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As COVID rages, ASF is another wake up call

The two-day 2021 National Food Security Summit (NFSS), which would distill discussions that have taken place in the past couple of months at regional levels, begins today with over 1,000 participants meeting – virtually, of course, in cognition of the pandemic.

Last Friday, about a dozen groups critical to the government's agricultural policies held the Farmers and Fisherfolks Congress 2021 (FFC) to decry what they pointed out as a decades-long abuse and neglect of the agriculture sector through inaction and misplaced policies.

BIZLINKS

REY GAMBOA

These groups have declared they would boycott the NFSS, which is a pity since their views could have provided important inputs that would have been heard and discussed in addressing issues and formulating future policies that they claim is misguided advice by government economists.

The NFSS in only on its second term, the first one having been held in October 2019 a few months after Agriculture Secretary William Dar assumed office. Being part of an extensive consultative network involving stakeholders in the agriculture sector should be seen as an opportunity not to be wasted.

ASF crisis

Of particular interest during the two-day summit is the rollout of two programs that would control the spread of and eradicate the African swine flu (ASF) at the barangay levels and repopulate the hog farms that had been decimated by the contagious virus.

The ASF epidemic, which has ravaged countless piggeries big and small across the country, has to date led to the culling of more than three million hogs, and which the swine industry estimates to have resulted in more than P100 billion in losses.

The government has been slow to contain the spread of ASF, which started in the middle of 2019 in one backyard farm in Rizal, and has spread largely uncontained through 2020 to more than 2,600 barangays in 12 regions, 46 provinces, and 502 cities and municipalities.

Containment and culling measures by the Department of Agriculture and concerned local governments were largely several steps too late, and without any known medication to fight the virus, the decimation continues and has led to the almost doubling of pork prices by the last quarter of 2020.

Saving the hog industry

With several government programs now in place, including allowing more importation of pork until the end of the year, what should be the biggest hurdles are the availability of funds and implementation details to save the hog industry.

For a nation that loves pork, the widespread shortage of swine meat caused by ASF had elevated inflation levels beyond the government's target and badly affected the agriculture sector's contribution to economic growth during the last two quarters.

Clearly, the initial appropriations from the contingent fund of the President and the Quick Response Fund of the Department of Agriculture to contain the ASF spread had not been enough to muster the needed muscle that would have prevented the crisis from further escalating.

Last week, the President used his powers to declare a state of calamity over the whole country to deal with the ASF contagion by allowing local governments to use their calamity funds for quarantine and border controls, as well as other measures, including disease control in hog farms.

How this will effectively play out during the remaining months of the year should be reflected in whether the spread will be controlled and even stopped to allow backyard growers and commercial swine farms to safely start raising pigs again.

Only after a complete eradication of ASF will there be a chance for a new normal where swine growing can bounce back to, and even exceed, pre-ASF levels.

Wake-up call

What happened in the last two years should be a wake-up call for the private sector to adopt stringent measures, including improved biosecurity procedures while growing their swine, to safeguard their farms from future zoonotic diseases.

We live in a world where country borders have become more porous in allowing the spread of diseases that affect both humans and agricultural produce. We need to be more adept at containment measures since we don't know what the next pandemic would be or when the next zoonosis would strike.

The government is now starting a program to repopulate the country's swine-raising industry mainly through a P27-billion low-interest loan program through two state-owned banks. The private sector should take advantage of this not only to start afresh, but to modernize its facilities.

More work needs to be done, though, with backyard swine farms that account for 60 percent of the pork that is brought to market, at least before the ASF became a crisis. It will be challenging to bring small hog raisers to adopt measures that tackle threats of livestock diseases.

Growing an agriculture industry

The country needs to keep a razor-sharp focus on growing a healthy agriculture sector, which has of late shown an extreme vulnerability to a host of natural and manmade exigencies, but which is exceedingly vital to future food security and economic growth.

We should be better at using import tariff mechanisms, not only to protect our agriculture sector, but also to maintain the balance needed to ensure that we are able to secure cheap imported foods when local supply is not available.

We enjoin the private sector to lock hands with the DA and the agricultural community to transform the way we grow food into a competitive, science-based, and technology-backed industry. Other countries have done it and there is no reason why we cannot.

