imposed the blanket ban on Belgian pork products as ASF could cripple the P200-billion local hog industry.

In response to the appeal of Belgium, BAI Director Ronnie D. Domingo said the BAI would seek more information from Brussels on the actions it has undertaken to contain ASF, particularly measures to ensure the safety of the Belgian animal feeds. This is because ASF could thrive even in animal feeds and plants, he said.

"We want to be guaranteed by other countries that even the plants that grew within the area of the affected farms have been secured or cleared of ASF," Domingo told the BusinessMirror last year.

"We want Belgium to prove that the source of their feed ingredients is safe. It's true they have showed their laboratory results, biosecurity measures and control measures, [and they] are okay. But our other concerns include the handling of Belgium's animal feeds," he added.

Nonetheless, Dar and Goffin agreed to pursue better cooperation to support the livestock development of the Philippines, particularly in improving the country's cattle stocks through crossbreeding, according to the DA.

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DA sets long-term plan to control Panama disease on bananas

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is crafting a long-term program to effectively control (Panama disease), the fruit's major problem in the country.

DA Secretary William Dar said the disease is caused by the soil-borne fungus Fusarium oxysporum that enters the banana plant's roots and colonizes the xylem vessels, blocking the flow of water and nutrients which can cause the wilting and death of the crop.

"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.

The roadmap will be prepared by the High Value Crops Development Program, Agricultural Credit and Policy Council and the Bureau of Plant Industry in cooperation with Filipino banana expert Dr. Agustin Molina, formerly of the Bioversity International.

A stakeholders' meeting will be held to set up measures for stricter phytosanitary measures to manage, control and contain the disease.

Foot baths and tire dips will be set up in farms that are infested with the diseases.

A training program will also be conducted to inform farmers on plant health and the propagation of disease-resistant banana varieties.

Major problem. In 2015, about 15,000 hectares planted Cavendish banana were affected by Panama disease.

An international conference in October will gather global experts to discuss strategies to prevent and control the disease as well as resolve other problems caused by lack of viable lands, impact of climate change, shift in market conditions and emergence of new competitors.

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

Dar said fresh banana is still the country's major farm export.

He cited data from the Philippine Statistics Authority which showed exports of the fruit stood at $1.77 billion from January to November 2019 and $1.38 billion in 2018, making bananas the top farm export.

Preliminary data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, is estimating that Philippines' gross export of banana could have reached 3.95 million metric tons (MT) in 2019, roughly 20 percent of the entire banana exports globally which is expected at 20.08 million MT.

The country's full year 2019 production of bananas is expected to grow 16 percent from 2018's 3.39 million MT.

The Philippines is Asia's number one exporter of the fruit and second to Ecuador in the global scale.

3 firms keen on Malaya TPP

AT least three firms have expressed interest to participate in the third round of bidding for the privatization of the 650 megawatts Malaya thermal power plant (TPP) and its underlying land in Pililla, Rizal.

The Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp. (PSALM) said AC Energy, Inc., Panasia Energy Inc. and Denki Power sent representatives to the pre-bid conference that was held last Friday, February 14.

Deadline for the submission of documentary deliverables is on March 12.

Opening of bids is on April 15.

Last November, Malaya TPP's privatization failed for the second time as no bidder met the minimum bid price of P4,481,796,017.

PSALM is in talks with the Commission on Audit for the approval of a lower minimum bid price on the asset, slashing it by P400 million to P500 million which is the cost running the said facility.

COA has yet to approve the proposal.

In the last bidding, four pre-qualified bidders passed the initial stage: including Panasia Energy, Inc., Phinma Energy Corp, Hill Trench Power,Inc. and Therma Central Visayas Inc.

However, right before the deadline for submission of the financial bid, Fort Pilar Energy, Inc., Panasia Energy, Inc. and AC Energy sent letters to PSALM explaining that they cannot meet the minimum bid price.

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Anti-ASF campaign taps CDO cops

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY—The Department of Agriculture and Bureau of Animal Industry in Northern Mindanao hves tapped the Philippine National Police and the local government units to prevent the spread of the African swine fever in the region.

As of Friday, BAI said, it had held orientations about.ASF among PNP personnel and barangay officials in Cagayan de Oro and Bukidnon, said Jake Sepe, the agency's veterinary officer.

Sepe said Bukidnon had nine ASF checkpoints and while Cagayan de Oro had four.

Last month, Mindanao 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 had 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 on 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," Duterte said in his Administrative Order 22.

Bukidnon borders the Davao Region where the ASF outbreak was reported, particularly in Davao Occidental and Davao del Sur.

"We are prepared at our entry and exit points," Sepe said in a telephone interview.

Aside from the installation of foot baths at designated quarantine areas, Sepe said, they were also profiling cargo vehicles suspected of carrying livestock infected with ASF.

"We are closely monitoring vehicles, especially those coming from affected areas, and check those that are suspicious-looking, he said.

Carlota Madriaga, DA-10 technical director, said the region ranked as the third-highest producer of hogs in the country.

The Philippine Statistics Authority says Northern Mindanao produced 56.61 thousand metric tons of live hogs from October to December 2019.

To prevent the disease from spreading further, both the Bukidnon and Misamis Oriental provincial governments have declared a ban on pigs and pork products. **PNA**

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Govt confirms new ASF cases in report to OIE

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

THE Philippines has confirmed more outbreaks of African swine fever (ASF) in Luzon, including new cases in Malabon, Rizal, Isabela and Cavite, affecting over 17,00 hogs.

In a follow-up report to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) on February 13, Philippine Chief Veterinarian and Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) Director Ronnie D. Domingo confirmed there were 38 more ASF outbreaks in 11 provinces.

