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PART 1 of 2

Another way of solving the pork price crisis

INTROSPECTIVE
RAMON L. CLARETE

The more the government invests in enforcing the official price, the more the price cap looks like a wrecking ball destroying our pork production and marketing capability, evaporating the pork supply further in the process. In the end we all get a triple whammy with a price control on pork: pork producers will quit the business, pork buyers will be hungry and angry, and the authorities will waste public resources in enforcing an order that is difficult to enforce.

Several national and local government agencies — the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Metro Manila Development Authority, and the National Capital Region mayors — recommended that President Rodrigo Duterte order that pork prices be held below P300 a kilogram. Last I heard from household pork buyers was that the going retail price was reaching P400 a kilogram, about a 77% jump over its 2019 level.

That move, if taken by the President, is not a good start in solving the pork price crisis. As with price controls in the past — not just here but in other countries as well, and not just on food items but on other necessities like housing and medicines — a price cap does not solve the problem of rising prices of pork. On the contrary, it will only worsen it.

By fixing the price at below its market level, the government in effect taxes producers, causing supply to contract further and feeding more fuel to the price spike. The problem calls for assisting producers to produce more in order to restore normal levels of supply, and relieve pork buyers of high prices. Telling hog producers to sell scarce pork at below market value kicks them out of the pork business instead, and blows away our prospects of quickly normalizing production.

Price capping will not even help pork consumers, particularly the poorer ones, that it is intended to assist. Price freezes, particularly on essential food items, tend to be difficult to enforce. The measure will just create a parallel or black market for pork, the price of which exceeds their official level. If water seeks its own level, prices of essential food items will likewise gravitate to their respective equilibrium levels as dictated by the law of their respective supplies and demands. People will have to consume pork, and those who can find supply and afford its price will buy it. Those who cannot switch to substitutes like chicken meat and vegetables, bringing up their prices.

In the past, whenever we had price fixes on food items, retailers in wet markets were selling price-controlled items at prices they thought made most sense. Buyers then just accepted them as their families needed to eat, trashing government orders of freezing those prices. Yes, there were a few buyers who, thinking that laws can moderate the working of the economic law of supply and demand, warned retailers against violating official prices or face the consequences of ignoring price controls. Retailers simply told them to buy their food from the Departments of Agriculture or Trade and Industry. No arrests were made.

I am not condoning those acts against the law of the land, but I would not be surprised if the law breaking would be repeated should there be price controls imposed on pork, chicken meat, and vegetables. If they need to enforce price control on food items, the authorities would need to spend on enforcement, arresting violators. But that is like arresting jaywalkers on a very busy street that is heavily congested. It can be done if authorities have more informers and enforcers in every wet market and retail store. But what will it accomplish? It will only destroy the retailing of food items, aggravating further the shortage and price spike.

The more the government invests in enforcing the official price, the more the price cap looks like a wrecking ball destroying our pork production and marketing capability, evaporating the pork supply further in the process. In the end we all get a triple whammy with a price control on pork: pork producers will quit the business, pork buyers will be hungry and angry, and the authorities will waste public resources in enforcing an order that is difficult to enforce.

ADDRESSING THE SHORTAGE

The current pork price crisis stems from a sharp reduction of pork production starting about two years ago. As the Table accompanying this column shows, the country then produced about 1.625 million tons of pork. A year later, output nosedived to 1.608 million tons of pork. Which was not that bad and may have passed

TABLE 1.

Apparent Supply and Use Table for Pork, Philippines, 2008 to 2020

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Pork production ('000 t cwe)	1,299	1,314	1,329	1,358	1,382	1,409	1,423	1,484	1,562	1,586	1,624	1,608	1,331
Net pork imports ('000 t cwe)	91	120	173	157	147	184	224	201	221	274	329	257	152
Apparent pork consumption ('000 t cwe)	1,390	1,434	1,502	1,516	1,528	1,592	1,647	1,685	1,783	1,860	1,953	1,865	1,483
Population (mln persons)	89	91	93	94	97	98	100	102	103	105	107	108	110
Per capita apparent consumption (kilos)	15.5	15.8	16.2	16.1	15.8	16.2	16.5	16.6	17.3	17.7	18.3	17.3	13.5

SOURCE OF DATA: GIRA COMPILATIONS

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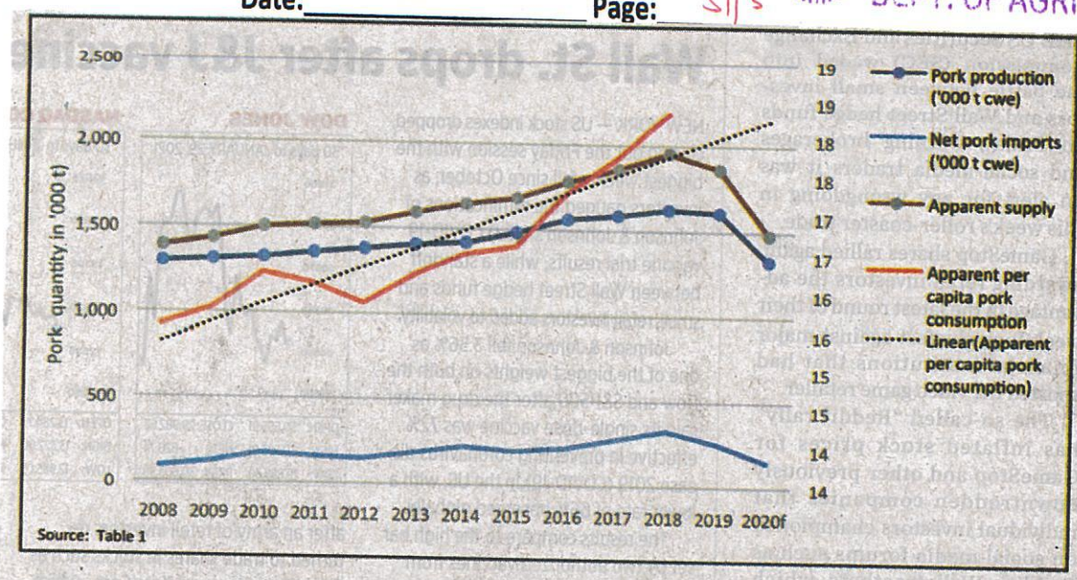

Source: Table 1

as one of those fluctuations we expect in agricultural production. But the fall persisted last year when output hit 1.331 million tons, a fall of about 17.23%.

We of course know that that is because of the African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreak. The spread of ASF to all the major island groups of the country is unfortunate, and is a testament to the weakened capability of our authorities in protecting our country from such destructive and contagious disease affecting our hog population. Let that be for now as I focus on alternative approaches to solving the pork price crisis.

Using data from the Table, the apparent per capita consumption from 2008 to 2018 is illustrated in the Figure accompanying this piece.

If there was no new supply of pork available in the market, per capita consumption would have fallen to 17.3 kilograms in 2019 and 13.5 kilos in 2020. That would certainly induce a lot of instability in our country considering that pork is a staple meat of our people.

Suppose we get the linear time trend of average pork consumption from 2008 to 2018, and project what their values may be in 2019 and 2020. Based on the linear equation defining the time trend, the country's per capita consumption in 2019 and 2020 would be 18.001 and 18.243 kilos, respectively. Multiplying these numbers by the country's population in these years, the demand for pork would be 1.946 million tons and 1.999 in 2019 and 2020 respectively.

Comparing these numbers with the apparent supply (local output and net imports), we have a shortage of 81,000 tons in 2019 and 516,000 tons in 2020. Those numbers may explain why pork prices have been spiraling. No price ceiling can remedy this problem. This problem has to be addressed with additional supply. Since local output cannot immediately expand because of ASF, we have to tap the rest of the world for additional pork.

The Department of Agriculture is aware of this solution and proposes to implement it with an expansion of the minimum access volume (MAV). This is the amount of pork our laws allow to be imported at a lower tariff of 30%. It is not really that low, but it is at least lower than the tariff on pork importation allowed without any volume constraints. The tariff on those imports is 40%.

Expanding the minimum access volume can help. But if the agriculture department expands the MAV by about 100,000 metric tons, the country will still have a deficit of about 400,000 metric tons. Pork prices will still go up, which in turn will put pressure on authorities to resort to an unenforceable price freeze.

Pork prices, even under this scenario, will still be at least 30% above world prices. That will not give consumers and processors enough relief. MAV may just moderate the price increases.

Why don't we get rid of the MAV system and bring tariff rates down to 5%? The problem with the MAV is its archaic allocation system. Most of it is allocated to existing players, some of whom, like producers and existing large traders, have a conflict of interest in importing pork. How fast can they bring in imports when it is in their interest to slow down the flow of imports to increase their profits? A better approach is to let market competition decide on a better equilibrium price. Let us open up the import market some more and predictably, and bring down pork prices quickly like what we did with the rice price increase in 2019.

What about our hog producers? Producers will adjust to the new price structure. This can be an opportunity for them to become more competitive as they produce local pork at near world prices. Look at rice tariffication — there were those who said rice farmers would reduce rice output. So far, that seems to have not materialized. This year, despite the bad typhoons we had seen at the tail end of 2020, Agriculture Secretary William Dar announced that the country has a very good rice output. And rice imports, which spiked in 2019, started to moderate and adjust to the new equilibrium. ■

RAMON L. CLARETE is a professor at the University of the Philippines School of Economics.

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A deeper look at today's issues
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'Tariff cut to expand PHL sources of rice imports'

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
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THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has filed a petition with the Tariff Commission to lower the most favored nation (MFN) tariff on rice imports to 35 percent.

The move is aimed at expanding the options of traders for sources of rice imports, according to Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar, who kept his response short when asked about the petition.

At present, the in-quota tariff for rice imports or those within the minimum access volume (MAV) is at 40 percent while those outside the MAV (out-quota) are at 50 percent.

"More sources," Dar said in an SMS response to the BusinessMirror last Thursday when asked about the Cabinet-level Committee on Tariff and Related Matters' (CTRM) endorsement of a petition to reduce pork and rice tariffs.

The Tariff Commission is set to conduct a hearing on the DA's petition this Thursday.

However, the DA's proposal to reduce tariffs did not sit well with industry groups, as they claimed there was no industry consultation conducted prior to submitting the petition.

In a statement, the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) said the DA's proposal to reduce tariffs on rice from non-Asean countries is "unwarranted and ill-timed."

FFF said that there is no need to reduce tariffs for rice imports outside of Asean since the country has ample supply as repeatedly pronounced by Dar.

The group added that data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that both well-milled rice (WMR) and regular-milled rice (RMR) prices are even lower than their 2019 levels.

"From July 2020, prices had shown a continuous downtrend and reached their lowest level of P40.75 per kilo for WMR and P36.09 per kilo for RMR in December 2020," it said.

"The local price declines occurred despite the increase in international prices of rice, particularly those coming from Vietnam and Thailand."

FFF National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor said imports from countries like India and Pakistan, which will benefit from the lower applied MFN rates, "are still cheaper than comparable products from Asean countries like Vietnam and Thailand even if they are assessed a higher 50-percent tariff. "

Montemayor added that the savings from lower tariffs on rice imported outside of Asean would be passed on to consumers.

"This sudden proposal of the DA is totally unjustified. It is a stab in the back of our rice farmers, who are still reeling from the drastic fall in farm-gate prices caused by excessive imports in the last two years following the enactment of the Rice [Trade Liberalization] Law," he said.

"Why encourage more and cheaper imports now when local supply is more than enough, and prices are very stable?"

Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. President Danilo V. Fausto said lowering the tariffs on rice imports outside of Asean would pose competition to local producers who are adjusting to a new trade regime.

Fausto argued that it will also cut the government's revenues from rice tariffs, which are being earmarked for productivity support programs for the rice sector.