Facebook and Twitter

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Should you wish to share any insights, write me at Link Edge, 25th Floor, 139 Corporate Center, Valero Street, Salcedo Village, 1227 Makati City. Or e-mail me at reydgamboa@yahoo.com. For a compilation of previous articles, visit www.BizlinksPhilippines.net.

The Manila Times

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RICE HARVEST UP 8.6% IN JANUARY-MARCH

FARMERS in the Philippines harvested a total of 4.626 million metric tons (MMT) of *palay* (unmilled rice) in the first quarter of 2021, which is a new record, the Department of Agriculture (DA) reported on Monday.

This was 8.6-percent higher than the same period a year ago and exceeded the record *palay* yield logged in the first quarter of 2018.

Philippine Rice Research Institute Executive Director John de Leon attributed the production growth to improvements in both areas harvested and yield.

Area harvested increased by 4.53 percent, while yield grew by 3.87 percent over the same three-month period last year.

"Area harvested to rice expanded from 1.10 million hectares (ha) to 1.15 million ha, while yield went up from 3.88 mt/ha (metric ton/hectare) to 4.03 mt/ha. Overall, area harvested contributed 54 percent to the incremental first quarter production, while the share of yield was 46 percent," said de Leon in his report to Agriculture Secretary William Dar.

Unmilled rice production reached a new record in the first quarter of this year, which will help the country attain a higher level of food security. THE MANILA TIMES FILE PHOTO

De Leon said the first quarter growth in *palay* output was observed in both irrigated and rainfed areas.

The growth in area harvested can be attributed to the above normal rainfall due to a series of typhoons in the last quarter of 2020, which enabled farmers to do a quick turn-around planting, he added.

Given "a record rice crop" recorded in 2020, the DA is eyeing back-to-back bountiful harvests.

"This record first-quarter yield further boosts our confidence to hit, or even surpass, the 20.4-million metric ton *palay* production target we set this year, barring strong typhoons and other natural calamities," said Dar in a statement.

Meanwhile, Dar said the agency is also expecting a more stable market for rice this year, despite the challenges due to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, thanks to the massive funding allocated to the industry under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund or RCEF, complemented by the DA banner national inbred and hybrid rice program, and rice resiliency project.

"We are slowly achieving a favorable equilibrium, wherein consumers have access to affordable rice, while our farmers reap bountiful harvests and earn bigger incomes as a result of yield improvements and stable prices of *palay*," he said.

JORDEENE B. LAGARE

Manila Standard

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DA revising rice harvest goal after strong Q1 output

By Othel B. Campos

THE Department of Agriculture plans to revise the 2021 rice production target after the country harvested a record 4.62 million metric tons in the first quarter.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar said the country may also post back-to-back bountiful harvests after the bumper yields in 2020.

"We are pleased to report that the country's rice farmers harvested a total of 4.626 million MT for the first quarter of 2021, 8.6 percent more than in first quarter of 2020, and erasing the record harvest in first quarter 2018," he said.

The DA aims to surpass the 20.4-million MT of palay production in 2021, barring strong typhoons and other natural calamities.

"We therefore commend millions of our rice farmers, and thousands of local government technicians and leaders, and industry stakeholders nationwide for this achievement. We also appreciate the efforts of our 'OneDA' team for vigorously implementing the various interventions that led to the improvements in yield," Dar said.

Philippine Rice Research Institute director John de Leon attributed the production growth to improvements in both area harvested and yield. Area harvested increased by 4.53 percent, while yield grew by 3.87 percent over the same three-month period in 2020.

"Area harvested to rice expanded from 1.1 million hectares to 1.15 million hectares, while yield went up from 3.88 MT/ha to 4.03 MT/ha. Overall, area harvested contributed 54 percent to the incremental first-quarter production, while the share of yield was 46 percent," de Leon said.

The first-quarter growth in palay output was observed in both irrigated and rainfed areas, he said.

De Leon said the growth in area harvested could be attributed to the above-normal rainfall following a series of typhoons in the last quarter of 2020, which enabled farmers to do a quick turn-around planting.

Malaya
Business Insight

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Palay harvest seen to hit record level

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is optimistic the country would again set a record palay yield for the year following first quarter's performance.

