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Entire Bicol now affected by ASF

African swine fever has reached Masbate, the remaining ASF-free province in the Bicol region.

In a document signed by Department of Agriculture (DA)-Bicol executive director Rodel Tornilla, it was confirmed that the swine disease was detected in hogs owned by Mayor Arturo Virtucio of Aroroy town.

The DA did not give details on the number of infected hogs.

The first ASF case in Bicol was detected in Camarines Norte in July and Albay in September. The swine disease spread to Catanduanes last December and Sorsogon last month.

Men bathe hogs in a backyard piggery in Cagayan de Oro on Wednesday. Authorities confirmed ASF outbreaks in the city and Misamis Oriental.
GERRY LEE GORIT

'Review protocols'

Meanwhile, Ormoc City Mayor Richard Gomez urged Agriculture Secretary William Dar to review the protocols in dealing with ASF, particularly concerning the movement of hogs from Mindanao that pass through Leyte.

Gomez questioned why hogs bound for Manila pass through Ormoc.

"They want to pass through Ormoc *na wala pang* infection. *Kung magdala ang mga baboy ng* virus, *kami naman ang tatamaan ng* ASF," he said.

Gomez said the government could use Navy ships to deliver hogs to Metro Manila rather than risk the rest of Leyte to the infection.

Border control measures were implemented in Ormoc after ASF cases were confirmed in Abuyog, La Paz, Javier, and Palo last month.

The DA classified the eastern portion of Leyte as a "red zone" after recording new cases. Under ASF protocols, movement of hogs from virus-free areas through red zones is prohibited.

In a recent dialogue with Gomez, DA regional director Angel Enriquez said they would install disinfection trucks in Liloan Port in Southern Leyte, where trucks from Mindanao will dock, and at the Macabug boundary of Ormoc.

Enriquez said the trucks could be escorted from border to border to ensure that they would not make a pitstop.

In a meeting of mayors of the fourth district of Leyte on Tuesday, it was agreed to to allow the movement of hogs within its borders to stabilize local supply.

– **Louise Maureen Simeon**

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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DA forms panel to oversee ASF vax development, manufacturing program

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas @jearcalas

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has formed a technical working committee (TWC) that would oversee the African swine fever (ASF) vaccine development and manufacturing in the country.

PART 1 OF 2

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PART 2 OF 2

Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar issued Special Order (SO) 125 on February 5, 2021 that formalized the creation of the TWC.

The DA, meanwhile, has confirmed the outbreak of the ASF in Masbate, marking the presence of the fatal hog virus in all provinces of Bicol region.

In a letter addressed to Aroroy, Masbate Mayor Arturo Virtucio, DA Regional Field Office V Regional Executive Director Rodel P. Tornilla said hog organs and whole blood specimens submitted by Virtucio tested positive for ASF.

The letter was dated February 9, the same day the samples were tested. Tornilla has informed Virtucio of the government's "new protocols" on swine depopulation.

In a webinar on Thursday, Eugene P. Mende, Philippine Veterinary Drug Association president, said the incursion of ASF in Masbate could have been caused by "viajeros" who easily penetrated the province's port.

"The viajeroes easily enter the port of Masbate without proper accountability in terms of audit and disinfection. They easily travel anywhere," Mende, who is also a member of the government's ASF Crisis Management Task Force, said in Filipino.

Based on the government's latest zoning plan, Masbate was the lone province in the Bicol region without a reported ASF outbreak prior to the February 9 confirmation.

Under the SO, the TWC is responsible for coordinating with the United States Department of Agriculture, United Kingdom's Pirbright Institute and other international research institutions "regarding the licensing, material transfer, development and manufacture of ASF vaccine."

The TWC would also "facilitate the clinical trials of ASF vaccines that will be made available to ensure safety and efficacy and the eventual registration of such."

The group would also be responsible for fast-tracking the procurement of commercially available ASF vaccines to kick-start the country's nationwide vaccination program.

Dar also instructed the TWC to "formulate national policies and guidelines for ASF vaccine development, trial and manufacturing."

The TWC would be chaired by Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) Director Reildrin G. Morales and National Livestock Program (NLP) Director Ruth S. Miclat-Sonaco.

The members of the TWC are: Philippine Carabao Center (PCC) OIC-Deputy Executive Director Claro N. Mingala; UP Los Baños College of Veterinary Medicine Assistant Professor Remil L. Galay; Central Luzon State University College of Veterinary Science and Medicine Dean Virginia M. Venturina and National Advisory Committee for Animal Disease Control and Emergency Chair Edna Zenaida V. Villacorte.

The TWC would also include representatives and leaders from the private sector: National Federation of Hog Farmers Inc. President Chester Warren Y. Tan, Robina Farms Inc. Director Dante J. Palabrica, Philippine Veterinary Medical Association President Corazon P. Occidental and Philippine College of Swine Practitioners President Zoilo M. Lapuz.

Former BAI Director Ronnie Domingo, who is now the head of the PCC, earlier told the BUSINESSMIRROR that the country is being cautious about ASF vaccine rollout by undertaking necessary technical consultations regarding the matter.

"Unlike the Philippines, China went into rapid development and deployment of ASF vaccines. The new strain issue can be considered as part of the unwanted consequence of inadequate vaccine efficacy and biosafety testing," Domingo said via SMS.