The report noted that 17,406 hogs in backyard farms were susceptible to ASF in Rizal, Pampanga, Malabon City, Cavite, Benguet, Kalinga, Nueva Ecija, Bataan, Pangasinan, Quezon and Isabela with at least 252 pigs already infected.

It also indicated that 105 hogs in the affected areas died from ASF, while the remaining 17,283 pigs were culled while five heads were slaughtered.

In its seventh follow-up report, Manila confirmed that the fatal disease has found its way into the province of Isabela where 18 hogs died.

The number of hogs susceptible to ASF, as reported by the Philippines to the OIE, rose to 204,889 heads. Authorities have culled 208,924 pigs to contain and control the spread of the virus.

Outbreaks in Quezon

THE government also confirmed that Quezon is no longer ASF-free, as 636 hogs in two municipalities in the province were susceptible to the fatal hog disease, of which 13 were already infected.

The ASF outbreaks were confirmed in Mulanay and San Narciso, Quezon, and that the virus struck mostly backyard farms, according to the report. It added that the susceptible hogs in the two municipalities have been culled.

The outbreaks in Quezon province started as early as January 15 and are still continuing, according to the report.

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ASF. . .

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The Philippine report also indicated that ASF outbreaks in Malabon City are continuing, with the latest outbreak occurring in backyard farms in Barangay Baritan.

Rizal's dilemma

THE Philippines told the OIE that there were new ASF outbreaks in Rizal province—considered the country's ground zero of the outbreaks. The new outbreaks started last month and are still ongoing.

Based on Domingo's report, about 1,501 hogs in backyard farms were susceptible to ASF in Binangonan, Antipolo and Angono, Rizal. Of the total figure, 18 pigs were infected by the disease. The government culled all 1,501 hogs.

The confirmation of new outbreaks in Rizal pushed back the province's timetable for regaining ASF-free status.

Under the government's ASF contingency plan, an area may be declared free from ASF if laboratory tests in the affected area yield negative results for three consecutive months.

In December, the Department of Agriculture noted that Rizal may be technically considered free from ASF after it has not detected the presence of the virus in the province since August 2019.

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Govt to develop feeds from sugarcane waste

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas @jearcalas

THE Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) said it is developing animal feeds and fuel briquettes using waste from sugarcane fields, a move that would help reduce the contribution of farms to global warming.

PhilMech said converting agricultural wastes from sugarcane fields, which are mostly comprised of leaves and stalks, into animal feeds and fuel briquettes would also allow planters to earn additional income.

"Based on research conducted by PhilMech, 1 hectare of land planted with sugarcane can produce 11 to 21 tons of agricultural wastes in the form of leaves and stalks. However, most of the agricultural wastes from sugarcane farms are either left to rot in the field or burned, which could contribute to global warming," it said.

PhilMech, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture, said one of the viable solutions they have initially identified is to convert the wastes into animal feeds and fuel briquettes.

"Hence, the study is being conducted to develop sugarcane crop waste-based silage and pelleted feeds for animal consumption, and an environment-friendly fuel briquette suitable for domestic cooking and industrial application," it said.

"PhilMech believes producing animal feeds and fuel briquettes from sugarcane farm wastes will also benefit the farmers themselves, as they could earn additional income from processing and selling those two products," it added.

PhilMech said it has already developed a forage chopper and feed pelletizer for the processing of sugarcane tops into animal feed. PhilMech added that proximate and nutritional analysis of the produced silage is being done to determine the best formulation out of the 13 formulations it has developed to date.

"In many rural areas in the Philippines, wood is still utilized as fuel for cooking which contributes to deforestation. But with products like briquettes, rural households need not rely on wood anymore for cooking," it said.

"Also, PhilMech is studying alternative or supplementary feeds for livestock, and sugarcane wastes could be a raw material for silage as feed for animals," it added.

Some 490,000 hectares of farmlands in the Philippines are planted with sugarcane, according to the latest estimates of the Sugar Regulatory Administration.

Based on PhilMech's estimates, the sugarcane farms leave about 4.5 million metric tons to nearly 8.6 MMT of agricultural wastes, according to the BusinessMirror's computations.

"Instead of throwing away or burning their farm wastes, sugarcane farmers could definitely earn from processing, and selling, animal feeds and fuel briquettes made from sugarcane wastes," said PhilMech Executive Director Baldwin G. Jallorina.

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Fake 'tahong' invades Bacoor mussel farms

By Jonathan L. Mayuga @jonlmayuga

IT looks like green mussel, locally known as *tahong*. It feeds like it, too. However, mussel growers said this invasive species is definitely not your favorite *tahong*, and it may soon be flooding the wet market as it continues to proliferate and invade mussel farms in various parts of the country.

***BAHONG*, which fishermen also call "fake tahong," dominate bamboo poles at green mussel farms in Bacoor City.**

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***BAHONG* (left) is smaller compared to the typical and marketable *tahong* (green mussel).** PHOTOS FROM PAMALAKAYA PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

Called as *bahong* in Bacoor, Cavite, this invasive species has put a stiff competition against the green mussel, which commands a higher price because of its taste.

Joel Falcis, a fisherman and green mussel grower based in Bacoor, said the fishermen noticed the occurrence of *bahong* more than a decade ago.

"In the last three years, we noticed that it has become massive. Now, we have almost nothing to harvest," he said in Filipino.

The spokesman of the Cavite Chapter of the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya), Falcis said *bahong* can easily be mistaken by has consumers for *tahong*.

"The only problem is that it has no commercial value," he said. "People won't buy them," he added.

Although it is smaller and darker than the green mussel, *bahong* is being sold in the market, but at a much lower price.