"We have record production of crops, of palay. We have to sustain that. Pursuing this proposal would discourage farmers to [plant]," he told the BusinessMirror.

Unmilled rice output last year rose to an unprecedented 19.294 million metric tons volume, slightly eclipsing the previous record of 19.28 MMT in 2017.

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A broader look at today's business

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DAR, DA form team to identify govt lands for CARP coverage

By Jonathan L. Mayuga
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THE Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) have agreed to form a joint validation team to identify government lands that may be covered by the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

The DAR led by Secretary John R. Castriciones and the DA led by Secretary William D. Dar reached an agreement during a meeting last January 28 that only idle government-owned lands should be covered by the second phase of CARP or the Duterte administration's agrarian reform program.

The two officials also decided to work hand-in-hand in pursuit of the country's food security program.

The formation of the joint validation team came after Dar suggested that all government-owned lands be verified and validated first before deciding whether or not these should be placed under CARP coverage as provided for under Executive Order (EO) 75.

Under the law, DAR is authorized to place under the CARP coverage all idle government-owned land for distribution to landless farmers.

Castriciones then proposed the formation of a joint validation team between the DAR and the DA, to which his counterpart agreed to ensure that no government-owned farmlands that are being used in pursuit of the country's food security program would be compromised.

Dar said there are lands owned by the DA that are being used as "farm laboratories" even as he raised concerns that these may be inadvertently placed under the CARP coverage during its implementation.

Signed by President Duterte on February 15, 2019, EO 75 continues to face resistance from some government agencies.

While the order directs all departments, bureaus, offices, and instrumentalities of government to identify lands owned by the government devoted to, or suitable for agriculture, for distribution to qualified beneficiaries, government agencies are giving DAR the runaround in submitting a list of potential CARPable land under their jurisdiction.

During an online news conference in September last year, citing DAR's own inventory, Castriciones said there are 217,120.98 hectares of government-owned land that can be covered by EO 75.

However, only Technical Education and Skills Development Authority had executed a Deed of Transfer to over 289 hectares of government lands in Davao de Oro in favor of the DAR.

Also in September last year, the Cagayan State University has donated 622 hectares of agricultural lands for distribution to landless farmers.

Castriciones, during the said press conference, said "other agencies of the government are not cooperative but the department is exerting all efforts, including legal confrontation to cover these government-owned lands."

Manila Standard

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Team formed to validate CARP lands

By Rio N. Araja

THE Department of Agrarian Reform and Department of Agriculture have partnered to form a joint validation team to ensure that the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program covers only "idle" government-owned agricultural lands.

Agrarian Reform Secretary John Castriciones and Agriculture Secretary William Dar decided to work hand-in-hand in pursuit of the country's food security program.

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The Manila Times

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Towns, cities to produce own food – Dar

BY EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

AGRICULTURE Secretary William Dar has urged towns and cities in the country to come up with their own produce, citing the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic.

Dar on Saturday directed all regional field offices (RFOs), bureaus and attached agencies and corporations of the Department of Agriculture (DA) to "adopt a town or city" within their respective areas as part of the government's Plant, Plant, Plant program to increase crop production and help stabilize supply and prices of vegetables and other farm commodities.

"The ongoing pandemic has highlighted the need for each town and city in the country to be able to produce or at least a portion of its own food requirement," he said in a statement.

Called "Sa palay at gulay May ani, hanapbuhay, oportunidad at nutrisyon" or Pag-Ahon, the project aims to enhance household food security through vegetable production after the rice harvest season in idle lands and backyards.

Dar noted the success of a pioneering rice-vegetable production and marketing project in Lupao, Nueva Ecija.

"Through this initiative, farm households will not only produce food within their reach, but also have additional [sources] of income. And we want the 'One-DA' family to stand by their side in this worthy and sustainable venture," he said.

The Lupao project was initiated in May 2020 by the DA's Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) under executive director John de Leon in partnership with the municipal government, headed by Mayor Alex Rommel, Lupao Vegetable Growers Association, East-West Seed Co. and Dizon Farms.

In a report to Dar, team leader Dr. Roel Suralta of DA-PhilRice said the participating farmers were able to earn an additional income of at least P10,400 monthly from pechay and mustard.

The Lupao Pag-Ahon project team trained 50 farmers and 100 household members from 22 *barangay* (villages), planting a total of 6.25 hectares to assorted vegetables.

The Lupao farmer-participants started harvesting their vegetable produce in September 2020, delivering and selling these to Dizon Farms, their marketing arm.

Dar challenged the association to make it sustainable and venture into processing.

Dizon Farms has provided a reefer van and has trained farmers on post-harvest handling practices to improve the quality of their products.

Suralta said the Pag-Ahon project's marketing partner, Dizon Farms, has ensured that the harvested vegetables are readily sold to consumers and that quality is maintained with the assistance of another project partner, East-West Seed Co.

"Market is a key component in this project. Otherwise, it won't be profitable and sustainable. Project beneficiaries do not have to transport their crops to the market. It is the market that [goes] to them," he added.

In addition to PhilRice, two other DA agencies, based in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, have each adopted a town upon DAR's instructions during the Pag-Ahon harvest festival in Lupao last year.

The DA-Philippine Carabao Center adopted San Jose City and the DA-Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization, the Science City of Muñoz.

"We now have good examples that each DA-RFO, bureau, attached agency and corporation can follow suit and, in the process, enable small farm families earn additional incomes from vegetable raising as well as ensure household food security," Dar said.

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High food prices

I reached out to Agriculture Secretary William Dar last week to ask what was going on with food prices. My wife was complaining about the high cost of everything from meat to vegetables and fish.

I am trying to eat more vegetables but apparently, the prices of vegetables are also sky high. The typhoons were months ago and it shouldn't be a logistical problem to bring veggies to Metro Manila.

Secretary Dar responded on Messenger within minutes. He said: "The highland vegetables are more than enough while the supplies on *pinakbet* vegetables are tight because of the typhoons in November. We hope that by the middle of February supplies will be much more. We are also mobilizing supplies from areas not affected by the typhoons.

DEMAND AND SUPPLY

BOO CHANCO

"Chicken we have enough supply. For pork, the supply is too tight due to African swine fever or ASF. We are also mobilizing from green zones from Mindanao and Visayas. We are encouraging pork imports."

I asked a friend who had a modest sized piggery in Lipa. He confirmed the sad state of the local piggery business.

"About 45 percent of hog farms big and small are gone due to ASF. If price control is slapped there will be additional closures.

"To transport 30 hogs for market you must have them tested at a price of about P21,000 from a private laboratory.

"LGUs, on the other hand, don't have funds for disposal of infected hogs. If they spot a truck with suspected ASF hogs they simply turn them away instead of doing on the spot disposal. So *kakalat*.

"Dar, as good as he is, can't solve this because it is literally the equivalent of COVID-19 for animals except that with ASF they all die.

"I lost 80 pigs in December and we have quit the hobby. I'm now concentrating on raising *sabong* roosters to sell!

"We buried the final batch of 31 pigs on Dec. 31, 2020! The source of infection is untraceable. I have a relatively high level of bio security and daily disinfection.

"Cost of quality feeds high, plus bio security, plus required testing *tapos* price control sure recipe that another 10 percent minimum will quit this year."

How do we revive the pig industry? Is there something like crop insurance to cover disasters like this?

I am told commercial farms don't get any compensation for their loss. The small farmers who get P5,000 per head will be waiting for many months before they get any money to start up. And because each claim is limited to 20 pigs at a time, claims must be filed under different names.

I asked him how much he lost. It hurts to recall. Just calculate on the basis of marketable pigs at 80 to 90 kilos selling for P190 per kilo as per DA even as the average farm gate price is now reported at P250 per kilo.

"A breeder sow would have a value of about P30,000 each. I lost 11 excluding the fatteners and piglets. Just close the chapter and now enjoy chasing after chickens for breeding!"

That's one man's story whose piggery was more of a hobby, an expensive and tearful one, it turns out. No more crispy *pata* for a long while.

As for poultry, the situation also doesn't look good. Even big poultry raisers are closing down because buyers like Jollibee have cut down on purchases.

Until the latter part of 2020, the poultry industry claims it had already lost P95 billion due to subsidized chicken imports, while domestic poultry feed sales lost another P14 billion.

What bothers me, good as Sec. Dar is, we are not being told what to expect in terms of government actions beyond price control.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) asked President Duterte to impose a price ceiling of P270 to P300 a kilo of pork which now sells as much as P400 a kilo. Price control is like repealing the law of supply and demand. It won't work. There is some profiteering by middlemen but the main problem is real lack of supply.

Sen. Ralph Recto is right: "First, focus on food. If the GDP report card is bad, the GNP – the number of *Gutom na Pilipino* – is worse. There should be a review of the farm-to-table chain. Every step, and not just focus on the narrative *na 'kasalanan ng* middleman.'

"Many of the problems are upstream – production for one, and not just on overpricing. When traders are paraded as the usual suspects, we may not be able to find the real solution. The green shoots of economic recovery must be seen in our farms.

"*Mahalaga ang pagkain*, because Filipino families on the average spend 43 percent of their income on food. But the bottom 30 percent, or about 7.42 million families, allot almost 60 percent of their income on food. If the daily minimum wage won't be enough to buy a pot of chicken *tinola*, then hunger becomes COVID's deadliest side effect."

Here in the city, workers who earn P500-P537 a day won't be able to put enough food on the table for their families given the high cost of everything from veggies to meat to fish. More hungry stomachs will make the political pot boil dangerously.

In its Jan. 18 *Bantay Presyo* monitoring two days ago, the DA reported the prevailing prices of the following items per kilo: regular milled rice, P38; *galunggong*, P280; dressed chicken, P180; *liempo*, P450; *talong*, P200; *repolyo*, P230; and *siling labuyo*, P1,000.

Household consumption remains key to the growth rebound. With food prices at current high levels, families will cut consumption of everything else… there goes a consumption driven growth for other domestic businesses.

Involuntary hunger or hunger due to lack of food reached a new record-high of 30.7 percent, or an estimated 7.6 million households in a recent SWS survey. That is almost one in every three Filipinos.

I am amazed there isn't more buzz about this food cost problem. It could blow up in our faces.

Boo Chanco's e-mail address is *bchanco@gmail.com*. Follow him on Twitter *@boochanco*

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'Pork holiday' urged amid soaring prices

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

Consumer advocacy group Laban Konsyumer Inc. (LKI) is calling on the public to do a "pork holiday" amid the continued increase in the prices of pork products.

LKI said consumers are carrying the burden of high prices of pork and even chicken, amid the tug of war among the Department of Agriculture, local hog raisers, importers and market vendors.

"There are competing positions at the moment. Everyone has its own story. You do not know which is which. And yet, consumers continue to bear the brunt of high prices," LKI president Vic Dimagiba said.

"Consumers must exercise their right of choice. Let's stop buying meat products. Let's have a pork holiday until the market price behaves," he said.

Latest market monitoring showed that the price of pork ham or *kasim* range from P370 to P400 per kilo while pork belly or *liempo* is now at P400 to P440 a kilo.

The high prices of pork is still an effect tight supply due to rising cases of ASF, as well as the lowering down of investments of commercial raisers amid fears of getting infected with the hog disease.

LKI said that stakeholders have conflicting claims on the current price and supply mess in the market.

The DA has been blaming traders and wholesalers for price manipulation, while local hog raisers are calling for the resignation of Agriculture Secretary William Dar for his alleged incompetence.

On the other hand, importers are asking the government for lower tariffs and more volume while vendors are complaining of high prices from traders.

In the end, consumers suffer and are faced with sky high prices of pork at a time when costs of other food items are also increasing.