"[The Philippines] has not yet approved any ASF vaccine. DA is arranging vaccine development research with several foreign institutions. Technical consultations are being made to prevent such adverse effects," he added.

Reuters reported last month that a new strain of the fatal ASF virus has been detected in China that was reportedly caused by illegal vaccines.

The new ASF strain discovered in China is missing one or two key genes present in the wild ASF virus and doesn't kill pigs, according to the Reuters report. However, the new strain causes reduction in the number of healthy piglets, the report added.

In a virtual press briefing last Tuesday, Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar disclosed that they have been in talks with the United Kingdom and now with Vietnam for possible trials of their respective ASF vaccines in the Philippines.

"We have coordinated with the United Kingdom and they are positive in our efforts to also have these vaccines introduced properly and massively used in the country," Dar said.

The ASF, which is fatal to pigs but not harmful to humans, has resulted in the culling of about 500,000 pigs, based on latest figures disclosed by Dar.

Manila Standard

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'P40-b Bayanihan funds idle'

By Macon Ramos-Araneta and Maricel V. Cruz

WITH almost P40 billion of the funds allotted to address gaps in the country's COVID-19 response measures still not released, Senator Francis Pangilinan sought Thursday a Senate probe on the snail-paced disbursement and utilization of funds under Bayanihan 2.

Pangilinan filed Senate Resolution 647 after an online survey in Southeast Asia showed that a majority or 53.7 percent of its Filipino respondents from a more specialized cohort than respondents in

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'P40-b...

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national surveys disapproved of the government's handling of the pandemic.

Findings by the Singapore-based ASEAN Studies Center released Wednesday showed that among Southeast Asian countries, Filipinos in the policy, research, business, civil society, and media communities had the lowest approval rating for their government's response to the pandemic.

According to the report of the Office of the President submitted to the Senate January 4, only a total of P103.24 billion of the P140 billion Bayanihan 2 funds had been released.

In Senate Resolution 647, Pangilinan pointed out the delays in the release of the salary of contact tracers, hazard pay and special allowances of health workers, cash subsidies to jeepney drivers, and P83 billion of funds of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, as well as the underspending of the Departments of Transportation, Public Works and Highways, and Agriculture.

"These delays and underspending are unacceptable given that Bayanihan 2 was signed into law September 11, 2020," Pangilinan said.

At last week's Senate hearing, the DA revealed that project implementation under the Bayanihan 2 was only at 25 percent, with no measures so far to address the African swine flu that has crippled the P200-billion hog industry and caused the drastic rise of prices of pork in the market.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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22 hog farms probed for price-supply manipulation

By MARC JAYSON CAYABYAB and ROBERTZON RAMIREZ

The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) has inspected 22 hog farms in Bulacan for possible manipulation of prices and hoarding of pork in the market.

The Bureau of Customs (BOC), meanwhile, yesterday reported shredding at least one container of alleged "hog casings" or intestines worth P1.5 million at its facility in San Pascual, Batangas.

In Bulacan, NBI agents visited hog farms in Sta. Maria, San Jose del Monte, San Ildefonso, Angat and Baliuag, Bulacan on Wednesday, NBI-National Capital Region director Cesar Bacani told **The STAR** yesterday.

The NBI was tasked by the Department of Justice to go after pork hoarders and price manipulators.

NBI agent Yuri Beltran said they would look into whether or not the

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22 hog From Page 1

supply of pigs was being manipulated by the hog farms.

"We will follow the trail (of the pork) to find out if the supply is being prevented from reaching the market," Beltran said in an *ABS-CBN* news report.

The national government has imposed a price cap on pork and chicken, which compelled retailers and importers to go on a pork holiday to avoid selling at a loss.

In a statement, the BOC said that destroying the hog casings is in compliance with the provisions of the Republic Act 10863, or the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act, particularly on the "Disposition of Goods Injurious to Public Health."

The BOC added that the effort was also part of its campaign to free up storage facilities of abandoned and illegally shipped items to further improve the country's trade facilitation.

In Metro Manila, vendors have started receiving hogs from Visayas and Mindanao and some parts of Luzon.

The Department of Agriculture said about 8,000 hogs have already been shipped to Metro Manila and distributed to major wet markets in the capital.

Yesterday alone, 3,000 hogs equivalent to 200 metric tons from General Santos arrived in Manila.

Pork products transported to Manila are largely sourced from Ilocos, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Western Visayas, Northern Mindanao and Soccksargen.

"The total volume they have committed is at 4,860 hogs daily and if we look at the average requirement, it's at 4,000 per day. So that level is manageable," Agriculture Undersecretary Ariel Cayanan said.

Executive Order 124 puts a 60-day cap on pork *kasim* at P270 per kilogram, pork *liempo* at P300 and chicken at P160 a kilo in Metro Manila markets.

But due to logistics and transport constraints, some vendors still cannot comply with the cap and can only sell at around P330 to P350 a kilo.

"From the height of P400 a kilo, we are slowly working that out that's why we are bringing in more pork to Manila," Cayanan said.

Calabarzon is expected to supply 2,690 hogs daily, Northern Mindanao and Soccksargen with 1,429 hogs each, Ilocos with 926, Mimaropa with 500 and Western Visayas with 429 hogs.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar lauded the private sector and hog stakeholders for helping in stabilizing supply and prices in Metro Manila.