Falcis said the proliferation of *bahong* in Bacoor mussel farms has led the fishermen to conclude that despite the government's effort to rehabilitate Manila Bay, its water remains polluted, enough for a more sturdy filter-feeder to emerge and dominate their farms.

He also blamed the massive development activities in Manila Bay for the adverse impact on the coastal and marine ecosystem that has taken its toll on the livelihood of small fishermen.

Falcis said buildings and houses have come closer to the coastal area now because of land reclamation.

Road bridges like Cavitex R1 Extension also caused irreversible damage to breeding grounds of fish, and other seafood, resulting in fewer fishes to catch and fewer or no shellfish and crabs to gather by coastal communities.

Sought for expert opinion, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), through Ashley Salinas of the National Integrated Fisheries Technology Development Center (NIFTDC) based in

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Dagupan City, Pangasinan, said *bahong*, scientifically named Mytella *charruana* or charru mussel, originated in South America.

It has been observed in Philippine waters, most probably through shipping in 2012, particularly in Cavite, which, she said, "where major shipping activities happen."

Bahong has also started to invade the provinces of Pangasinan, Bulacan and Cagayan four years ago, she said.

This sturdy species is also found in parts of Colombia, South America, she said.

Since its appearance in Pangasinan, Salinas said the BFAR-NIFTDC conducted the first study to identify the species of this mussel, which was previously unknown to the country.

The study described the morphological characteristics of the mussel compared to the farmed green mussel, which is smaller in size, has a dark brown to a black outer shell and bluish to a purple interior shell.

Salinity tolerance experiments were made on charru mussel to determine at which salinity it could tolerate. The experiments revealed that it can withstand a wider range of salinity (5ppt to 30ppt) compared to green mussel which gives it the upper hand in the natural ecosystem.

"Charru dominated green mussels because it can tolerate a nearly freshwater up to saline water. Also, reviewing the surface salinity profiles of the municipalities affected by the invasion of these mussels, it turned out that the rainy months in which salinity level drops are also the time of the appearance of charru mussels," she said.

Meanwhile, Salimas said that during the hot season, where salinity become higher, charru mussel naturally dies and the green mussel resurfaces resulting in an alternate peak season.

Despite its different characteristics compared to green mussel, according to Salinas, charru mussels are edible and safe to eat, as long as it is thoroughly cooked and harvested from red tide, and heavy metals-free culture grounds.

In fact, she said this type of mussel is marketed in Pangasinan, but at a lower price than green mussels.

According to Salinas, exterminating the charru mussels in green mussel farms is next to impossible because it is an invasive species, or would not be a wise decision because of the costs, and time and effort involved.

"There is no single silver bullet that is 100 percent effective in killing any invasive mussel in all situations that won't harm other species, and keep our waters safe," she said.

"We have few methods of dealing with charru mussels, [such as] manual, chemical, biological, but these can either be uneconomical or hazardous to other species or the environment," she said.

Salinas added she has recommended to use these mussels and put them into good use instead of trying to exterminate them.

"For example, this mussel is also edible like the green ones, hence, it can be sold in various forms when marketed properly," she said.

Meanwhile, she said the smaller ones can be used as animal feed especially in poultry farms as its shell is a good source of calcium while its meat can be a good alternative source of protein.

"The green mussel was also once an invasive species to oyster growers in Cavite during the 1960s. But after learning to culture and market them alongside oysters, green mussels became one of the easily gathered and widely accepted seafood in the country," she noted.

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Lending funds available for SMEs, farmers, fisherfolk

SMALL and medium enterprises (SMEs), farmers and fisherfolks and their cooperatives and associations, can avail of agricultural lending program to increase their productivity.

The Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (ACEF) lending program is now accessible through state-owned Land Bank of the Philippines.

Eligible projects include purchase of farm input and equipment or farm improvement; acquisition/establishment of agri-based production and post-production and processing machineries, equipment and facilities; and relending to farmers and fisherfolk.

Loans are meant to augment conduit funds for relending to agrarian reform beneficiaries/small farm holders (ARBs/SFHs) to finance their livelihood and agri-enterprise projects; and boost conduit's funds for relending to member ARBs/SFHs to finance their house or office repairs.

Loan amounts for livelihood/agri-enterprise are up to P1 million per farmer/fisherfolk, while up to P5 million per project per borrower for farmer and fisherfolk cooperation/association.

These carry an interest rate of 6 percent per annum.

For production, forms of collateral include combination of Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation (PCIC) insurance and/or agricultural guarantee fund pool (AGFP) guarantee coverage if applicable, and assignment of expected produce.

In acquisition of fixed assets, these are any or combination of chattel mortgage on object of financing, assignment of expected produce, and PCIC insurance proceeds.

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Conversion of sugarcane waste into feeds, fuel planned

THE Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) is rolling out a project that will convert organic waste from sugarcane fields into animal feeds and fuel briquettes.

Based on the agency's research, one hectare of land planted to sugarcane can produce 11 to 21 tons of agricultural wastes in the form of leaves and stalks, most of which are either left to rot in the field or are burned.

PHilMech developed a forage chopper and feed pelletizer that will process sugarcane tops into animal feed. About 13 formulations have been developed in the production of sugarcane tops silage.

However, proximate and nutritional analysis of the produced silage is still being done to determine the best formulation.

PHilMech executive director Baldwin Jallorina said utilizing sugarcane waste could result in additional income for farmers and cooperatives.