"In the meantime, third party independent government agencies should take it upon themselves to probe price collusion if any and file charges to anyone who slept on their job, those who take advantage at the expense of the other stakeholders and more importantly, the consumers," Dimagiba said.

Meanwhile, the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) slammed anew the government's move to impose a price cap on pork and its proposal to bring down tariffs on imported meat.

Data from the Bureau of Customs showed that at 40 percent tariff, imported prime cuts of pork has a landed cost of only P118.

Including other costs like delivery to both cold storage and retail outlets as well storage cost, importers would only shoulder around P153 per kilo.

And yet retail prices are at a high of P440 per kilo, which means importers are earning as much as P287 per kilo.

"And now importers are demanding to reduce the tariff? What treachery for the DA to even support this call," Sinag chairman Rosendo So said.

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Cut on rice tariff 'ill-timed' – farmers

By MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR

The recent recommendation of the Department of Agriculture (DA) to temporarily reduce tariffs on rice imports was described as "unwarranted and ill-timed" by a group of farmers.

Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) National Manager Raul Montemayor is questioning the basis for the DA's petition, given that DA Secretary William Dar had repeatedly said the country will have enough local rice production following a record harvest in 2020 despite the series of typhoons and calamities.

"This sudden proposal of the DA is totally unjustified. It is a stab in the back of our rice farmers, who are still reeling from the drastic fall in farmgate prices caused by excessive imports in the last two years following the enactment of the Rice Tariffication Law. Why encourage more and cheaper imports now when local supply is more than enough, and prices are very stable?" Montemayor further said.

The farmers noted that the DA even suspended the issuance of import clearances late last year to ease the glut in supplies after a surge in imports in the middle of the year.

To recall, last January 28, the DA asked the Tariff Commission to reduce tariffs on rice imported from non-ASEAN countries to only 35 percent from the current 50 percent.

The Tariff Commission will conduct a hearing on February 4 to discuss the proposal.

Meanwhile, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) show that average retail prices for both well-milled rice (WMR) and regular-milled rice (RMR) in 2020 were 2.5 percent lower than 2019 levels.

From July 2020, prices had shown a continuous downtrend and reached their lowest level of ₱40.75 per kilo for WMR and ₱36.09 per kilo for RMR in December 2020.

Balita

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Presyo ng baboy, bumaba na -- DA

Bumaba na ang presyo ng karneng baboy sa kabila ng kakapusan ng supply nito.

Ito ang inihayag ni Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary William Dar at sinabing hindi na umano tataas pa ang presyo ng nasabing produkto.

Ibinatay aniya nila ang presyo sa isinagawang pagbabantay ng ahensya sa mga pangunahing pamilihan sa Metro Manila.

Sa ngayon aniya, naglalaro mula P330.00 hanggang P350.00 ang presyo ng kada kilo ng baboy mula dating P400 bawat kilo nito.

Aminado ang opisyal na tumaas ang presyo nito sa Luzon bunsod na rin ng malawakang epekto ng African Swine Fever (ASF).

Aniya, nakipag-ugnayan na ang ahensya sa Department of Transportation (DoTr) at Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) para sa shipping lines para sa libreng pagbiyahe ng mga produktong karne.

Sa usapin ng ASF, bibili na umano ang DA ng rapid test kits para sa ASF at ibibigay ito sa mga local government unit (LGU) upang mapaigting ang pagbabantay nila kontra ASF.

Jun Fabon

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LGUs ordered to conform to gov't policy on hog movements

THE Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) has directed local government units (LGUs) to align their executive orders (EOs) with National Government policy in restricting the movement of live hogs.

The department is monitoring issuances of LGUs in limiting the entry of hogs and pork products to prevent the spread of the African Swine Fever (ASF), because of the potential for inconsistent local policies to delay the flow of goods, Undersecretary Jonathan E. Malaya said.

"Although the conscientious efforts of LGUs to mitigate the spread of the ASF in their respective jurisdictions are needed, they still have to ensure that their local policies and directives are aligned and consistent with those of the National Government," he said in a statement Sunday.

BW FILE PHOTO

PORK PRICES are rising because of the large-scale cull of hogs on Luzon, forcing markets in Metro Manila to import their meat from more distant islands.

Pork prices are rising because of the large-scale cull of hogs on Luzon, forcing markets in Metro Manila to import their meat from more distant islands, in the process incurring higher transportation costs.

Last week, the Department of Agriculture confirmed the detection of ASF in Dulag, Leyte after the first case in the province was reported in Abuyog, further south on the Leyte Gulf coast, on Jan. 14.

The DILG, through Memorandum Circular No. 2021-00, asked LGUs to review their EOs to ensure they conform to national policy, as provided for by Resolution No. 14 of the Inter-Agency Task Force on the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases.

The President's Administrative No. 22, series of 2020, also requires agencies and LGUs to implement and comply with the agriculture department's National Zoning and Movement Plan, imposed to contain the ASF outbreak.

Undersecretary Bernardo C. Florece, Jr., the acting DILG secretary, said non-compliance by LGUs may lead to the filing of charges.

"Failure on the part of the LGU to comply with these directives would lead to reprimand and/or issuance of show cause orders," he said in the same statement.

"Repeated breaches of those directives may lead to appropriate charges being brought against the local chief executive." — **Charmaine A. Tadalan**

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Legislator calls for farmers' transport costs to be subsidized

A PARTY-LIST legislator called for farmers' transportation costs to be subsidized in order to ease the flow of goods to the major markets and provide relief to consumers from rising food prices.

In a radio interview Sunday, Ang Probinsyano Representative Ronnie L. Ong said: "*Madalang na ang transportasyon* (The supply of transport is tight for) goods from the provinces to the cities so this way *matutulungan mo ang dalawang* sector, (it will be possible to help two sectors, farmers and consumers)" he said.

He added that price controls on food should not be imposed without due consultation.

"*Ang hirap magdikta ngayon ng* price freeze (it's hard to dictate a price freeze)... we should have a dialogue. *Hindi pwede ang* immediate reaction (There cannot be an immediate reaction)," he said.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has alleged that price manipulation is behind the rising prices, and asked the Philippine Competition Commission to investigate traders and wholesalers.

Deputy Speaker Bernadette Herrera-Dy said in a statement Sunday that the DA and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) should take action on rising prices.

She said, "It is high time that the DA and DTI do something about the rising cost of food prices being complained by the general public."

The House of Representatives will investigate the rising prices of food starting Tuesday under orders from Speaker Lord Allan Jay Q. Velasco. — **Gillian M. Cortez**

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Strengthening our response to rising food prices

GOING FORWARD
CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE "BONG" GO

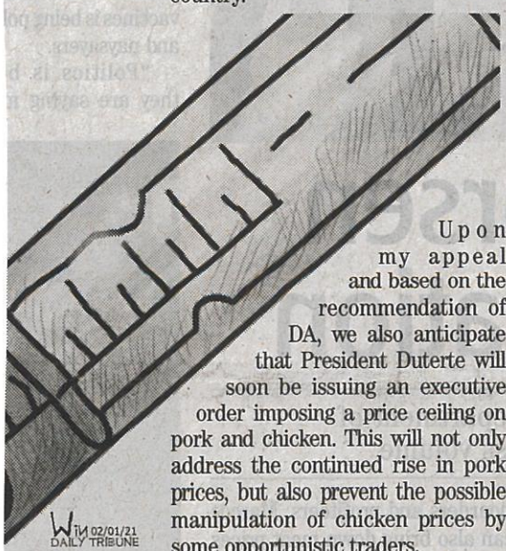
"I am confident and optimistic that we will overcome the challenges we face today if we continue to work hard and work together.

The issue of rising food prices due to the African swine fever (ASF) and the current pandemic has been at the top of the agenda of the government. This problem has deeply aggravated the hardships plaguing the lives of ordinary Filipinos at this challenging time.

I, therefore, laud President Rodrigo Duterte for signing Executive Order 123, which modifies the rates of import duty on certain agricultural products under section 1611 of Republic Act 10863, otherwise known as the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act. The order will maintain the reduced tariff rates on Mechanically Deboned Meat or MDM of chicken and turkey until end of next year to help increase supply and drive down prices on food items.

I also commend President Duterte for earlier issuing Executive Order 105, creating the National Task Force on Animal-Borne Diseases to prevent the entry of animal-borne diseases, like ASF, control their spread and address other related issues.

To mitigate increasing food prices, I also expressed my support to the Department of Agriculture's (DA) proposal to augment local pork supply by increasing the Minimum Access Volume (MAV) for imported pork and allow it to enter the country with lower tariff rates over the next few months. The DA must also continue to enhance and strengthen its programs and projects that would help improve food production in the country.



Upon my appeal and based on the recommendation of DA, we also anticipate that President Duterte will soon be issuing an executive order imposing a price ceiling on pork and chicken. This will not only address the continued rise in pork prices, but also prevent the possible manipulation of chicken prices by some opportunistic traders.

Recognizing our ultimate objective of providing a comfortable life for all Filipinos, I urge my former colleagues in the Executive and, now, my fellow legislators to continue providing both immediate and long-term solutions to address hunger and food security. No Filipino should go to bed hungry. No Filipino family should be deprived of having affordable and quality food on their table.

But even as we address these pressing issues hounding our country today, I also remain committed to assisting our *kababayans* in crisis situations.

My office continues to provide aid to victims of recent fire incidents across the country. On Monday, 25 January, we extended this assistance to 18 families in Barangay San Pedro, Molo, Iloilo. On Tuesday, 26 January, we also provided aid to 82 families, or 259 individuals, in Tramo Street, Pasay City. That same day, we also helped 20 families and eight individuals affected by the recent fire and flashflood incidents in Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon. Then on Wednesday, 27 January, we helped 40 families, or 163 individuals, in Barangay Gulod, Novaliches, Quezon City, including another 47 families, or 189 individuals, in Barangay 649, Baseco Compound, Port Area, Manila. We also provided financial assistance to help them get back on their feet quickly.

We also have not forgotten the victims of previous and recent typhoons and natural disasters. On Monday, 25 January, my team headed to Uson, Dimasalang, Mobo and Milagros in Masbate to extend assistance to 336 beneficiaries. On Tuesday, 26 January, we helped 948 beneficiaries in Barangay Sabang Evacuation Center, Allen, Northern Samar. The following day, 27 January, my team helped 1,002 beneficiaries in the town of Veruela and another 749 beneficiaries in the town of Talacogon, both in Agusan del Sur. We also extended assistance to around 700 beneficiaries in Sorsogon City, Sorsogon. Then on Thursday, 28 January, 160 beneficiaries in Loreto and 686 beneficiaries in San Francisco, both in Agusan del Sur, were also given aid. My team also went back to Marikina City to provide additional aid to the victims of typhoon "Ulysses."

That same day, we also helped 1,428 beneficiaries from typhoon affected communities in Sorsogon City, Sorsogon. Before distributing assistance to the typhoon victims in Sorsogon, I personally visited and checked the current status of the Malasakit Center in Dr. Fernando B. Duran Sr. Memorial Hospital. I also witnessed the turnover of additional financial assistance to the hospital. My staff and I gave away food packs, vitamins, meals, masks and face shields to patients in the hospital.

By Friday, 29 January, my team went to the city of Butuan to provide aid to 825 typhoon victims. I joined my staff in Barobo, Agusan del Sur to give assistance to a total of 3,321 beneficiaries. We also went to Casiguran, Sorsogon to extend assistance to 549 beneficiaries. We also visited and provided aid to 101 victims of a recent whirlwind in Tudela, Misamis Oriental, while at the Carmen Copper Mine in Toledo City, Cebu, we aided 248 families affected by a landslide incident. On Saturday, 30 January, we also distributed aid to 1,018 families in Sara, Iloilo that were affected by floods last year. My staff also went to Pilar, Sorsogon to give additional assistance.