"Despite some vendors and traders going on a pork holiday last Monday, we can see that business is picking up with initial hog deliveries from Mindanao, Visayas and Luzon, enabling market retailers to comply with the ceiling prices of pork, and with enough profit margin," Dar said.

"Based on the initial outcome of our interventions, and with the help of the private sector, we can say that we were able to hurdle the shortage," he said.

Food summit defended

Meanwhile, Malacañang yesterday defended its decision to call for a food security summit, saying a new strategy is needed to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque announced on Wednesday the executive department's call for a food summit.

Mindanao Development Authority chairman and former agriculture secretary Emmanuel Piñol took offense on the announcement, saying it appeared that he knew nothing about food security planning. In an online post, Piñol said it seemed that the idea to hold a food summit only surfaced now when a food security master plan was one of the "major undertakings" of the agriculture department in 2018. He also noted that a food security summit that sought to address food shortage was already done more than two years ago.

Asked to react to Piñol's statement, Roque said the food summit is necessary because the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the everyday lives of Filipinos.

"Assuming that there was a previous food summit, the pandemic is really a game changer. We never thought there would be a pandemic of this scale and scope and we still need a food summit," Roque said at a press briefing. – **With Alexis Romero, Louise Maureen Simeon**

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
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ASF detected in hog samples in Masbate

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has detected African Swine Fever (ASF) in Masbate, Bicol, a letter from the DA to Aroroy Mayor Arturo Virtucio showed. A document from DA showed that organs and blood samples that were taken from hogs in Aroroy, Masbate have been tested positive for ASF, a fatal animal swine disease. As of January 9, ASF has already spread to 12 regions and 38 provinces in the Philippines, affecting 447 municipalities and cities and as many as 2,311 barangays. The deadly virus, which has been in the country since 2019, already resulted in the death and culling of 436,423 hogs. The most affected island-region so far is Luzon, while the provinces with the most ASF outbreaks are Bulacan, Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Isabela, Pangasinan, Quezon, Davao Occidental, Camarines Sur, among others. (Madelaine B. Miraflor)

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Proposed tariffs will harm farmers

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

The newly proposed tariff reduction will harm, not help, our farmers.

In the first place, what are tariffs for?

As quoted from investopedia.com: "Governments impose tariffs to raise revenues and protect industries." So when tariffs are to be reduced, the opposite will happen.

For the swine volumes inside the quota (minimum access volume, or MAV), the 30-percent tariff will be decreased to 5 percent for the next six months and 10 percent for the succeeding six months. For those outside the quota, 40 percent will go down to 15 percent in the next six months and 20 percent for the succeeding period.

If these tariff reductions decrease government revenue and lessen farmer protection, why propose this at all?

For background, it should be known that tariffs are determined at a level that will protect farmers from imports, but at the same time, low enough to force them to be competitive. Since the swine tariff levels have been set at 30 percent and 40 percent, the reason for decreasing tariffs is not because we are ready to compete at lower levels, but because we need more imports immediately. This is to cover our sudden severe shortage because of the African swine fever (ASF). Our farmers will not be able to compete at the 5 percent to 10 percent levels.

We must, indeed, increase supply—not necessarily at the farmers' expense. The shortage is because of the ASF, but that is not the farmers' fault. Some even say it is partly the government's fault because of inadequate border controls that failed in preventing ASF entry. If other governments did it successfully, why not ours?

The government now wants to bring in imports even cheaper than current levels, when they are already cheaper than our local products. So why give importers and traders even more profits when they are already enjoying enough? The result of decreased tariffs is less protection for farmers and decreased government revenue. This revenue should instead be used to help our farmers improve local supply.

There is definitely profiteering with pork prices at P440 a kilo, instead of the P330 to 360 range submitted by stakeholders to the government. But the government's mistaken price range of P270 to P300 has made the product disappear. What we see now are very large subsidies to enable the product to be sold at that low range. These resources are better used by correcting the price ceilings and using the saved subsidy money to support our farmers' increased production.

Definitely, profiteering should be severely penalized. But this should be done with the correct reasonable P330 to P360 price ceiling. A better alternative is the more flexible suggested retail price, which the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has used very successfully to penalize profiteers.

An example of using the saved revenue from unnecessary subsidies is providing sufficient insurance for each ASF casualty. This way, farmers hesitating to grow hogs because of ASF will now do so because of this insurance. In addition, those hiding the ASF casualties will now reveal them, thus helping focus our anti-ASF activities on the correct areas.

The proposed MAV expansion from 54,000 to 162,000 tons has consequences that Department of Agriculture (DA) senior officials may not know about. The additional 108,000 tons will give the importers even lower costs, even though they don't need it because they are already making enough profits. But in addition, the decreased costs to them of only P15 from the product's price of over P300 is not likely to change their decision.

On the other hand, this means a loss of P1.62 billion (P15 times 108,000 tons) in lost government revenue, which can help the farmers increase supply. A plea of the farmers is that collected tariffs for their products should be plowed back to help them, instead of going to the general fund and used for other purposes. If rice tariffs go back to rice, why not do that for other products like swine?