"In many rural areas in the Philippines, wood is still utilized as fuel for cooking which contributes to deforestation but with products like briquettes, rural households need not rely on wood anymore for cooking. Also, PHilMech is studying alternative or supplementary feeds for livestock and sugarcane wastes could be a raw material for silage as feed for animals," said Jallorina

Industrial use. PhilMec is developing a technology that would process sugarcabe tops into anumal feeds.

Data from the Sugar Regulatory Administration showed crop year 2017-2018, the total area of land planted with sugar cane in the country is at 418,257 hectares.

PhilMech is the government agency assigned to take the lead for the country's agricultural and fishery mechanization programs by developing protocols and processes.

THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

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Loan funds for SME, farmers, fisherfolks

In acquisition of fixed assets, these are any or combination of chattel mortgage on object of financing, assignment of expected produce and PCIC insurance proceeds

Small and medium enterprises (SME)), farmers, fishers and their cooperatives and associations may now avail of an agricultural loan program to increase their productivity.

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In acquisition of fixed assets, these are any or combination of chattel mortgage on object of financing, assignment of expected produce and PCIC insurance proceeds.

Loan applicants should submit a business plan about their project containing market, technical, management, financial and environmental aspects. JV

The Manila Times

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ASF confirmed in Benguet, Kalinga

BY DEXTER SEE

BAGUIO CITY: The Cordillera office of the Department of Agriculture (DA-CAR) has confirmed the presence of the African swine fever (ASF) virus in Benguet and Kalinga, prompting local officials to issue a temporary ban on the entry of live pigs into the two provinces while appropriate steps are being taken to prevent the spread of the animal disease.

DA-CAR officials said ASF-infected pigs have been found in a commercial farm in Camp 1, Tuba and a backyard farm in Beckel, La Trinidad, both in Benguet, and in a backyard farm in Lubo, Tanudan, and a commercial piggery farm in San Julian, Tabuk City, both in Kalinga.

Some 189 pigs within the one-kilometer radius from the epicenter of the reported ASF cases in Beckel and another 35 pigs in Camp 1 had been culled as part of mitigating measures to arrest the spread of the virus.

More than 200 pigs within the one-kilometer radius in San Julian are expected to be depopulated.

No pigs in Tanudan have been found to be within the epicenter of the reported ASF cases in the area.

Benguet Gov. Melchor Diclas immediately issued an order imposing a temporary total ban on the entry of live pigs into the province to prevent the entry of ASF-infected pigs.

A surveillance conducted by the Agriculture department showed that the ASF cases in Beckel might have come from infected piglets that were purchased online by the owner from Pangasinan, which was earlier reported to have ASF cases, while the ASF cases in Camp 1 were supposedly caused by leftover food fed to the pigs in the commercial farm.

The ASF cases in Lubo and San Julian were said to have been the result of also feeding the pigs leftover food.

The DA-CAR officials advised piggery farm owners not to order their supply of piglets online, especially from areas with reported ASF cases, and not to feed their pigs with leftover food, which has been identified as one of the sources of the infection.

Owners of the pigs that had been depopulated within the one-kilometer radius from the epicenter of the reported ASF cases in Benguet and Kalinga will be provided with assistance under the agency's indemnification fund amounting to P5,000 per pig aged 29 days and above.

Earlier, the Agriculture department directed all government agencies and local government units to strictly implement and comply with the National Zoning and Movement Plan for African Swine Flu under a 2019 circular.

The ASF, despite having no known effect on humans, is a severe and highly contagious viral disease affecting domestic and wild pigs with a case-fatality rate approaching 10 percent and caused by a resistant virus with no developed cure to date.

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Research body: Turn farmers into agripreneurs

By Brenda Jocson

BAGUIO CITY—The government-hosted Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture has rallied government leaders and extension workers to transform farmers into agripreneurs during the recently held 33rd Anniversary celebration of the Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Training Institute-Cordillera Administrative Region.

Anchored on the theme "Vibrant Agriculture and Fishery Extension Towards Masaganang Ani at Mataas na Kita," Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, during the celebration, emphasized that SEARCA is working with partners such as the Agricultural Training Institute to make a difference in agriculture in Southeast Asia and the Philippines in particular.

"We don't just need a hero now, what we need are partners," Dr. Gregorio declared.

He talked about SEARCA's partnership with ATI-Cordillera Administrative Region in implementing the International Fund for Agricultural Development-funded project "Supporting Smallholder Farmers in Asia and the Pacific Region through Strengthened Rural Advisory Services" from June 2016 to February 2020.

He said the project aims to empower smallholder farmers through access to effective and demand-driven agricultural advisory services.

Manila Standard

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'Coco oil potential cure for Covid-19'

By Alena Mae S. Flores

CAN coconut oil help fight viruses including the dreaded novel cornonavirus or SARS-nCOV-2?

Coconut oil experts Dr. Mary Newport of Spring Hill Neonatology and Dr. Fabian Dayrit of Ateneo de Manila University believe so.

Newport and Dayrit have released a report on the potential of coconut oil in fighting viruses, and possibly SARS-nCOV-2.

"Given the considerable scientific evidence for the antiviral activity of coconut oil, lauric acid and its derivatives

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'Coco oil...

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and their general safety, and the absence of a cure for nCoV-2019, we urge that clinical studies be conducted among patients who have been infected with nCoV-2019," The Potential of Coconut Oil as an Effective and Safe Agent Against the Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) dated Jan. 31, 2020, says.

"This treatment is affordable and virtually risk-free, and the potential benefits are enormous."

According to the study, lauric acid (C12) and its derivative monolaurin have three significant and powerful antiviral activities.

Lauric acid dissolves the cell membrane of the virus, inhibits virus maturation and prevents it from spreading, and also prevents the virus from replicating.