I also continue to help some of the most vulnerable sectors affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. A total of 3,000 TODA members received assistance from my office at the Villamor Airbase Elementary School in Pasay City on two separate occasions, 26 and 27 January. Then on Thursday, 28 January, my team headed to Koronadal City, South Cotabato to assist 351 farmers and other indigent recipients. My team also distributed assistance to the former rebels in Bobon, Northern Samar. By Saturday, 30 January, my office proceeded to Gingoog City, Misamis Oriental to help a total of 193 beneficiaries composed of market vendors, small-scale farmers and *trisikad* drivers.

"Upon my appeal and based on the recommendation of DA, we also anticipate that President Duterte will soon be issuing an executive order imposing a price ceiling on pork and chicken.

I also personally visited and gave assistance to a total of 1,719 patients during the blessing of the new one-stop shop building for government services at the Southern Philippines Medical Center Compound in Bajada, Davao City on Friday, 29 January.

Throughout our visits to these affected communities, we provided aid such as meals, food packs, masks, face shields and vitamins. We also gave bicycles, tablets and shoes to select beneficiaries.

Representatives from various agencies such as the Departments of Social Welfare and Development, Trade and Industry, Labor and Employment, and Agriculture, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority and the National Housing Authority, among others, were also present to provide their respective and separate assistance based on the needs of these communities.

As the economy slowly reopens and we work our way toward recovery, I am confident and optimistic that we will overcome the challenges we face today if we continue to work hard and work together. By working together in the spirit of *bayanihan*, I am certain that we will emerge from this crisis as a stronger and more unified nation.

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Imports to worsen meat mart situation

The slaughter of our local hog raisers will begin if the Department of Agriculture executes its plan to raise the minimum access volume

Government should prevent importers from taking over the local supply of pork meat which will kill local producers, Senator Imee Marcos said yesterday.

"The slaughter of our local hog raisers will begin if the Department of Agriculture (DA) executes its plan to raise the minimum access volume of pork imports by as much as three times the present 54,000 metric tons," Marcos said.

"The DA may be overcompensating in its rush to increase imports to reduce consumer prices. It may deal the coup de grace to our pork industry before Vietnam could release a vaccine against African swine fever (ASF) later this year," Marcos added.

Probe hoarding

Marcos, who chairs the Senate committee on economic affairs, said the DA should instead speed up its investigation into the hoarding of pork products that may be causing the artificial hike in market prices amid the spread of ASF, particularly in Luzon.

"Many local hog raisers have already shut down their business. Importation amid the Covid-19 pandemic means more local jobs will be lost and surrendering the country's food security to foreigners," Marcos said.

Prices of pork imports from the United States, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Brazil suggested excessive profits were being made at the expense of consumers.

Marcos cited the import cost of a 40-foot container of frozen pork belly (liempo) from Spain was P117.87 per kilo, already including a 40 percent tariff.

Prices inflated

"Compare that to its market price of as much as P450 per kilo. Even if you add cold chain, storage and outlet delivery costs, the meat importer's costs would only amount to about P153 per kilo," Marcos pointed out.

Besides arresting hoarders and profiteers, Marcos said the government can also bring down meat prices by subsidizing the cost of transporting pork products to Luzon, which imports about 80 percent of its supply from the Visayas and Mindanao.

Marcos pointed out that the DA got the single biggest item for emergency and stimulus funding under Bayanihan 2, amounting to P24 billion.

"DA's spending must be investigated, as well as the failure of the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) to implement its suggested retail prices," Marcos said.

Marcos's Senate Resolution 619 calling the government's consumer price arbiters to an inquiry will be taken up in a joint hearing of the committees on agriculture, food and agrarian reform and trade, commerce and entrepreneurship on Monday.

Check costs

Deputy Speaker and Bagong Henerasyon Rep. Bernadette Herrera, meanwhile, urged the DA and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to do something about the rising cost of food products, particularly meat and vegetables.

Herrera made the remark after the DA reported that the prices of most meats and vegetables have spiked by up to 66 percent during the first month of 2021.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the increasing prices of food products already pushed the country's inflation rate to 3.5 percent last December.

Herrera said the economic crisis as a result of the onslaught of the Covid-19 coupled by skyrocketing food prices is adding more suffering to the people.

"It is not right that we let our people endure the soaring food prices since many of them have already lost their jobs and are facing a reduction in their income because of the pandemic," Herrera said in a statement.

FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

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Cebu pork prices see slight increase

BY RICO OSMEÑA
@tribunephl_rico

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF UFOOD

LESS supplies and the African swine fever are causing pork price increase.

Pork producers in Cebu on Sunday confirmed slight increase in prices due to reduced supplies.

Roland Tambago, president of the Central Visayas Pork Producers Cooperative, told the *Daily Tribune*, that prices rose between six to nine percent.

"Decreased supply was due to a lot of buyers of live hogs for the Metro Manila market," he said.

The Department of Veterinary Medicine and Fisheries said *liempo* (pork belly) now sells for as much as P400 a kilo.

DA is eyeing to bring down prices of *liempo* to P300 and *kasim* (butt) to P270.

Prices have soared to as high as P450 per kilo due to market manipulation as the industry struggles with the African swine fever problem and government-imposed lockdowns due to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

The DA requested President Rodrigo Duterte to issue an executive order imposing price ceilings to prevent price manipulation.

Cebu produces an average of 53,890 metric tons of pork annually and demand can go up to as many as 63,000 metric tons. Other remaining pork needs are purchased from Region VIII (Eastern Visayas) and Mindanao areas.

The Department of Agriculture has designated "special hog lanes" to ensure unhampered passage of pork products from Visayas and Mindanao.

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Hunger, food security addressed – Go

No Filipino should go to bed hungry.

Senator Christopher Bong Go emphasized this in his column "GOing Forward" Sunday as he reiterated government commitment to

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providing comfortable life for all.

The senator was reacting to the issue of rising food prices due to the African swine fever (ASF) and the current pandemic.

"No Filipino family should be deprived of having affordable and quality food on their table," Go remarked even as he urged legislators to continue providing both immediate and long-term solutions to address hunger and food security.

Noting how the problem has aggravated the hardships plaguing the lives of ordinary Filipinos, Go said the issue has been at the top of the agenda of the government.

He lauded President Rodrigo Duterte for signing Executive Order (EO) 123, which modifies the rates of import duty on certain agricultural products under section 1611 of Republic Act 10863, otherwise known as the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act.

The order will maintain the reduced tariff rates on Mechanically Deboned Meat or MDM of chicken and turkey until end of next year to help increase supply and drive down prices on food items.

The senator was reacting to the issue of rising food prices due to the African swine fever and the current pandemic.

He also commended President Duterte for earlier issuing EO 105, creating the National Task Force on Animal-Borne Diseases to prevent the entry of animal-borne diseases, like the ASF, control their spread and address other related issues.

To mitigate increasing food prices, he also expressed support to the Department of Agriculture's (DA) proposal to augment local pork supply by increasing the Minimum Access Volume (MAV) for imported pork and allow them to enter the country with lower tariff rates over the next few months.

"The DA must also continue to enhance and strengthen its programs and projects that would help improve food production in the country," he said.

No Filipino family should be deprived of having affordable and quality food on their table.

Go sees President Duterte issuing an executive order soon imposing price ceiling on pork and chicken.

"This will not only address the continued rise in pork prices, but also prevent the possible manipulation of chicken prices by some opportunistic traders," he said.

As the economy slowly re-opens with eyes on recovery, Go expressed confidence and optimism that "we will overcome the challenges we face today if we continue to work hard and work together."

"By working together in the spirit of *bayanihan*, I am certain that we will emerge from this crisis as a stronger and more unified nation," he said.

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BFAR: 20 areas tested positive for 'Red tide'

A TOTAL of 20 coastal areas in various parts of the country have tested positive for "red tide poisoning"

This was revealed through Shellfish Bulletin 2 dated January 28, 2021, issued by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Information and Fisherfolk Coordination Unit. The document said the conclusion was based on the latest laboratory results of the BFAR and Local Government Units (LGUs). Shellfishes collected in these areas are still positive for paralytic shellfish poison that is beyond the regulatory limit, the document said.

These areas were identified as: Honda Bay and Puerto Princesa Bay in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan; Coastal waters of Inner Malampaya Sound, Taytay, Palawan; Sorsogon Bay, Sorsogon; Coastal waters Dauis and Tagbilaran City, Bohol; Tambobo Bay, Sianton, Negros Oriental; and the Coastal waters of Daram Island, Zumarraga, and Cambatutay, Western Samar.

The areas also included the following: coastal waters of Calubian, Leyte, Carigara Bay, and Cancabato Bay, Tacloban City in Leyte; Coastal waters of Biliran Islands; Coastal waters of Guiuan and Matarimao Bay in Eastern Samar; Balite Bay, Mati City in Davao Oriental; Lianga Bay and Coastal waters of Hinatuan in Surigao del Sur; and Dumanquilas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur.

Moreover, the San Pedro Bay in Western Samar is now positive for red tide toxin.

As such, all types of shellfish and Acetes sp. or alamang gathered from these areas are not safe for human consumption, the BFAR said.

The BFAR advised against harvesting, selling, buying and eating shellfish from these areas.

Jonathan L. Mayuga

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Senate, House panels to conduct probe on food price spikes

By Butch Fernandez
@butchfBM
& Jovee Marie N. Dela Cruz
@joveemarie

THE Senate Committees on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform and Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship and the House Committee on Agriculture and Food will conduct separate investigations into the "alarming" increase in the prices of food products.

Quezon Rep. Mark Enverga, chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food, said Speaker Lord Allan Velasco has directed the panel to conduct an immediate briefing on the concerns of rising prices of agricultural products, which has been set on February 2.

"The committee is tasked to assess current data on current supply and demand of all agricultural goods and to find a solution to the current predicament of both suppliers and consumers," said Enverga.

Meanwhile, Deputy Speaker Bernadette Herrera has called out the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) on the increasing prices of meat and vegetables.

"It is high time that the DA and DTI do something about the rising cost of food prices being complained by the general public," the Bagong Henerasyon representative said.

Herrera said it was as if the pandemic-induced economic crisis was not enough that people also had to suffer from skyrocketing food prices.

"It is not right that we let our people endure the soaring food prices since many of them have already lost their jobs and are facing a reduction in their income because of the pandemic," Herrera said.

Herrera said the artificial hike in food costs needs to be curbed by enforcing strict measures to regulate the prices imposed by traders.

The DA has reported that the prices of most meats and vegetables have jumped by up to 66 percent in January.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the increasing prices of food products already pushed the country's inflation rate to 3.5 percent last December.

Herrera said she is looking forward to hearing the explanation of DA and DTI on the rising food prices in the investigation to be conducted by the House of Representatives.

Joint inquiry

THE Senate opens Monday a joint inquiry by the committees on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform with Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship to tackle "alarming increases" in prices of basic commodities and "soaring food prices."

This, as Senator Imee Marcos sounded an alarm Sunday alerting the Duterte administration to avert the impending death of the local pork industry "faster than African swine fever" due to over importation.

Marcos, who chairs the Senate Economic Affairs Committee, pressed concerned authorities to reconsider the plan of the Department of Agriculture (DA) allowing upward adjustment of the minimum access volume of pork imports "as much as three times the present 54,000 metric tons [MT]."

Warning against its disastrous consequences, the Senator predicted pork importers will likely take over local market supply and "push Filipino producers out of business."

In a statement over the weekend, Marcos predicted that "the slaughter of our local hog raisers will begin if the Department of Agriculture executes its plan to raise the minimum access volume of pork imports by as much as three times the present 54,000 MT."