An added concern stated during the Feb. 1 Senate hearing is the added corruption risk. Since who gets the added quota worth P1.62 billion is discretionary, a person reportedly terminated for alleged MAV corruption is now back in the MAV committee. This allegation is now under review.

On the proposed rice tariff reduction for non-Asean countries from 40 to 60 percent to 35 percent, the same logic applies. Rice tariffication is definitely good. But it needs an added safeguard measure. The tariff that equates imported to local rice is 70 to 85 percent. The temporary added effective tariff to approach this level was not given. This resulted in farmers losing 30 to 50 percent of their previous incomes. But instead of increasing the 35-percent tariff, the opposite is being recommended: the 40 to 50 percent non-Asean tariff is being decreased to 35 percent. One can imagine how the rice farmers must feel betrayed.

These current proposals do the opposite of what tariffs are meant to do. Because they harm farmers and waste government revenue that should be used to help them, these proposals should definitely be disapproved. INQ

The author is Agriwatch chair, former secretary of Presidential Programs and Projects, and former undersecretary of the DA and the DTI. Contact is Agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com

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WHAT'S DRIVING PRICES UP

SWINE FEVER DEPLETES PH HOG INVENTORY BY 24%

By Karl R. Ocampo
@KAROcampo_

The country's hog inventory dropped by 24 percent in January, its lowest beginning stock in 25 years, as the African swine fever (ASF) devastated commercial and backyard piggeries in many regions, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The PSA also reported that the number of grower pigs—or those used for breeding—were reduced by 29 percent.

Eleven of the country's 17 regions recorded lower outputs while both commercial and backyard farms saw a sharp drop in their inventories.

These were the Cordillera Autonomous Region, Ilocos region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon), Bicol, Central Visayas, Davao region, Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos), Caraga and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

In a country where pork is considered the main source of protein, the widespread presence of ASF is alarming.

Rising pork prices

The disease catapulted pork prices by as much as 44 percent, prompting the government to impose price ceilings on pork sold in Metro Manila's public markets and supermarkets.

Hog raisers and traders, however, protested the price caps by refusing to supply pork to market sellers since Monday in order to cut further losses.

Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said the country had a shortfall of 400,000 metric tons of pork. Given the local shortage, industry experts said outsourcing would be the likeliest option and that somebody would need to foot the bill amounting to about P60 billion.

"The industry would need money—lots of it—to combat ASF," said Jess Cham, president of Meat Importers and Traders Association.

> **Those who decided to stay [in this business] are taking a gamble**
>
> **Chester Warren Tan**
> President, National Federation of Hog Producers Inc.

"ASF is a global concern. Other countries took 20 years to eradicate it, and they have the logistics and technology," Cham said.

'High-risk business'

Chester Warren Tan, president of the National Federation of Hog Producers Inc., said that in the next five to eight years, hog raising "will continue to be a high-risk business."

"Those who decided to stay are taking a gamble and will need the support of the government, all the industry stakeholders, to stabilize prices and bring production up," Tan said.

Concerned parties have yet to agree on how to approach the problem. Producers want the government to extend financial aid to the local industry to encourage former hog raisers to reinvest, while economists suggest reduced tariffs on pork imports to immediately squash the high retail prices.

The government is trying to do both, stressing that it aims to complete hog repopulation and recovery programs in the next two to three years.

Until then, consumers are expected to rely on imported frozen products. Imports are currently dominating freezers in cold-chain facilities, according to the National Meat Inspection Service.

On Wednesday, the regional office of the Department of Agriculture (DA) confirmed the presence of the disease in Masbate, the third Bicol province to be stricken after Camarines Sur and Catanduanes.

Industry players said the disease might have come from Bicol mainland and slipped through Masbate's seaport in the capital city, where security protocols could be lax.

Depopulation efforts are now being discussed, although the DA has yet to confirm an outbreak.

In Albay, authorities placed six towns and a city in the province on "hog traffic lockdown" after declaring these areas "red flag zones" for ASF.

A red flag means that the entry and exit of live hogs and processed pork products from these areas would be prohibited as a measure against the spread of the disease.

Areas on lockdown are the towns of Pioduran, Polangui, Oas, Daraga, Bacacay and Malinao, and Ligao City, said Dr. Pancho Mella, chief of the provincial veterinary office.

So far, Mella said 827 hogs in the province had been culled since late last year to stop the spread of the disease. The latest to be slaughtered were 109 hogs in Malinao after they tested positive for the disease.

A total of 163 hog raisers in Albay have suffered losses estimated at P9 million and have yet to recover, Mella said.

Misamis Oriental

In Misamis Oriental province, agriculture authorities confirmed that ASF caused the deaths of hogs in two towns and two villages in Cagayan de Oro City in the last week of January.

Councilor George Goking, chair of the city council's trade and commerce committee, said he expected prices of pork to go up in public markets.

Dr. Benjamin Resma, the provincial veterinarian, told a radio interview on Wednesday that at least 37 hogs raised in backyard farms died in the towns of Manticao and Initao.

—WITH REPORTS FROM MAR S. ARGUELLES AND JIGGER J. JERUSALEM INQ

THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

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ASF makes its way to Northern Mindanao

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MISORCARES

MISAMIS Oriental veterinary office employees visit backyard farmers to disseminate information about the African swine fever and how they can prevent contamination.