"Three mechanisms have been proposed to explain the antiviral activity of lauric acid and monolaurin: first, they cause disintegration of the virus envelope; second, they can inhibit late maturation stage in the virus replicative cycle; and third, they can prevent the binding of viral proteins to the host cell membrane, the report says.

The antiviral properties of lauric acid, with its derivative monolaurin, have been recognized for many years. As lauric acid is ingested by the body, it turns it into monolaurin.

Lauric acid and monolaurin are known to have powerful antibacterial, antiviral and anti-pathogenic properties. Similarly, capric acid (C10) has also shown promising activity against other viruses.

The study says at least two fatty acids have antiviral properties: C10 and C12.

"Both C10 and C12 are present in Laurin® MCT, a patented formula that contains a 60% blend of capric and lauric acid. These valuable fatty acids give your immune system a broader spectrum of protection against bacteria and viruses, said Chemrez Technologies Inc. managing director Dean Lao Jr.

Lao says the proper way to take it is to start with one teaspoon a day and gradually increasing intake to one to three tablespoons a day.

"Laurin® MCT can be taken daily, on its own, or mixed with any food or drink, Lao said.

Laurin® MCT is Philippine-made and manufactured by Chemrez, a subsidiary of D&L Industries, Inc.

It is an all-natural, non-GMO and Food and Drug Administration-approved product found in Mercury Drug stores, Watsons branches and selected health and wellness shops.

Laurin® MCT is also available for purchase online through Shopee and Lazada.

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Davao mixed-use project to start with housing, UP graduate school

CONSTRUCTION will start this year for the initial residential units and the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) graduate school at the Agriya mixed-use complex of Damosa Land, Inc. (DLI) in Panabo City, Davao Del Norte.

DLI First Vice President Ricardo F. Lagdameo said the company has so far sold about 40% of the initial 177 lots for the residential component, which is expected to generate 70% of the project's total revenue.

Mr. Lagdameo, in an interview during the project's formal launch on Feb. 13, said the initial phase of the project is estimated to cost about P4 billion, but the total investment has yet to be determined for what the firm sees as a long-term development for the 88-hectare complex.

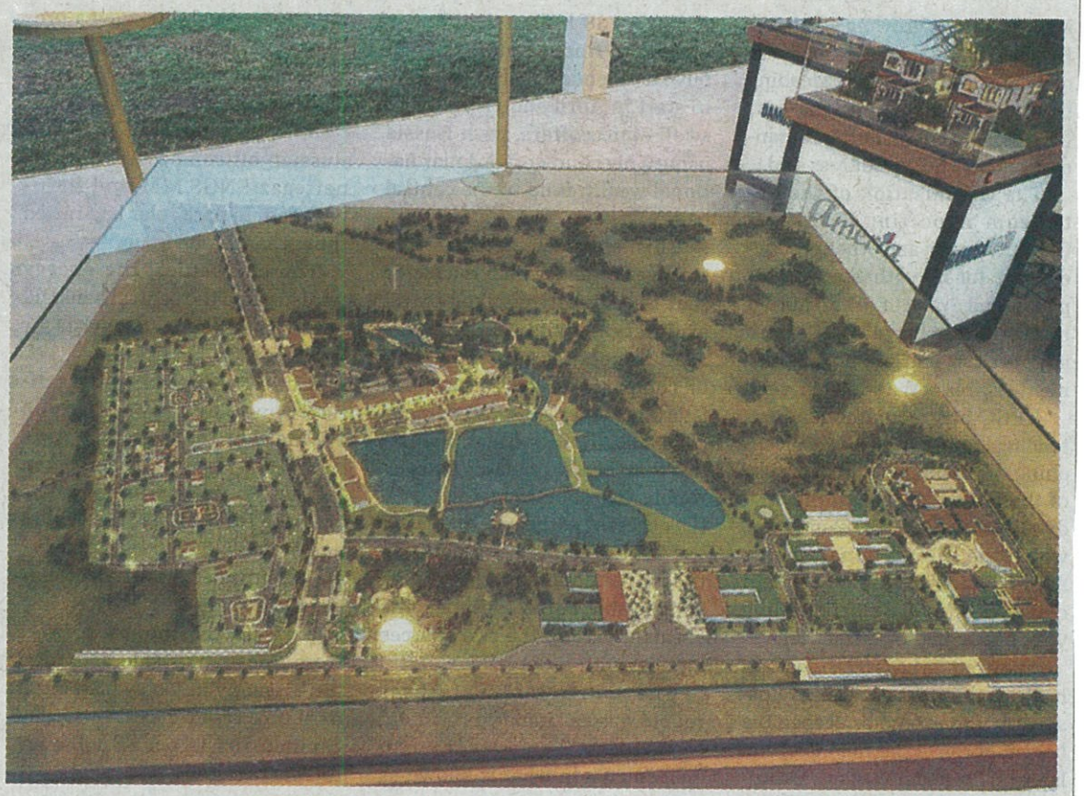
"It is really a long-gestation project," he said.

Agriya, conceptualized by architect Felino A. Palafox, Jr., is designed as an "agricultural metropolis" or agropolis, and the name is a play on "Agricultural City of Anflocor," the Floirendo family's holding firm that includes DLI and the flagship Tagum Agricultural Development Co., Inc.

Macy P. Bibat, project head, said the company will showcase the first model house by next month and start building before the end of the year.

"We are not really advocating that they (lot buyers) put up a big house on the lot," said Ms. Bibat, noting that the project promoters want to encourage backyard farming in keeping with the agropolis concept.

The lots range between 202 to 450 square meters priced at P6 million to P15 million.



DLI PHOTO

MODEL of the first phase of the Agriya "agricultural metropolis" project of Damosa Land, Inc.