She surmised that the DA "may be overcompensating in its rush to increase imports to reduce consumer prices," but added that "it may deal the coup de grace to our pork industry before Vietnam could release a vaccine against African swine fever [ASF] later this year."

The Senator suggested that the DA should instead step up its probe into the hoarding of pork products seen to trigger an artificial hike in market prices amid the spread of ASF in Luzon.

At the same time, Marcos cited reports that "many local hog raisers have already shut down their business," warning that allowing importation amid the Covid-19 pandemic means "more local jobs will be lost and surrendering the country's food security to foreigners."

She observed prices of pork imports from the United States, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Brazil suggested "excessive profits were being made at the expense of consumers, citing the import cost of a 40-foot container of frozen pork belly (liempo) from Spain was P117.87 per kilo, already including a 40-percent tariff.

Marcos added: "Compare that to its market price of as much as P450 per kilo. Even if you add cold chain, storage and outlet delivery costs, the meat importer's costs would only amount to about P153 per kilo."

Apart from arresting hoarders and profiteers, the Senator suggested the Duterte government can bring down meat prices by subsidizing the cost of transporting pork products to Luzon, which imports about 80 percent of its supply from the Visayas and Mindanao.

Moreover, Marcos noted the DA got "the single biggest item for emergency and stimulus funding" under Bayanihan 2, amounting to P24 billion.

In filing Senate Resolution 619, she suggested that probers must mount a full-blown inquiry into "DA's spending, as well as the failure of the Department of Trade and Industry to implement its suggested retail prices."

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'Imports to kill hog industry'

By Macon Ramos-Araneta and Rio N. Araja

SENATOR Imee Marcos on Sunday warned that importation may kill the local pork industry faster than Aafrican swine fever (ASF) as she asked the Department of Agriculture (DA) to hasten its probe of the hoarding of pork products.

Marcos, who chairs the Senate committee on economic affairs, said the hoarding may be causing an artificial hike in market prices amid the spread of ASF, particularly in Luzon.

She called on the government to prevent pork importers from taking over local market supply and pushing Filipino producers out of business.

She said importation amid the COVID-19 pandemic means losing more local jobs and surrendering the country's food security to foreigners.

She said many local hog raisers have already shut down their business.

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'Imports...

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Prices of pork imports from the United States, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Brazil suggested excessive profits were being made at the expense of consumers.

Marcos cited that the import cost of a 40-foot container of frozen pork belly (liempo) from Spain was P117.87 per kilo, already including a 40 percent% tariff.

"Compare that to its market price of as much as P450 per kilo. Even if you add cold chain, storage and outlet delivery costs, the meat importer's costs would only amount to about P153 per kilo," Marcos said.

Besides arresting hoarders and profiteers, Marcos said the government can also bring down meat prices by subsidizing the cost of transporting pork products to Luzon, which gets about 80 percent of its supply from the Visayas and Mindanao.

The slaughter of local hog raisers, she said, will begin if the DA executes its plan to raise the minimum access volume of pork imports by as much as three times the present 54,000 metric tons.

"The DA may be overcompensating in its rush to increase imports to reduce consumer prices," she said.

"It may deal the coup de grace to our pork industry before Vietnam could release a vaccine against African swine fever (ASF) later this year," Marcos added.

Furthermore, Marcos pointed out that the DA got the single biggest item for emergency and stimulus funding under Bayanihan 2, amounting to P24 billion.

"DA's spending must be investigated, as well as the failure of the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) to implement its suggested retail prices," Marcos said.

Marcos's Senate Resolution 619 calling the government's consumer price arbiters to an inquiry will be taken up in a joint hearing of the committees on agriculture, food and agrarian reform and trade, commerce and entrepreneurship on Monday.

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Villar donates composting equipment

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

TO BOOST a local urban farming project, Senator Cynthia Villar and the Bureau of Soils and Water Management delivered to St. Bosco Parish in Tondo, Manila, a composting equipment and a shredder to recycle kitchen and garden waste into organic fertilizers.

With the composting facility, the parish will have a steady supply of compost to enrich the soil of their urban garden project.

The parish, headed by headed by Father GC Carandang, has implemented a project entitled "Buhay sa Gulay" where residents from the nearby barangays grow their own food.

They are encouraged to plant vegetables like squash, upo, talong, and pechay in an 8,000-square meter vegetable garden that used to be a football field.

This is in partnership with the Department of Agrarian Reform, Department of Agriculture and the local government of Manila.

The senator has been embarking on the composting of wastes and turning them into organic fertilizers which they distribute for free to farmers, urban gardeners and other stakeholders in the agricultural industry.

Aside from being cost efficient, Villar, chairperson of the Senate committee on Agriculture and Food, noted that using organic fertilizers would be beneficial to the environment

The senator has a successful waste recycling program in Las Piñas in all the 20 barangays of the city, which produces at least 60 tons of organic fertiLIzer monthly.

The Manila Times

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LGUs told: Review steps vs ASF

BY DEMPSEY REYES

THE Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) on Sunday reminded local government units (LGUs) to see to it that their orders to prevent the spread of the African swine fever (ASF) jibe with that of the national government.

"Although the conscientious efforts of LGUs to mitigate the spread of the ASF in their respective jurisdictions are needed, they still have to ensure that their local policies and directive are aligned and consistent with those of the national government," DILG spokesman Jonathan Malaya said in a statement.

Malaya, who is also the DILG undersecretary, said the department had monitored the steps taken by the LGUs to limit the entry of pigs, hogs to their communities.

He added that local officials "must not impede the flow of cargoes across LGU boundaries."

The LGUs' actions should be coordinated with the Department of Agriculture's field offices to make them consistent with the ASF zoning classification system.

DILG Officer-in-Charge Bernardo Florece has issued a memorandum urging the LGUs to do an "immediate review" of executive orders and "align their objectives, without delay, with presidential and national issuances on the prevention and control of ASF."

He acknowledged that the LGUs could issue executive actions, but "these must always be consistent with national policies and directives."

Failure to comply could lead to reprimand and the issuance of show cause orders from the DILG, Florece said.

The LGUs were also asked to strictly obey the nationwide policy on the unhampered flow of cargoes as indicated in the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases' (IATF-EID) resolution and Presidential Administrative Order 22.

IATF-EID's Resolution 14 says movements of all types of food and non-food cargoes must remain unimpeded during the enhanced community quarantine "to avoid any threat of shortages of food staples, subject to the presentation of relevant documents."

The presidential order directs all government agencies concerned and LGUs to strictly implement and comply with the ASF National Zoning and Movement Plan.

The zoning plan has two ASF zone classifications: the containment zone where "concerted activities" must be implemented to contain ASF and the isolation of ASF disease towards full eradication, and the free zone, the geographical areas that remain ASF-free.

In a related development, Sen. Maria Imelda Josefa Marcos warned that the local hog industry would die if the government raised the minimum access volume of pork imports by as much as three times the present 54,000 metric tons.

She called on the DA to prevent pork importers from taking over local market supply that might push Filipino producers out of business.

"The DA may be overcompensating in its rush to increase imports to reduce consumer prices," she said on Sunday in a statement.

"It may deal the coup de grace to our pork industry before Vietnam could release a vaccine against African swine fever later this year," Marcos added.

She advised the Agriculture department to instead speed up its investigation into the hoarding of pork products that could be causing an artificial hike in market prices amid the spread of ASF, particularly in Luzon.

The senator, chairman of the Senate Committee on Economic Affairs, noted that many local hog raisers had already been forced to close.

"Importation amid the Covid-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) pandemic means more local jobs will be lost and surrendering the country's food security to foreigners," she said.

Prices of pork imports from the United States, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Brazil suggested excessive profits were being made at the expense of consumers.

Marcos cited that the import cost of a 40-foot container of frozen pork belly from Spain was P117.87 per kilo, already including a 40-percent tariff.

"Compare that to its market price of as much as P450 per kilo. Even if you add cold chain, storage and outlet delivery costs, the meat importer's costs would only amount to about P153 per kilo," she pointed out.

Aside from arresting hoarders and profiteers, she said the DA could also bring down meat prices by subsidizing the cost of transporting pork products to Luzon, which imports about 80 percent of its supply from the Visayas and Mindanao.

Marcos said the DA got the single biggest item for emergency and stimulus funding under Bayanihan 2, amounting to P24 billion.

"DA's spending must be investigated, as well as the failure of the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) to implement its suggested retail prices," she said.

The Committee on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform and the Committee on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship will conduct a joint hearing on today, Feb. 1, on the continued increase in the prices of food and other goods.

WITH BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO

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PART 1 of 2

Importation to kill Phl pork industry – senators

By PAOLO ROMERO

Increasing pork imports may kill the local hog industry faster than the African swine fever (ASF), some senators warned yesterday.

The warning comes as the Senate committee on agriculture and food, chaired by Sen. Cynthia Villar, launches today its inquiry into the rising prices of basic commodities.

Senators Imee Marcos and Francis Pangilinan in separate statements criticized the "kneejerk reaction" of the Department of Agriculture (DA) to import more agricultural products when there are other options that could be used to complement programs to boost local production.

Marcos said the government should prevent pork importers from taking over the local market supply and pushing Filipino producers out of business.

"The slaughter of our local hog raisers will begin if the Department of Agriculture executes its plan to raise the minimum access volume of pork imports by as much as three times the present 54,000 metric tons," Marcos pointed out.

"The DA may be overcompensating in its rush to increase imports to reduce consumer prices. It may deal the coup de grace to our pork industry

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Importation

From Page 1

before Vietnam could release a vaccine against ASF later this year," she added.

Marcos, who chairs the Senate committee on economic affairs, said the DA should instead speed up its investigation into the hoarding of pork products that may be causing an artificial hike in market prices amid the spread of ASF, particularly in Luzon.

"Many local hog raisers have already shut down their business. Importation amid the COVID-19 pandemic means more local jobs will be lost and surrendering the country's food security to foreigners," she said.

Prices of pork imports from the US, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Brazil suggested excessive profits were being made at the expense of consumers, she added.

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"Compare that to its market price of as much as P450 per kilo. Even if you add cold chain, storage and outlet delivery costs, the meat importer's costs would only amount to about P153 per kilo," she said.

Besides arresting hoarders and profiteers, the senator said the government could also bring down meat prices by subsidizing the cost of transporting pork products to Luzon, which imports about 80 percent of its supply from the Visayas and Mindanao.

She pointed out that the DA got the single biggest item for emergency and stimulus funding under Bayanihan 2, amounting to P24 billion.

"DA's spending must be investigated, as well as the failure of the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) to implement its suggested retail prices," Marcos suggested.

Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph Recto said he already warned the DA last November about the surge in prices following the three successive typhoons.

Recto said the DA has enough funds in its budget to undertake rehabilitation and assist farmers.

Pangilinan said the objective of the hearing– which will also be jointly held with the committees on trade and on sustainable development goals, chaired by Senators Aquilino Pimentel III and Pia Cayeteno—is to ensure that every Filipino consumer, especially the poor, has access to adequate and affordable food.

Pangilinan said agriculture could be the engine of economic growth, given that everyone needs to eat. **–With Romina Cabrera**

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PH faces prolonged shortage in sugar supply

By MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR

The Philippines has been short of sugar production for many years, and it will stay that way for a long time, a top official of a sugar-producing company said.

This, according to Central Azucarera de Bais Chairman Steven Chan, should be enough reason for the Philippines to stop allocating a portion of the country's annual sugar production for exports.

To recall, every start of the crop year, the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA), the government agency tasked to regulate the sugar industry, gets to decide how much of the country's expected sugar production gets to stay here in the country and how much will be exported to the world market to balance the prices.