BY PERSEUS ECHEMINADA

Department of Agriculture (DA) Northern Mindanao confirmed on Thursday an outbreak of the African Swine Fever (ASF) in Misamis Oriental and in outskirt villages in Cagayan de Oro (CdO) City.

In a press briefing, DA director Carline Collado said laboratory test results showed ASF cases in Barangay Jampason in Initao and Barangnay Pagawan in Maticao, both in Misamis Oriental, and San Simon and Mambuaya villages in CdO.

"Rest assured that the regional ASF task force, local government units and other hog industry agencies are doing their best to eliminate, manage and control this viral disease," she said.

Dr. Benjamen Resma, Misamis Oriental veterinary office chief, said depopulation of hogs in affected villages are underway to prevent the spread of the ASF. Affected farmers will be compensated P5,000 per head by the DA and P2,000 by the provincial government.

The provincial government has already suspended the transports of pigs from commercial farms.

Agriculture officials see increase in pork prices due to additional biosecurity measures.

Misamis Oriental Governor Bambi Emano said more than 30 heads have been culled even before the outbreak was confirmed.

Hog dealers from outside the province and returning residents who brought with them pork products from areas with ASF cases were being investigated as causes of the outbreak.

ASF-affected pigs usually manifest high fever, reddish areas on the neck, chest, and extremities and internal bleeding that will lead to death within two to 10 days.

Culling

In the Visayas, about 3,000 pigs have been culled in Leyte province since January as authorities try to stop ASF.

Depopulation is being carried out within the 500-meter radius of areas with confirmed ASF carriers.

Affected farmers will be compensated P5,000 per head by the Department of Agriculture and P2,000 by the provincial government.

"ASF spread has not been totally controlled since there are new areas added to the infected zones and these are closer to Tacloban City, the regional capital," DA Eastern Visayas regional information officer Francis Rosaroso said.

As of Wednesday, there were still pending test results from samples of over 300 hogs with ASF symptoms. Only the Bureau of Animal Industry's Animal Disease Diagnosis and Reference Laboratory in the National Capital Region can examine samples for confirmatory testing.

ASF has been detected in the towns of Abuyog, La Paz, Javier, Dulag, Tanauan, Palo and MacArthur. Leyte was the first province in the Visayas to confirm an ASF infection.

Initial investigation showed the virus could have been transmitted to local farms through an infected boar used for mating and by traders who may have fed their stocks with contaminated food.

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL

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DA to hold food security summit

THE Duterte administration, through the Department of Agriculture, has sought the conduct of a food security summit to discuss ways to address the current issues hounding the agriculture sector.

"The Executive branch is calling for a food security summit, with the Department of Agriculture as lead agency, to continue to boost and develop the agri-fishery sector through the cooperation, coordination and collaboration of the local government units and the private sector's industry players and stakeholders," Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said.

Roque said the summit would help the current administration craft a national food security plan that would boost food production and benefit farmers and fisherfolk in the country.

"As part of the President Rodrigo Roa Duterte's whole-of-government approach, the summit aims to develop a National Food Security Plan to achieve our vision of a food-secure and resilient Philippines with prosperous farmers and fisherfolk, and where consumers have continuous flow of food and producers have continuous productivity, unhampered movement of agricultural commodities, accessibility and price stability," he said.

The plan to hold a good security summit comes in the wake of rising prices of food commodities such as pork, chicken, and vegetables.

Roque, however, did not mention as to when the summit would be held.

He said the participation of local government units and the private sector in the summit is needed to modernize the country's agri-fishery sector.

Roque also stressed that the food security summit aims to discuss mitigation measures on several challenges the agriculture sector is facing, which include the price increase in pork products, drop in farmgate prices of palay (unhusked rice), and the onslaught of the African swine fever.

"It further seeks to present some models for agribusiness value-chain approach, LGU-led agri-fishery extension system, and strengthening the role and capacities of local price coordinating councils and regional development councils," he said.

Consumers have been bearing the brunt of sudden price increase in several food items over the past weeks.

On February 1, Duterte signed Executive Order 124 imposing a mandated price ceiling on selected pork and chicken products in Metro Manila for 60 days to ensure that basic necessities are "adequate, affordable, and accessible to all".

EO 124 imposes price cap of P270 per kilo for pork kasim and pigue, PP300 per kilo for pork liempo, and P160 per kilo for dressed chicken sold in the country's metropolis.

The implementation of price ceiling, according to the EO, would be in place for 60 days, unless Duterte decides to extend it upon the recommendation of the DA.

On Tuesday, Trade and Industry Sec. Ramon Lopez said his office is now coordinating with the DA to carry out the plan to lower the suggested retail price for imported pork in groceries and supermarkets.

Lopez said the SRP of imported pork in groceries and supermarkets will be lower than the price ceiling set for locally-sourced pork in wet markets.

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

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BOC DISPOSES OF ₱1.5-M HOG CASINGS FROM CHINA

By BETHEENA UNITE

The Bureau of Customs (BoC) disposed of recently a shipment of hog casings from China in a waste disposal facility in San Pascual, Batangas.

Through shredding and rendering, a container of hog casings amounting to ₱1.5 million was disposed of on February 2.

It was witnessed by Port of Manila (POM) Auction and Cargo Disposal Division Chief Enrico Turingan III, and representatives from the Bureau of Animal Industry, Philippine Coast Guard, and Commission on Audit.