Mr. Lagdameo said that when the company turns over the properties, it will be giving out seedlings to the owners to get them started on their own small farm.

For the university campus, Ms. Bibat said UPLB is scheduled to start with the first building by the second quarter this year.

The 1,500-square meter building will house classrooms and an auditorium, among other office components.

DLI donated three hectares for the UPLB extension unit, which will be focusing on graduate studies in agriculture.

Ms. Bibat said the state-run school will later set up greenhouses and laboratories.

Mr. Lagdameo said the firm is planning to invite other educational institutions to set up a campus for primary and secondary education.

"We also want to have here a K to 12 (kindergarten to grade 12) school."

Meanwhile, the company is also finalizing Agriya's Nature-tainment area, which will be open to visitors.

The agri-tourism area features a living crop and aquaculture farm where guests can learn how food is grown and have a better "appreciation of agriculture," Ms. Bibat said.

It will have a "pick-and-pay" section where children can harvest vegetables to bring home.

Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat, speaking at the project launch, said Naturetainement will be part of the campaign on agri-tourism, which is being promoted as a key segment for the tourism industry.

"It is a noble thing what you are doing here at Agriya, highlighting the merits and importance of agriculture," said Puyat.

— **Carmelito Q. Francisco**

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SPIKES OF EXTREME HEAT CONTRIBUTING TO MASSIVE DIE-OFF OF WILD BUMBLEBEES

SPIKES of extreme heat caused by warming temperatures are a critical factor in the widespread die-off of wild bumblebees, according to a study published last week in the *Science* journal—even beyond the effects of pesticides.

"We are not saying pesticides are not a factor," said Jeremy Kerr, a biologist at the University of Ottawa and the senior researcher on the study. "We are confirming positively that climate change is a factor."

Bumblebees are different from honeybees. The former is a wild species, while the latter is cultivated for agricultural production.

Both are imperiled, but in different ways. Some 50 percent of 49 native bumblebee species in the US are declining, according to Leif Richardson, an ecologist at the University of Vermont and a bumblebee expert who did not work on this paper.

Some species' populations, however, are growing. Wild bumblebees have been studied less than farm bees. The fate of honeybees is particularly well monitored by the government since they're credited with fertilizing roughly $15 billion worth of crops yearly in the US alone, according to the Department of Agriculture.

Honeybees have been dying off at an alarming rate. Beekeepers across the United States lost 40.7 percent of their honeybee colonies from April 2018 to April 2019, according to the latest annual nationwide survey conducted by the University of Maryland-led nonprofit Bee Informed Partnership.

Recent research has linked farm bee die-offs to insecticide use.

But for this paper, contributors Peter Soroye, Tim Newbold and Kerr, looked at wild bumblebees, which scientists note also perform critical pollinating functions.

To evaluate climate impacts on wild bee sites, they developed records of bee occupancy at 550,000 locations across North America and Western Europe of 66 bumblebee species. They used a baseline period of 1901 to 1974 and compared it to 2000 to 2014.

They found declines of 17 percent in Europe and 46 percent in North America.

Controlling for other factors, they concluded that "climate change has driven stronger and more widespread bumblebee declines than have been reported previously."

Richardson said the paper may actually underestimate the extent of the change.

"In the end," he said, "lack of data, particularly in Northern climes, only allowed them to consider a small percentage of land mass."

Kerr said that knowing about bumblebees' sensitivity to heat spikes is helpful prevent their decline. "Just like we would plant a shade tree to help protect humans from heat, we could manage habitat to shield bees from extremes."

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Bayer faces more Monsanto pain with $265-million dicamba award

BAYER AG's first United States trial over the dicamba herbicide resulted in a $265 million damage award to a Missouri farmer who blamed the company and its competitor BASF SE for destroying his peach orchards.

The jury verdict is the latest litigation hit for Bayer, which is also seeking to settle thousands of lawsuits claiming exposure to its Roundup weedkiller causes cancer. The German drug and chemical giant faces more than 140 lawsuits over allegations that dicamba wreaked havoc across the Midwestern US when it drifted onto crops that weren't engineered to resist the herbicide. Both dicamba and Roundup are produced by Monsanto, which Bayer acquired in 2018.

Adding to Bayer's legal woes in the US, it's set to go to trial in March in the first of thousands of lawsuits claiming it hid safety risks of its Essure birth-control device. It's also battling suits by numerous cities alleging that Monsanto contaminated waterways with toxic PCBs, a chemical compound widely used in industrial applications before it was banned in 1979 over environmental concerns. Bayer has denied wrongdoing over both of the weedkillers, as well as Essure and PCBs.

Saturday's decision by jurors to impose $250 million in punishment damages on Bayer and BASF on top of $15 million to compensate farmer Bill Bader for losses to his peach crops may encourage other commercial growers from Arkansas to Illinois to pursue trials rather than settle their claims over ruined crops, including corn, cotton and soybeans.

Bayer vowed to appeal, with US spokesman Chris Loder saying "the evidence presented at trial demonstrated that Monsanto's products were not responsible for the losses sought in this lawsuit."

Each of the three Roundup trials Bayer has lost so far—resulting in combined damages of $191 million after jury verdicts totaling more than $2.4 billion were reduced—has triggered thousands of additional claims from consumers. The court-appointed mediator overseeing settlement negotiations said in mid-January he was "cautiously optimistic" a comprehensive deal will be reached in about a month. Several trials have been put on hold as talks continue.

Monsanto has been fighting lawsuits since 2015 over its dicamba product, now called XtendiMax. BASF makes its own dicamba-based herbicide for use on its genetically modified seeds.