Sugar production is divided into different classifications, including 'B' for domestic sugar, 'A' for sugar exports to the US, 'D' for sugar exports to the world market or other countries, and 'C' for reserves.

For this crop year, SRA has decided that 7 percent or 153,000 metric tons (MT) of the country's sugar output will be exported to the United States.

In the Philippines, the sugar crop year starts in September and ends in August of the following year.

Chan argued, however, that "for the last eight to 10 years, we have been a net importer of sugar" and that "there has been no excess" in the country's annual sugar output.

"We have found out that our total average consumption in the last four years is 2.5 million MT and we produce way lower than that," Chan said in a phone interview.

"We are definitely a net importer. We have no treaty obligation [to the US]. There is no sense why we are doing something that we are doing. There is absolutely no reason to export when you have no excess," he added.

For this crop year, sugar production is estimated to be "more or less" 2.19 million MT, according to SRA. This is 2 percent higher than the 2.145 million MT produced in the previous crop year, which ended last August.

Based on SRA's estimate, this should be enough to cover the domestic demand, which is expected to take up only 1.97 million MT of the total output. This, however, is lower than the 2.5 million MT average consumption Chan mentioned.

Moreover, a separate data he provided also showed that in the last four crop years, annual domestic sugar consumption didn't go down below 2.3 million MT. In fact, consumption was on an uptrend from 2016 to 2018 and only started going down in 2019.

Chan said that if the country continues to export sugar to the US, producers will only lose money, and only traders to benefit from it.

Normally, A sugar is priced lower than B sugar. As of January 17, for instance, the average mill site price for A sugar stood at ₱1,270.05 per 50-kilo bag, while B sugar costs ₱1,505.29 per 50-kilo bag, based on SRA data.

He also said that the Philippines will "never have a surplus in sugar production because we consume more than what we produce" and that has always been the case for the past eight to 10 years.

Furthermore, he said that the "population never stopped growing" and that "we are running out of land resources [due to] land reform [and] housing and we are running out of farmers."

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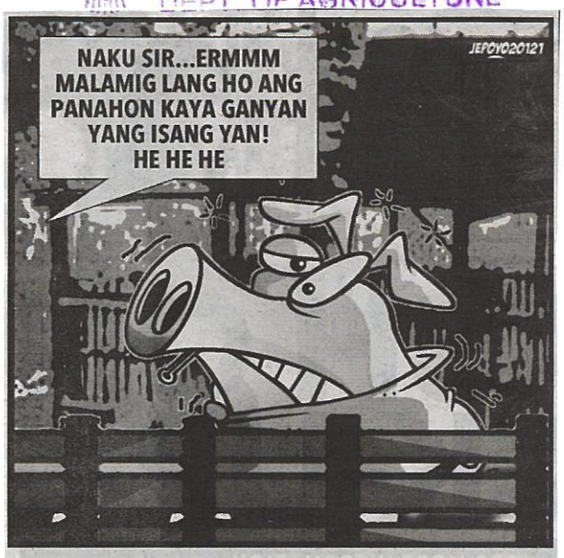

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Pigilan, pagkalat ng African Swine Fever

KUMPIRMADO nang may African Swine Fever (ASF) sa apat na bayan sa Leyte, ayon sa Department of Agriculture (DA)-Eastern Visayas. Ayon kay DA Director Angel Enriquez, dalawang bayan pa ang nadagdag na mayroong ASF. Ito ay ang mga bayan ng Abuyog at Dulag. Unang nabalita ang pagkakaroon ng ASF sa mga bayan ng Javier at La Paz. Kinunan ng samples ang mga namatay na baboy sa Dulag at Abulog at positibo ang resulta na may ASF ang mga ito.

Ang maagang pagkilos ng DA sa Eastern Visayas ukol sa problemang ito ay nararapat ganundin naman ang mga local government units (LGUs). Gumawa ng paraan ang LGUs para hindi na tumawid pa sa ibang bayan ang ASF. Magtayo ng checkpoint para walang makakalabas na buhay na baboy, karne o nakaprosesong pagkain mula sa karneng baboy. Siguruhin na walang makakapuslit.

Isa rin sa mga dapat gawin ng LGUs ay ang pagmonitor sa mga nag-aalaga ng baboy sa likod-bahay. Maaaring hindi napapansin ng mga hog raisers na maysakit ang kanilang baboy. Bisitahin ng LGUs ang mga ito para malaman ang kalagayan ng mga baboy. Ireport naman ng hog raisers sa mga kinauukulan kung may napapansin silang sintomas o pagbabago sa kanilang mga alaga. Sabi ng DA magbibigay sila ng P5,000 financial assistance sa mga apektadong hog raisers bukod pa anila ito sa ipagkakaloob ng LGUs.

Noong nakaraang linggo, maraming patay na baboy ang natagpuan sa dalampasigan ng Naujan at Pola sa Oriental Mindoro. Ayon sa report, nasa 20 patay na baboy ang napadpad sa Naujan at lima sa Pola. Kumuha ng samples sa mga baboy bago inilibing ang mga ito. Nagnegatibo naman umano sa ASF ang mga baboy.

Ang nakapagtataka ay kung bakit itinapon ang mga baboy. Ayon sa mga mangingisda, isang barko umano ng may kargang baboy ang nagtapon ng mga ito. Hanggang ngayon, wala pang makapagturo sa nasabing barko. Ang pagkapadpad ng mga patay na baboy sa Or. Mindoro ay nagdulot ng pangamba sa mga nag-aalaga ng baboy sa nasabing probinsiya. Walang ASF sa Oriental Mindoro kaya natatakot silang ang mga natagpuang patay na baboy ang magdala ng sakit.

Nararapat kumilos ang DA sa kasong ito. Imbestigahan ang barkong nagtapon ng mga baboy. Panagutin ang may-ari. Kung walang sakit bakit nila itatapon. Ang mga ganitong aksiyon ang dahilan kaya kumakalat ang ASF. Ganito ang ginawa sa mga namatay na baboy sa Rizal noong 2018. Itinapon ang mga ito sa Marikina River at naging dahilan para kumalat ang ASF.

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Pag-aangkat ng karneng baboy, pinalagan

Nangangamba si Senator Imee Marcos sa posibilidad na mamatay ang lokal na industriya ng magbababay sakaling lumobo ang importasyon ng mga karneng baboy dahil tiyak na mamanipulahin ang presyo nito sa merkado.

"Ang pagkatay sa kabuhayan ng ating mga lokal na hog raisers ay magsisimula kapag ipinatupad ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang plano nitong itaas ng tatlong beses ang minimum access volume o dami ng puwedeng iangkat na baboy sa bansa sa mas mababang taripa, na ngayon ay nasa 54,000 metriko tonelada," ayon kay Marcos, chairman ng Senate Committee on Economic Affairs.

Nagtataka rin ang senador kung bakit nagkukumahog ang DA na lakihan ang pag-i-import ng karneng baboy para mapababa ang presyo sa palengke na maaari itong magdulot ng 'coup de grace' o tuluyang pagpatay sa industriya ng pagbababoy bago pa maipalabas ng Vietnam ang bakuna kontra sa ASF (African Swine Fever) sa huling bahagi ng taong ito.

Binigyang-diin nito, hindi dapat magmadali sa importasyon ang pamahalaan at ang dapat nitong gawin ay bilisan ang imbestigasyon sa 'hoarding' o pag-ipit ng mga pork product na maaaring sanhi ng artipisyal na pagtaas ng presyo nito sa merkado sa gitna ng pagkalat ng ASF, partikular na sa Luzon.

Leonel Abasola

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NEWS BRIEF

DA 'suicide' sa planong baboy price cap

TINAWAG na 'suicide' ng grupo ng mga magbababoy sa bansa ang price freeze na inirerekomenda ng Department of Agriculture (DA) bilang solusyon sa tumataas na presyo ng baboy sa bansa.

Ayon kay Pork Producers Federation of the Philippine Vice President for Luzon at AGAP President Nicanor Briones, suicide act ang rekomendasyon ng DA sapagkat lalo lamang aniyang panghihinaan ng loob ang mga magbababoy, maging ang mga magmamanok at magsasaka na muling mag-alaga at magtanim.

"Kapag ito ay ipinatupad, wala nang darating na baboy sa Luzon mula sa Visayas at Mindanao dahil malulugi ang mga trader at matatakot ang mga retailer na magbenta kung hindi susunod sa price ceiling. Kapag sumunod naman ay siguradong lugi sila," ani Briones, sa isang pahayag.

"Hindi price freeze, hindi importasyon ang solusyon, kundi malasakit sa magsasakang Pilipino," dagdag pa ni Briones, na nagpahayag rin ng paniniwala na kung hindi magagawa ang lahat ng ito ay maaaring magpatuloy pa ang krisis hanggang sa susunod pang taon.

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ASF hits 4 towns in Leyte

THE Department of Agriculture said four towns in Leyte were affected by the African Swine Fever.

The four were the municipalities of Dulag, Abuyog, La Paz and Javier.

Department of Agriculture- Eastern Visayas regional executive director Angel Enriquez said the latest confirmed ASF case was in Bgy. Combis, Dulag town.

Enriquez said blood samples of the dead pigs brought to the main office of the Bureau of Animal Industry for a polymerase chain reaction diagnostic test yielded positive result for the swine fever.

Affected pigs were culled to contain the spread of the disease.

Enriquez called on all local government units to immediately reactivate their task forces to regulate the movement of pigs, pork, and processed pork products going in and out of their respective areas.

Dulag Mayor Mildred Joy Que and barangay captains in areas within the seven to 10-kilometer radius of the index case in Dulag on Saturday met for an orientation on how to manage, contain and control the spread of the disease.

Hog raisers and farmers in the town were advised to monitor their hogs, report any symptoms of the swine disease or unusual deaths of pigs to the municipal agriculture office, institute quarantine measures and avoid swill feeding.

ASF can be spread by live or dead pigs, domestic or wild, and pork products. Transmission can also occur via contaminated feed and fomites or non-living objects.

Meanwhile, the DA assured hog raisers of P5,000 in assistance per culled pig aside from the P5,000 indemnity from concerned local government units.

Jane Eleda

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Stop importing frozen pork, Imee tells gov't

By Marlon Purificacion

SENATOR Imee Marcos called on the government to prevent pork importers from taking over local market supply and pushing Filipino producers out of business.

"The slaughter of our local hog raisers will begin if the Department of Agriculture (DA) executes its plan to raise the minimum access volume of pork imports by as much as three times the present 54,000 metric tons," Marcos said.

"The DA may be overcompensating in its rush to increase imports to reduce consumer prices. It may deal the coup de grace to our pork industry before Vietnam could release a vaccine against African swine fever (ASF) later this year," Marcos added.

Marcos, who chairs the Senate committee on economic affairs, said the DA should instead speed up its investigation into the hoarding of pork products that may be causing an artificial hike in market prices amid the spread of ASF, particularly in Luzon.

"Many local hog raisers have already shut down their business. Importation amid the COVID-19 pandemic means more local jobs will be lost and surrendering the country's food security to foreigners," Marcos said.

Prices of pork imports from the United States, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Brazil suggested excessive profits were being made at the expense of consumers.

Marcos cited that the import cost of a 40-foot container of frozen pork belly (liempo) from Spain was P117.87 per kilo, already including a 40% tariff.

"Compare that to its market price of as much as P450 per kilo. Even if you add cold chain, storage and outlet delivery costs, the meat importer's costs would only amount to about P153 per kilo," Marcos pointed out.

Besides arresting hoarders and profiteers, Marcos said the government can also bring down meat prices by subsidizing the cost of transporting pork products to Luzon, which imports about 80% of its supply from the Visayas and Mindanao.