According to POM District Collector Michael Angelo DC. Vargas, the disposal of the seized goods is in accordance with the provisions of Section 1145 (Disposition of Goods Injurious to Public Health) of the Republic Act No. 10863 or the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act.

"The condemnation was completed to ensure that goods injurious to public safety and health are properly disposed," Vargas said.

"The activity is also in line with the directive of Commissioner Rey Leonardo Guerrero to free-up storage facilities of abandoned and illegally shipped items to further improve trade facilitation," the district collector added.

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Davao eyed as the Philippines' chocolate capital

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

CITING Philippine Statistic Authority data that showed the bulk of the total annual cacao production came from Davao, Senator Cynthia Villar on Thursday sought to declare Davao City as the "Chocolate Capital of the Philippines" and Region XI, Davao, as the "Cacao Capital of the Philippines."

In her Sponsorship Speech on the proposed Senate Bill 1741, Villar said PSA records indicated that about 78.76 percent of the annual production of cacao in the Philippines came from the Davao region composed of Davao del Sur, Davao City, Davao del Norte, Davao Oriental and Davao de Oro and Davao Occidental. They are the top five producers.

The head of the Senate committee on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform also said there were more than 20,000 hectares of cacao farms in Davao, and Davao City, among the five provinces, had the largest area. It is targeting a total of more than 16,703 hectares dedicated for cacao," Villar said.

Villar's proposed bill seeks to recognize Davao "as the country's biggest producer of cacao and its vital contribution in making the Philippines world-renowned and sought after by chocolate makers."

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IN BRIEF

SL Agritech plans to issue P2-b debt

RICE producer SL Agritech Corp. plans to raise up to P2 billion from the issuance of debt paper.

Net proceeds from the fund-raising activity will be used to pay the company's short-term obligations and purchase rice and seed inventories from contract growers, it said.

SL Agritech received issuer credit rating of PRS Aa (corp.), with a stable outlook from Philippine Rating Services Corp. (PhilRatings) in relation to its planned issuance of up to P2 billion in commercial paper.

A company rated PRS Aa (corp.) means it has a strong capacity to meet financial commitments while stable outlook means that the rating is likely to be maintained in the next 12 months.

SL Agritech is one of the leading rice companies in the Philippines and exports high-quality rice seeds and premium packaged rice. Its fully integrated operations from hybrid rice seed research and development, to the sale of premium rice products allow the company to maximize its resources. **Jenniffer B. Austria**

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Chicken production and farm-gate prices dropped in 4th quarter

By MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR

The country's chicken production went down from October to December of last year but it didn't result in higher farm-gate prices, the latest data from Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed.

Based on the PSA data, the country's total chicken production from October to December 2020 was estimated at 484.36 thousand metric tons (MT), live weight, which is lower by 7.9 percent compared with the previous year's same quarter output of 526.10 thousand MT, live weight.

Among the regions, Central Luzon was the top producer of chicken during the quarter with 167.79 thousand MT, live weight.

This was followed by CALABARZON with 81.66 thousand MT, live weight, and Northern Mindanao with 51.57 thousand MT, live weight.

Combined, these three regions accounted for 62.1 percent of the country's total chicken production.

Compared with their levels in the same period of a year ago, 12 regions posted decreases in production during the period with CALABARZON, recording the biggest decline of 17.0 percent.

In particular, this region registered a production of 81.66 thousand metric tons, live weight this quarter, from the 98.39 thousand MT, live weight in the fourth quarter of 2019.

As of January this year, the total chicken inventory in the country was estimated at 179.78 million birds. This was 0.9 percent higher than the 178.26 million birds recorded in the same period of 2020.

Native/improved chicken and layer chicken inventory increased by 3.1 percent and 4.2 percent, respectively, but stocks of broiler chicken decreased by 4.7 percent.

Despite the decline in production, which normally pushes the prices upward, the average farmgate price of broiler chicken in commercial farms during the quarter went down from ₱91.24 per kilogram (/kg), live weight, during the same period last year to ₱87.44/kg, live weight.

During the period, the highest farmgate price was recorded in December at ₱93.82/kg, live weight, while the lowest was quoted in October at ₱78.07/kg, live weight.

In a previous interview, United Broiler Raisers Association (UBRA) President Bong Inciong said the crisis being felt in the poultry industry now was brought about by COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and the government's decision not to stop poultry importation last year.

To recall, the Philippines experienced some sort of a supply glut in chicken at the early part and up to the middle of 2020 because lockdown restrictions resulted in the temporary closure of restaurants and hotels, which takes up the bulk of the supply for this farm commodity.

At the time, the poultry industry appealed to DA to temporarily stop the importation of poultry but such a request was not granted.

As a result, Inciong said a lot of poultry raisers decided to leave the business and decided to shift into another livelihood such as egg production, eventually pulling down the supply of chicken.

"The situation is serious for us," Inciong said. "We have never experienced anything like this."

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Colombia offers to supply PH with pork, beef; boost tourism

By GENALYN KABILING

The country's dwindling pork supply may get a shot in the arm from Colombia.

The South American country has offered to supply pork and beef to the Philippines and sought the government's assistance to make it this happen.