The companies say the crop damages stem from farmers applying the chemical incorrectly, and that dicamba's current formulations won't drift if proper procedures are followed.

In Bader's trial in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, the peach farmer said neighbors planted dicamba-resistant cotton engineered by Monsanto and sprayed it with the older, easy-drift version of the weedkiller made by BASF. The herbicide enveloped his peach orchards, curling leaves and killing trees.

He testified that he tried to get Monsanto to inspect his damaged trees, but was told by a company representative that it didn't have the manpower to make it out to his farm, about 180 miles (290 kilometers) south of St. Louis.

The companies' lawyers presented statistical evidence showing that Bader's peach yields had begun to fall prior to 2015. They cited weather events, such as hail storms and late freezes, as the cause for declining peach production.

Donna Jakubowski, a US-based spokesman for BASF, didn't respond to a phone calls seeking comment on the jury award. It's unclear how the award will be split between Bayer and BASF.

Bev Randles, one of Bader's lawyers, said the $265 million verdict sends a message to all US corporations.

"There is no giant too big," she said. "Everyone has to follow the law."

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Cocoa traders expect adverse weather to hit Ivorian sales

ABIDJAN/LONDON — Adverse weather and hoarding in Ivory Coast could see sales of the top cocoa producer's largest export fall some way short of consensus, which could push global prices higher, traders said.

Cocoa futures on ICE are near their highest in three years as overly dry, hot winds have damaged the crop outlook in Ivory Coast, which grows around 40% of the world's cocoa.

"Everyone knows the mid-crop this year is going to be a nightmare," a Swiss-based trader told Reuters. "The weather has been dry (and) people are not selling what they promised to sell because they're hoping for higher prices."

Nine Ivory Coast exporters and buyers said they expect port arrivals for the April to September mid-crop to reach just 350,000-400,000 tonnes. This compares with official data of 527,000 tonnes last mid-crop and is well short of forecasts.

"Mid-crop arrivals should be between 450,000-500,000, that is what people are expecting," Marex Spectron deputy head of agriculture Jonathan Parkman, who has been involved in cocoa for almost four decades, said.

Ivory Coast, along with its neighbour Ghana, has introduced a $400 a tonne living income differential or premium for its 2020/21 cocoa sales in a bid to guarantee higher prices for farmers and combat pervasive poverty. This has prompted local dealers waiting for next season's price hike to hoard stock and even default.

"We're not going to get any (supplies) in August and September, they're all going to hold onto their cocoa because they want to sell it next season," a France-based trader said.

Adverse weather is having an impact on the tail end of the October to March main crop, with Ivory Coast exporters and buyers now expecting port arrivals at 1.58 million tonnes from a previously forecast 1.69 million.

Last season's main crop was 1.652 mln tonnes, official data shows.

"Our counting teams have noted since January that production will be down compared to last season following the lack of rain," said an Ivory Coast-based director of a European export company.

If the main and mid-crop forecasts of Ivorian buyers and exporters prove true, total arrivals this season would come to 2 million tonnes maximum. Last season's arrivals totalled 2.18 million, according to official figures.

A Reuters poll last month forecast 2019/20 Ivorian output of 2.2 million tonnes, but locals are sceptical.

"I'm looking for 5,000 tonnes of (cocoa) before March but I don't think I'll (get) it. There is not much left," an Ivory Coast based exporter said. — ***Reuters***

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Malaysia denies withdrawing option to sue EU on palm oil

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysia has not retracted its option to file a World Trade Organization (WTO) suit against European Union (EU) restrictions on palm oil-based biofuel, the minister in charge of palm oil said.

Minister Teresa Kok said a Reuters report on Wednesday misquoted her as saying that Malaysia no longer plans to file the suit and will instead seek to convince the EU to change its treatment of the crop in a review scheduled for 2021.

"We continue to view the Delegated Regulation as a discredit to the Malaysian palm oil industry's commitment towards mandatory sustainability since it creates additional trade barriers and impedes our sustainability efforts throughout our palm oil supply chain," she said in a statement on Friday.

Kok said she had requested a review of the Delegated Regulation.

The review process is scheduled to take place soon and should be completed by June 2021, she said.

— ***Reuters***

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World's largest sugarcane plant mulls using corn to boost ethanol output

SAO PAULO — The world's largest plant to process sugarcane, Brazil's Sao Martinho mill in Pradopolis, Sao Paulo state, could add corn as a second source of raw material to be able to boost its ethanol production, the company that controls the plant said on Tuesday.

Several cane-based sugar and ethanol plants in Brazil are adding machinery to produce ethanol using corn as well, a model seen as profitable because plants use cane waste as an energy source to process the corn and expand production period to a full year, instead of just during the cane crop from April to December.

The company, named Sao Martinho after its main unit, said it is weighing the possibility of making the investment to process corn and boost ethanol production capacity in the huge Pradopolis installation.

"It is a project under evaluation. Logistics is an important issue, since we would have to bring corn from the center-west," said Felipe Vicchiato, Sao Martinho's chief financial officer, during a conference call with analysts and investors on Tuesday.

He said the size of the mill in Pradopolis could compensate for the logistic costs and make the project financially feasible, but a final decision has yet to be taken.

Brazil is witnessing a boom in corn-ethanol investment, but most projects take place in center-west states such as Mato Grosso and Goias, large corn producers.

Some analysts had suggested the possibility to produce corn-ethanol as well in Sao Paulo, Brazil's main sugar belt, since a lot of corn produced in Mato Grosso usually crosses the state on its way to the export port of Santos.