Marcos pointed out that the DA got the single biggest item for emergency and stimulus funding under Bayanihan 2, amounting to P24 billion.

"DA's spending must be investigated, as well as the failure of the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) to implement its suggested retail prices," Marcos said.

Marcos's Senate Resolution 619 calling the government's consumer price arbiters to an inquiry will be taken up in a joint hearing of the committees on agriculture, food and agrarian reform and trade, commerce and entrepreneurship on Monday.

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Mga grupo ng magbababoy tutol sa price freeze

MARIING tinututulan ng mga grupo ng mga magbababoy sa bansa ang price freeze na inirerekomenda ng Department of Agriculture (DA) bilang solusyon sa tumataas na presyo ng baboy sa bansa.

Ayon kay Pork Producers Federation of the Philippine Vice President for Luzon at AGAP President Nicanor Briones, maituturing na suicide act ang rekomendasyon ng DA sapagkat lalo lamang aniyang panghihinaan ng loob ang mga magbababoy, maging ang mga magmamanok at magsasaka na muling mag-alaga at magtanim.

"Kapag ito ay ipinatupad, wala nang darating na baboy sa Luzon mula sa Visayas at Mindanao dahil malulugi ang mga traders at matatakot ang mga retailers na magbenta kung hindi susunod sa price ceiling. Kapag sumunod naman ay siguradong lugi sila," ani Briones, sa isang pahayag.

Kung mangyayari aniya ito ay makakadagdag itong lalo sa kinakaharap ngayong food crisis ng bansa na sanhi ng kakulangan sa suplay at napakataas na presyo ng karneng baboy at iba pang agricultural products, na lahat aniya ay mga suliraning dulot ng African Swine Fever, sobrang importasyon, smuggling at pinsala ng mga nagdaang bagyo.

Giit ni Briones, dapat tanggapin na may malaking problema sa kakulangan ng pagkain, hindi lamang sa karne ng baboy, maging manok, gulay at iba pa.

Ipinanukala rin niya na isailalim ang Luzon sa state of calamity upang magamit ang emergency fund, dahil higit pa aniya sa 10 bagyo ang tumama sa mga magbababoy na umaabot na sa mahigit P100 bilyon ang lugi.

Mungkahi pa niya, maaaring gamitin ang humigit-kumulang na P20 bilyon na pondo mula sa Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (ACEF) upang ayudahan ang mga magbababoy kabilang ang mga backyard at commercial hog raisers, at maging mga magsasaka.

Sinabi ni Briones na ang pondo ay maaaring ipambayad sa indemnification ng baboy na tinamaan ng ASF upang mapigilan ang pagkalat ng sakit at upang mabigyan ng food subsidy na P500 hanggang P1,000 ang mga mahihirap na pamilya buwan-buwan.

Ani pa ni Briones, dapat na solusyunan ang puno't dulo ng problema at tulungan ang mga lokal na magbababoy at magsasaka na kumita, nang kusa silang magpadami ng alaga at magtanim upang magkaroon ng sapat, mura at dekalidad na pagkain ang bansa.

"Hindi price freeze, hindi importasyon ang solusyon, kundi malasakit sa magsasakang Pilipino," dagdag pa ni Briones, na nagpahayag rin ng paniniwala na kung hindi magagawa ang lahat ng ito ay maaaring magpatuloy pa ang krisis hanggang sa susunod pang taon.

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Imee: Importation may kill PH pork industry

By MARLON PURIFICACION

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LGUs told to align anti-ASF efforts with nat'l gov't

By JUN I. LEGASPI

IN a move to avert the spread of African Swine Fever (ASF) while ensuring food security, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) urged all local government units (LGUs) to ensure their executive orders imposing a ban on the entry of swine hogs and other related products are aligned and consistent with national policies and directives.

DILG Undersecretary and Spokesperson Jonathan E. Malaya said the Department has monitored that LGUs have been issuing their respective executive orders restricting or limiting the entry of pigs, hogs, and related items to protect against the spread of ASF but this must not impede the flow of cargoes across LGU boundaries.

"Although the conscientious efforts of LGUs to mitigate the spread of the ASF in their respective jurisdictions are needed, they still have to ensure that their local policies and directive are aligned and consistent with those of the national government," Malaya said.

He said that the actions of LGUs must be coordinated with the Department of Agriculture field offices for consistency with the ASF zoning classification system.

In DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2021-00 signed by DILG Officer-in-Charge Bernardo Florece, Jr., LGUs were urged to conduct an immediate review of their executive orders and align their objectives, without delay, with presidential and national issuances on the prevention and control of ASF

Florece said LGUs must strictly follow the nationwide policy on the unhampered flow of cargoes stipulated in Inter-Agency Task Force on the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-MEID) Resolution No. 14 and Presidential Administrative Order No. 22, series of 2020 to mitigate the ASF in the country amid the pandemic.

On the other hand, Presidential Administrative Order No. 22, series of 2020 directs all government agencies and LGUs to strictly implement and comply with the Department of Agriculture's ASF National Zoning and Movement Plan which has classified the country into various zones with respective movement controls.

Under the DA's zoning plan, there are two ASF zone classifications namely, Containment Zone where concerted activities are implemented to contain ASF and isolate the ASF disease towards full eradication, and Free Zone (Dark Green) which is the geographical limit that remains free from the ASF virus.

Included in the Containment Zone are the Infected Zone (Red) which includes provinces with confirmed ASF cases; Surveillance Zone (Yellow) which includes provinces that are high-risk areas because of the dense population of swine, and volume of trade of pigs, pork, and pork products; Buffer Zone (Pink) which includes cities/municipalities of the National Capital Region and those which are adjacent to the infected zones, as well as ASF-free localities in an infected province; and Protected Zone (Light Green) which includes regions/provinces with no ASF cases but are contiguous with the yellow zone in terms of landmass.

The zone classification status is regularly reviewed and updated depending on the epidemiological changes of the disease.

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DA, DTI asked to address price hikes

A HOUSE leader on Sunday called out the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) over the alarming increase in prices of food products, particularly meat and vegetables.

"It is high time that the DA and DTI do something about the rising cost of food prices being complained by the general public," Deputy Speaker and Bagong Henerasyon (BH) party-list Rep. Bernadette Herrera said.

Herrera said it was as if the pandemic-induced economic crisis was not enough that people also had to suffer from skyrocketing food prices.

"It is not right that we let our people endure the soaring food prices since many of them have already lost their jobs and are facing a reduction in their income because of the pandemic," Herrera said.

She said the artificial hike in food costs needs to be curbed by enforcing strict measures to regulate the prices imposed by traders.

Ryan Ponce Pacpaco

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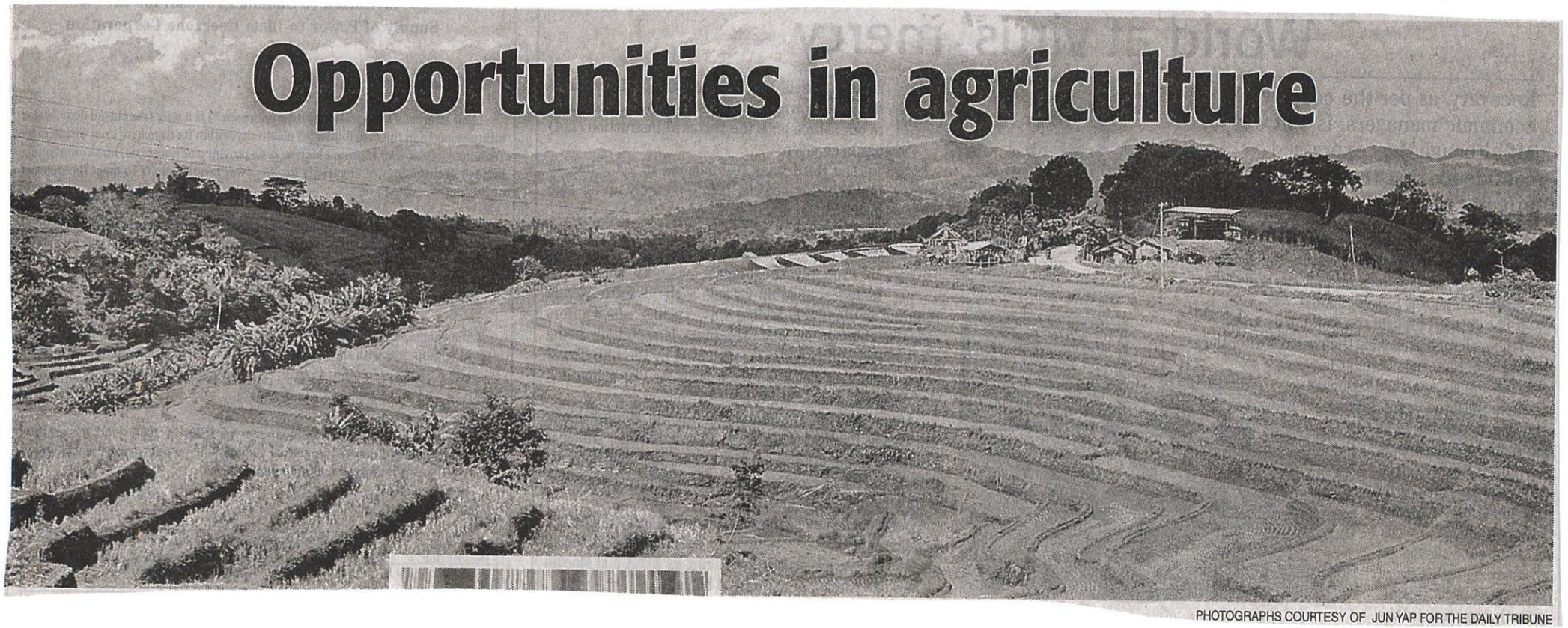
Opportunities in agriculture



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PART 2 of 2

THE not so discovered rice terraces in Barangay Codcod of San Carlos City, Negros Occidental, is a refreshing sight for adventurous tourists.

Since agriculture is considered as the backbone of the country's economy and the agricultural sector plays a very crucial role in shaping the nation's overall economic growth and development, it is just proper to share with the readers the hardships and victories of the stakeholders

In behalf of the *Daily Tribune*, I humbly would like to welcome and express my gratitude to the readers of the maiden edition of Agripportunity section.

But this would not have been possible without the support and trust of the management and editorial board of this respectable newspaper.

Foremost among the reasons why this writer was inspired to conceptualize this section was the knowledge and guidance that a knowledgeable and highly admired agriculture journalist have shared to me – even during the remaining days of his life, the late Zac Sarian.

AN improvised solar-powered pump provides water to residents of a small community.

Agriculture likewise plays a significant role in terms of employment, involving about 40 percent of Filipino workers, while contributing an average of 20 percent to the GDP.

Barely two weeks before he joined the Creator last December, Sir Zac sent me a short but very meaningful handwritten message which I will treasure in my whole lifetime.

With this, kindly join me in this advocacy of bringing worthwhile information on developments in the country's agricultural sector.

WITH practical technology, even a young lady can now easily weave silk in the remote barangays.

AGRI KA NA RITO
JULIO YAP JR.

Vast sector

Since agriculture is considered as the backbone of the country's economy and the agricultural sector plays a very crucial role in shaping the nation's overall economic growth and development, it is just proper to share with the readers the hardships and victories of the stakeholders.

Agriculture likewise plays a significant role in terms of employment, involving about 40 percent of Filipino workers, while contributing an average of 20 percent to the Gross Domestic Product or GDP.

Being an agriculture-based country, the Philippines has a land area of 30 million hectares, 47 percent of which is agricultural land.

The situation being such, the sector aims for food security, sustainability of the natural resource base, social equity and global competitiveness.