Colombia's interest to venture into meat trade with the country was relayed by new ambassador to the Philippines Marcela Ordoñez Fernandez during a meeting with President Duterte in Malacañang Wednesday.

"Let me focus now on our bilateral relation and start with commerce. The amount of goods that our two countries exchange has been growing and we wanted to grow a lot more," she said in her remarks at the Palace.

"We are interested in selling pork meat and beef to the Philippines and we would welcome, Mr. President, any support you can give us to accelerate the admissibility process," she added.

The latest offer from Colombia came as the government moves to boost the country's supply of pork and stabilize market prices.

Pork prices have recently gone up after local hog production was affected by the onslaught of African swine fever. Among the government's steps to address the situation are the imposition of a 60-day price ceiling on pork and chicken products sold in Metro Manila, increased hog shipment from Visayas and Mindanao to Luzon, and possibly more pork imports.

Apart from meat trading, Colombia is interested in boosting cooperative ties with the Philippines on tourism, education, defense and security.

"We also want to see an increase in foreign investment both ways as both your economy and my economy have a lot of potential," the ambassador said.

Fernandez informed Duterte that Colombia also wants "more tourism," citing the influx of Colombians to the Philippines.

"More and more Colombians are visiting the Philippines and we believe that Colombia has everything that the Filipinos love," she said. "We have the culture, we have the music, we have the dance and this brings me to all the exchanges that we hope to have between our countries," she added.

Colombia is likewise keen on enhancing the "orange economy" with the Philippines. "The orange economy or creative industries is a very important one, and both our countries strive in this," the ambassador said.

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BSP keeps rates steady, calls for food imports to ease inflation

By Daxim L. Lucas
@daxINQ

Saying that the Philippines likely faces higher inflation in the coming months, the central bank on Thursday decided to keep its key interest rate unchanged, beginning the "long pause" on monetary easing that Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Benjamin Diokno had indicated last week.

As this developed, the central bank chief said the seven-man Monetary Board called for "urgent and coordinated efforts" with government agencies in implementing nonmonetary interventions to give Filipino consumers access to "internationally competitively priced food" that would mitigate the impact of supply-side factors on inflation.

In an online press briefing, the country's top bank regulator said the Monetary Board had kept the interest rate on the overnight reverse repurchase facility steady at 2 percent—the current record low that was reached after a series of easing moves to counter the pandemic's effects on the economy last year.

The interest rates on the overnight deposit and lending facilities were likewise kept at 1.5 percent and 2.5 percent, respectively.

"The Monetary Board noted that inflation is likely to remain elevated in the coming months, reflecting the impact of supply constraints on domestic prices of key food commodities such as meat and vegetables as well as the recent uptick in international oil prices," Diokno said.

> **Inflation is likely to remain elevated in the coming months, reflecting the impact of supply constraints on prices of key food commodities and the recent uptick in international oil prices**
>
> **Monetary Board**

"At the same time, the latest baseline projections show inflation returning to within the target range of 2-4 percent over the policy horizon as supply-side influences subside," he added. "The Monetary Board also noted that inflation expectations continue to be anchored within the inflation target band."

The central bank chief said that the balance of risks to the inflation outlook now appears to be broadly balanced around the baseline path in 2021, but is seen to continue leaning toward the downside in 2022.

Tighter supply of meat products owing in part to the African swine fever outbreak in the country could lend further upside pressures on inflation, he explained.

However, the ongoing pandemic may continue to pose downside risks to demand and to the inflation outlook.

"While recent indicators of activity and sentiment have shown some improvement, the emergence of new variants of the virus and possible delays in mass vaccination programs continue to temper prospects for economic recovery and growth."

Diokno explained that the Monetary Board still viewed the current inflation outlook s being "manageable," and that the current environment "continues to allow the BSP to maintain an accommodative policy stance and thus complement crucial fiscal policy measures in supporting economic activity and market confidence." INQ

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Palay farmgate price rises 0.1% in second week of Feb.

THE average farmgate price of palay, or unmilled rice, rose 0.1% week-on-week to P16.72 per kilogram during the second week of February, with the price rising 4.6% from a year earlier, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

In its weekly update on palay, rice, and corn prices, the PSA said the average wholesale price of well-milled rice rose 0.2% to P37.37 while the retail price rose 0.1% to P40.93.

The average wholesale price of regular-milled rice fell 0.1% to P33.31 while the retail price fell 0.03% to P36.14.

The farmgate price of yellow corn grain fell 0.1% week-on-week to P12.51.

The average wholesale price of yellow corn grain fell 0.1% to P19.97 while the retail price fell 0.5% to P24.34.

The farmgate price of white corn grain rose 2.5% week-on-week to P13.82.

The average wholesale price of white corn grain fell 0.2% to P17.13 while the retail price fell 0.6% to P25.71. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

The Manila Times®

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Zamboanga food gardens bloom with 'makeover'

ZAMBOANGA CITY: Local youth groups have effectively turned idle lands into productive food gardens with the help of the advocacy group called "Kids Who Farm."

The Kids Who Farm, founded by Moncini Hinay and daughter Raaina Hinay, aims to inspire future farmers by educating the youth on the importance and value of food and farming.

The food gardens were implemented by the *Sangguniang Kabataan* (Youth Councils) of each *barangay* (village) as part of their efforts to improve food security in their communities. Referred to as Youth Food Gardens, each garden will be managed and maintained by the community youth.