Sao Martinho is already building an attached installation to produce ethanol from corn at its Boa Vista mill, located in Quirinopolis, Goias state. — ***Reuters***

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Bunge profit tops estimates on strong South American results

CHICAGO – Agricultural commodities trader Bunge Ltd. reported a stronger-than-expected quarterly profit on Wednesday as rising crop prices boosted farmer sales in South America and swelled margins in its large agribusiness segment, sending shares up more than 3% in pre-market trading.

But uncertainty about global trade and demand for Bunge's food and feed products clouded the outlook for this year, with 2020 earnings per share seen about flat.

The company cautioned that agribusiness results could slip this year as margins shift depending on crop sizes, farmer sales and the implementation of an interim US-China trade deal.

Bunge and its agribusiness peers Archer Daniels Midland Co (ADM.N), Cargill Inc. and Louis Dreyfus Co. have been hit hard by a years-long crop supply glut followed by a tit-fot-tat tariff war between the United States and China that disrupted global trade flows.

The companies, known as the ABCDs of global grain trading, have also seen livestock feed demand dented by a deadly hog disease in China known as African swine fever, or ASF. The full impact of China's coronavirus outbreak on Bunge's business also remains unknown.

"We're still faced with uncertainty in 2020. We expect markets to remain volatile as long as US and China trade tensions and ASF continue to create uncertainty," Chief Executive Officer Gregory Heckman said on a call with analysts.

"It's too early to tell what, if any, impact the coronavirus situation will have on our markets or how developments in Argentina may affect the industry this year," he said, referring to changes in Argentine agricultural export tax policy.

Bunge's agribusiness segment, its largest in terms of revenues and volumes, gained in the fourth quarter on strong vegetable oil demand and good South American oilseed crushing margins.

Accelerated farmer crop sales in Argentina ahead of anticipated increases to export taxes boosted the grains unit, which reported positive adjusted earnings before interest and tax (EBIT) margins compared with a negative margin last year.

Adjusted EBIT for the agribusiness rose over three-fold to $177 million in the fourth quarter.

Bunge said net sales fell to $10.78 billion in the quarter ended Dec.31, from $11.54 billion a year earlier year.

Adjusted net income attributable to the company was $191 million, compared with $18 million a year earlier.

Excluding items, the company earned $1.27 per share, above analysts' average estimate of 32 cents per share, according to IBES data from Refinitiv. — ***Reuters***

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Worries over mad cow disease keep European Union cautious on food rules

BRUSSELS — The specter of the 1990s BSE crisis means the European Union is likely to reject US demands it ease strict food safety rules, even with President Donald Trump threatening car tariffs if EU countries do not start importing more US farm products.

With European food and farming exports to the United States worth up to $12 billion a year more than imports, US Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue told the EU last month it should adapt its food regulations to reflect "sound science."

But there seems little prospect Brussels will agree.

Europeans who remember BSE, nicknamed mad cow disease, will not accept any lowering of food standards and no politician could support a trade deal perceived as doing so, said Johan Bjerkem, trade specialist at the European Policy Centre.

"On top of that, you're negotiating with Trump, for whom not many Europeans have great sympathy," he said. "Combine these things and it will be very difficult to accept a deal on those issues."

Trump, who has long complained that the EU's position on trade is "worse than China," said on Monday he was training his sights on Europe, raising the prospect of a new trade war.

The EU bans imports of meat treated with growth hormones or poultry washed with peracetic acid, often dubbed 'chlorinated chicken.' Both are standard US farming practices.

Washington points to inconsistencies — EU salad leaves are regularly washed with chlorine — and says EU rules are a smokescreen for protectionism. They undoubtedly do benefit EU farmers.

Brussels' response is that antimicrobial poultry washes mask otherwise far less strict and hygienic standards.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has concluded that the various washes are not a safety concern, but do not replace the need for good hygienic practices during processing of poultry carcasses.

The agency's study of hormone-treated meat similarly does not conclude that it is unsafe, but says there is insufficient data to prove it is safe.

CAUTIOUS EU APPROACH

The distinction is important, highlighting the "precautionary principle" that guides EU food safety law.

"The US has strict liability for lawsuits, which we don't have so much in the EU ... Here, the sense is more wanting to minimize the risks," said Mute Schimpf, food specialist at Friends of the Earth Europe.

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), which passed to humans and resulted from cattle being fed the remains of other livestock, led to a worldwide ban on British beef exports and the culling of millions of animals. It and other food scandals, such as dioxin in feed in Belgium, led to the founding of EFSA in 2002 and inform its safety-first approach.

"It led to the introduction in Europe of the precautionary principle, the idea that if you're not certain, don't take unnecessary risks," said Erik Millstone, professor of science policy at the University of Sussex.

Instead of reporting to agriculture ministries or commissioners also concerned about the welfare of farmers and the food industry, food safety agencies became part of policy on health and consumer protection.

EU labeling laws also tightened at a similar time. In 2003, labels were required to show the presence of more than trace elements of genetically modified (GM) crops. The result was that, while millions of tonnes of GM animal feed are imported into Europe, there are no GM food items on sale to EU consumers.

The United States does not require labeling of GM food and some of its farming lobbies believe Europe is unfairly stigmatizing their products with labels.

The restrictions though are not only in Europe.

The United States bans cheese made with unpasturised milk unless it has been aged for 60 days, ruling out imports of French brie and camembert. Kinder Eggs, a chocolate encasing a plastic toy, are also banned.

A lot of standards essentially boil down to local customs and a suspicion of standards elsewhere, particularly practices promoted by big foreign business.

"We work on the principle that if we don't do it, it must be bad. Whether that is protectionist or not I leave for others to dwell on," said Hosuk Lee-Makayama, director of trade think tank ECIPE. — ***Reuters***