Agribusiness

Even the Trade department defines "agribusiness" as referring to agriculture-related activities that put farmers, processors, distributors and consumers within a system that produces, processes, transports, markets and distributes agricultural products.

TRADITIONALLY woven cloth can still command a high price owing to its unique designs.

INDIGENOUS People in Negros Occidental continue to treasure their traditional weapons handed to them by their ancestors.

WITHOUT bees, plants would set fewer seeds and will have lower reproductive success.

Transformation of agricultural farming into a thriving agribusiness-driven sector entails acquiring farming technologies, training in more sophisticated farming techniques, creating stable supply chains, establishing transport and agricultural infrastructure, investing and research and development and securing a reliable property rights regime.

Inclusive growth and rural dev't

These activities can contribute not only in diversifying and increasing the value of agribusiness outputs, but also contribute to the inclusive growth and rural development agenda of the Philippine government.

Due to these, the agribusiness sector is positioned to largely contribute to the development of the Philippine economy.

In the succeeding editions of Agripportunity, we will be discussing the seven branches of agriculture, such as agronomy, horticulture, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery science, agricultural engineering and of course home science.

Join us in this advocacy of creating a doable prospect for the Filipino farmers... *Agri Ka Na Rito...!*

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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ECHOstore to sell organic goods certified by Naturland

ECHOstore said it will start selling Naturland-certified organic products following the forging of a partnership between the two sustainable lifestyle entities that seek to boost organic farming in the country.

The company said it has partnered with Naturland, a Germany-based farmers association and organic agriculture certifier, with the former becoming the first store in the country to sell products certified by Naturland.

The products that would be first sold at the ECHOstore are virgin coconut oil, turmeric powder and tea from Davao, and muscovado sugar from Negros.

"Although having offered food products for some time now, we decided to replace them step by step by Naturland certified organic products to provide orientation for customers in this crowded market of natural and organic products," ECHOstore Founder Pacita U. Juan said in a statement.

Juan, who has been an advocate for organic products for 15 years, said Naturland's organic certification standards "go clearly beyond government requirements."

Juan said ECHOstore has dedicated a special section in its online store for Naturland certified organic products. She added that the products would also be available in the company's physical store in Makati.

Naturland International Development Manager Marco Schlueter said the partnership would "help boost organic farming in the Philippines and to create better livelihoods" for smallholder farmers.

"We partnered with ECHOstore because of their long-standing commitment to the organic movement," Schlueter said.

"Moreover, in the midst of the worldwide Covid-19 crisis our more than 3,000 Naturland farmers in the Philippines can thus find new market opportunities. With ECHOstore they can now also sell their produce in the local market, additionally to their overseas exports."

Urmatt Group of Thailand Chairman Arvind Narula lauded the partnership noting that the Philippines is "now joining the club of Southeast Asian countries developing their domestic organic markets—after being mainly concentrated on exporting to European Union and the United States." ***Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas***

The Manila Times®

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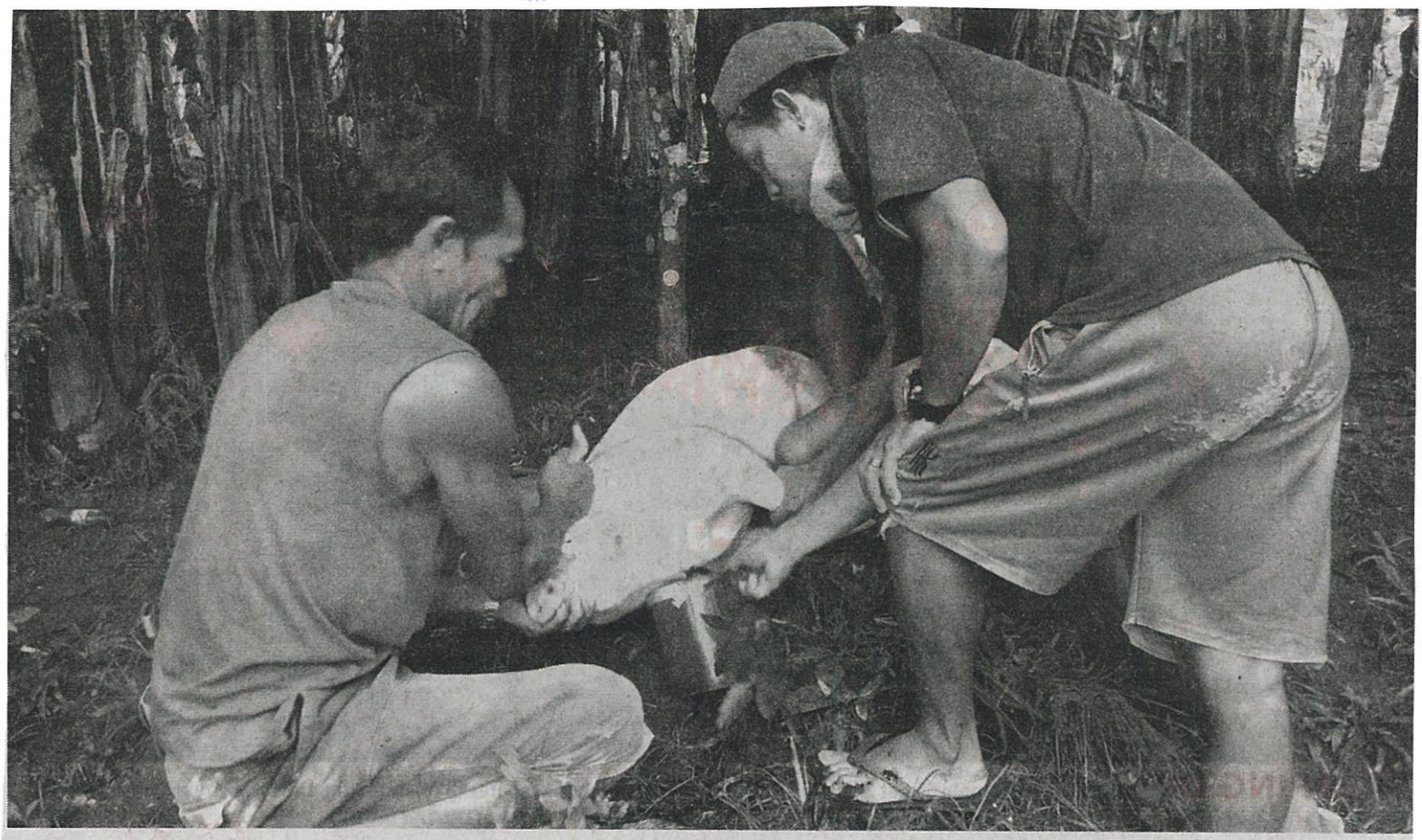

ANXIETY OVER ASF The massive slaughtering of pigs by local hog raisers is ongoing in many parts of Leyte because of fears over the spread of African swine fever (ASF), which has reportedly affected three towns of Leyte since last week. PHOTO BY NESTOR L. ABREMATEA

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

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Cebu bans export of live hogs for 6 months

CEBU CITY- For the next six months, exporting of live hogs and sows from the province of Cebu will be prohibited.

Cebu Governor Gwen Garcia has signed Executive Order (EO) No. 8 prohibiting live hogs raised in farms and in backyards in Cebu to be exported.

"There is an urgent need to strictly regulate the export of live hogs and sows to other areas of the country in order to protect the pig supply in the Province of Cebu," the EO read.

Some areas in the country are experiencing shortage of pork supply due to the African Swine Fever (ASF).

Some ASF-affected areas are getting their pork supply from Cebu, which remained free of the disease.

With this, Garcia said the province is taking steps to avoid pork shortage in Cebu.

"When there's a shortage, there will be a price increase. We don't want that to happen here," Garcia said.

The governor clarified that exporting pork by-products will still be allowed.

In a meeting with members of the Central Visayas Pork Producers Cooperative (CeViPPco) on January 29, the governor was told that for the month of January this year, the local supply of pork was not enough to meet the province's demand of 4,226 metric tons. **(Calvin D. Cordova)**

BusinessWorld
INCREASE YOUR BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

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China goes on pricey US corn shopping spree amid thin supply at home

FORT COLLINS, Colo. — China had been relatively quiet in the US corn market since its record buying streak last summer, but a string of much more expensive bookings this week would seem to be proof of the country's dire need for the yellow grain.

No one knows exactly how big China's corn stockpiles are, but the sudden deficit of usable grain in the country appears to have manifested in rising prices, extremely active state corn auctions and record imports.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) this week confirmed three separate sales of US corn to China for delivery in the 2020-21 year that ends on Aug. 31. Those sales total 3.74 million tons, or 147 million bushels.

One of those bookings, the 1.7 million tons announced on Thursday, is the sixth-biggest single-day sale of US corn in records back to 1977. Two of the July 2020 sales to China sit in the top five.

Frequent, large daily sales announcements, or flash sales, of US corn to China became common last July. But prior to this week, there had not been one explicitly to the Asian country since the 420,000 tons confirmed on Oct. 14.

Many analysts assumed China was sitting out due to high prices. By mid-October, US corn prices had risen at least 25% since Aug. 1 to the highest levels in more than a year. As of mid-October, year-end US corn supplies were seen 40% higher than the current expectation.

US prices are now around 30% above the mid-October levels and about 65% higher than on Aug. 1. But on the export front and compared with competitors, the US product is still the best deal around.

INTRIGUING POSSIBILITIES

Chinese corn prices started rallying in early 2020, before the US ones. Midway through last year, corn prices in China were up 15% on the year, reaching a 40% gain in mid-October. Dalian corn futures reached all-time highs earlier this month, up 50% from a year earlier, though they have backed off a bit since then.

But even as both have rallied, Chinese corn prices are about double the US ones and are trading at a premium not seen since Beijing in 2015 cut minimum price supports for Chinese corn farmers, before later eliminating them altogether.

China's willingness to book so much US corn despite the high prices not only suggests the corn is needed, but it also opens a wide range of possibilities on the trade front. How much more corn does China need? Will it buy substantially more than anyone expected?

In terms of marketing year exports, US shipping capacity will somewhat limit the amount of corn that can reasonably go out by Aug. 31. March through June is when US corn shipments tend to reach their maximum, and this period should be especially busy this year given the historically slow pace of shipments versus sales.

USDA's Beijing attaché this week maintained 2020-21 China corn imports at 22 million tons, some 4.5 million above USDA's official estimate. Others see even higher possibilities, such as consultancy AgResource, which this week pegged that number at about 25 million-27 million tons.

AgResource and other firms have suggested China's corn import demand will likely grow in the coming years.

RECORDS FALLING

Since mid-October, weekly corn sales to China have been light compared with volumes from previous weeks and months. Other commitments have chugged along at a steady pace since then, generally reaching at least average levels in most weeks.

As of Jan. 21, US corn bookings covered 75% of USDA's record 2020-21 export forecast of 64.8 million tons (2.55 billion bushels), comfortably ahead of normal. But adding in this week's flash sales, which total 4.06 million tons and include two sales to unknown destinations, boosts the percentage sold to at least 81%.

That is assuming that none of this week's flashes were included in last week's sales total. If they are all included in the current week's total that will be reported next Thursday, it would make for a record weekly volume in net corn sales, old-crop plus new-crop, since at least 2008.

Whenever accumulated sales grow this large, there is always a risk of some cancellations. That could derail the impending weekly sales record, though there is no specific reason to believe cancellations were prominent this past week.

It is interesting to note that back in 2013-14, US corn export sales to China neared record levels early in the marketing year, though a large portion of those orders were eventually cancelled.

USDA earlier this month reduced the 2020-21 US corn export target by about 2.5 million tons based on smaller supplies. Given this week's huge flashes, the agency is likely to face scrutiny from market participants if it does not raise the number in its next report due on Feb. 9. — ***Reuters***