Helping with the construction of these food gardens are the Sangguniang Kabataan Federation of Zamboanga City, the Zamboanga City Agriculturist Office, Rotary Club of Zamboanga City West, Rotary Club of Zamboanga City Central, JCI Zamboanga Inc., Seedbank Project, I Can Make A Difference Inc., Crimsonvironment, El Cosechas Soilless Gardening Solution and the Coca Cola Zamboanga City Plant.

Food gardens were built in the Barangays Tumaga, Sta. Maria, Divisoria and San Jose Gusu. The food garden in Tumaga was constructed behind the Barangay Government Center, to replace a 33-square-meter waste disposal area that had sat idle for many years. The same was done in Santa Maria, Divisoria and San Jose Gusu, in vacant lots owned by the Barangay Government.

Boasting hydroponics systems and containerized production that can host a wide variety of crops in a small area, the food gardens are aimed to address the cities' food security problems. By bringing farmland into the city, each garden brings food within reach of those who would otherwise have a hard time accessing their local markets.

The founders said they also intend for the food gardens to serve as an educational tool to help future generations grow an appreciation for farming.

"The truth is we're running out of farmers. There aren't enough young people interested in tending to the fields. Through these food gardens, we're hoping the next generation will learn to grow their own food, for their sakes and for the sake of their communities," the elder Hinay said.

The food gardens are part of the broader Youth Food Garden Project. Led by Kids Who Farm, the project looks to convert idle land into food gardens across Zamboanga City.

The father and daughter tandem are working to make sure the people of Zamboanga get enough to eat, while raising the next generation of small farmers. With the help of the Kids Who Farm core teammates Amina Shayne Halil, Khen Lexter Torres, Munir Akil, Abdulnasir Pandangan Jr. and Odessa Julienne Rebaya, they work with communities and with youth groups on efforts like the Youth Food Garden Project.

The elder Hinay stressed the importance of transforming idle land into productive spaces. The food gardens, he said, are proof of what can be done with land that is not being used.

"There's no such thing as idle land. Every bit of land can be made to serve the people living around it. These gardens bring nature into the city, provide food for those living around them, and make for a nice, cool space to spend time in," he explained.

The food gardens have already established gardens in Barangays Tulungatung, and Pasonanca, along with the new plots in Tumaga, Santa Maria, Divisoria and San Jose Gusu. Preparations are in place for similar gardens in Barangays Malagutay, Mercedes, Sinunuc, Santa Catalina and Lumbangan.

The Kids Who Farm and its partners are committed to building a food secure future for cities like Zamboanga. By inspiring young people to take to the farms and to turn idle land into prosperous gardens, Kids Who Farm is raising the next generation of agriculturalists so that everyone may have access to good food. **AL JACINTO**

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EDITORIAL

Food summit

FOR jobless, underemployed, low-salaried and hungry people, particularly during national emergencies and other trying times, overpricing, hoarding and profiteering are absolutely a no-no.

Aware of this, the national government, through concerned offices and agencies, wants to ensure food security and eradicate corruption, knowing fully well that grafters torpedo pro-poor programs.

It is public knowledge that corrupt government officials and employees waltz with unscrupulous traders during hard times, making it difficult for the authorities to pin down hoarders and profiteers.

"What's saddening, disgusting and lamentable is why Filipinos are reeling from food insecurity when in fact the Philippines is a known agricultural county," according to an aging rice farmer.

"Talagang hindi katanggap-tanggap ito dahil ang daming nakatiwangwang na lupain na iniwan ng mga magsasakang mas ginustong magtrabaho na lang sa labas ng bansa," the farmer added.

Thus, we commend President Rodrigo Duterte for calling a food security summit to discuss the problems confronting the agriculture sector, including the spike in pork prices and drop in farm gate prices of palay.

Likewise, the summit will discuss ways to develop the agri-fishery sector with the involvement of local government units (LGUs) and industry players, according to Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque.

The summit is part of Duterte's whole-of-government approach. It aims to develop a National Food Security Plan to achieve our vision of a food-secure Philippines,with prosperous farmers and fishers, he said.

The summit lead agency is the Department of Agriculture (DA) under Secretary William D. Dar.

By holding the food security summit, the government is on track in responding to the problems hounding the agri-fishery sector as the Philippines continues to battle the paralyzing COVID-19 pandemic.

Malaya
Business Insight

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Corn drops; soybeans down

SINGAPORE- Chicago corn futures fell 1.4 percent on Thursday, dropping to their lowest level in more than two weeks, as a smaller-than-expected decline in stocks weighed on the market for a second session.

Soybeans fell, while wheat slid for a second straight session.

The most-active corn contract on the Chicago Board Of Trade fell 1.4 percent to $5.27 a bushel, after hitting its lowest level since Jan. 26 at $5.25 a bushel earlier in the session.

Soybeans slipped 0.8 percent to $13.42-3/4 a bushel, after finishing down 3.4 percent in the previous session and wheat lost 0.4 percent at $6.33 a bushel, after ending 2.2 percent lower on Wednesday.

There are no signs that China's importers are going to add to their corn import binge, said Tobin Gorey, director of agricultural strategy at the Commonwealth bank of Australia. – ***Reuters***