The DA said the 4.63 million metric tons (MT) of palay harvested in the country during the quarter represented a 8.6-percent increase from 4.26 million MT in the same period last year and besting the 4.62 million MT record harvest in the first quarter of 2018.

"This record first-quarter yield further boosts our confidence to hit or even surpass the 20.4-million MT palay production target we set this year, barring strong typhoons and other natural calamities," said DA Secretary William Dar.

Dar in a statement said better output is mainly due to the implementation of various interventions.

John de Leon, director of the Philippine Rice Research Institute, attributed the production growth to improvements in both area harvested and yield.

De Leon said the area harvested increased by 4.53 percent while yield grew by 3.87 percent over the same three-month period last year.

"Area harvested to rice expanded from 1.10 million hectares (ha) to 1.15 million ha while yield went up from 3.88 MT per ha to 4.03 MT per ha. Overall, area harvested contributed 54 percent to the incremental first quarter production

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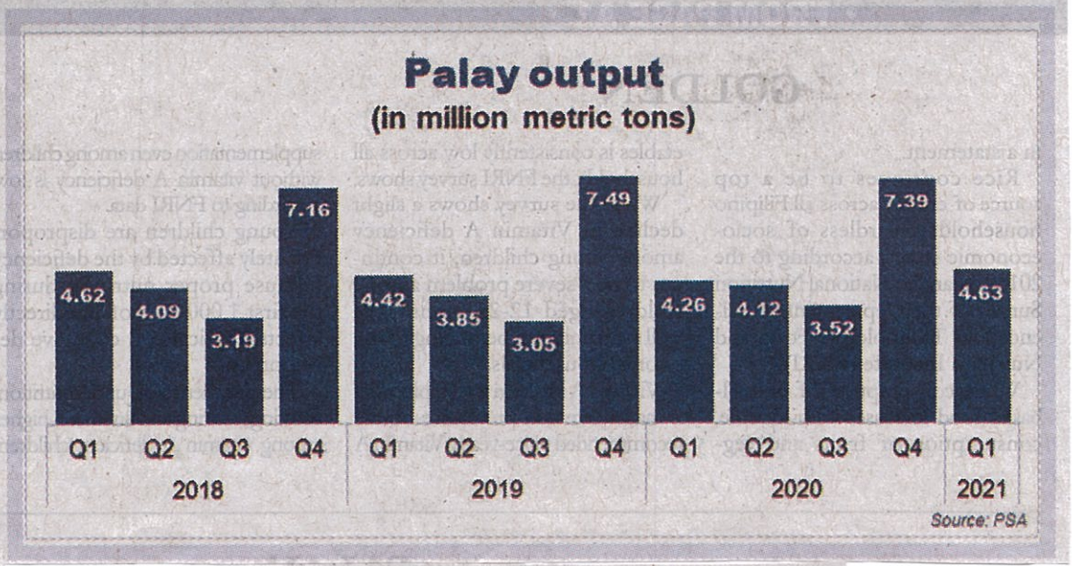

while the share of yield was 46 percent," de Leon said.

He added the first quarter growth in palay output was observed in both irrigated and rainfed areas with improvements in area harvested attributable to the above- normal rainfall due to a series of typhoons in the last quarter of 2020 that enabled farmers to do a quick turnaround planting.

Apart from a better output, Dar said DA expects a more stable market for rice this year with the help of available funding under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund and the agency's banner national inbred and hybrid rice program and rice resiliency project, despite the challenges brought by the pandemic.

"We are slowly achieving a favorable equilibrium, wherein consumers have access to affordable rice while our farmers reap bountiful harvests and earn bigger incomes as a result of yield improvements and stable prices of palay," Dar said.

The Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture meanwhile sees the country's agricultural volume of production to grow this year.

The Philippine Statistics Authority said the country's agriculture production performance dropped by 3.3 percent for the first quarter of the year due to the slowdown of livestock and poultry subsectors.

Despite the drop, the country recorded an 8.2 percent increase in the value of agricultural production at current prices as it reached P484.8 billion.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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DA-LED SUMMIT

GROUPS PROTEST VS PRO-IMPORT STANCE OF GOV'T

By Karl R. Ocampo
@KAROcampo_

At least 10 agricultural groups said they would boycott the Department of Agriculture's (DA) National Food Security Summit, which was set to begin today, to protest against the government's "pro-importation stance" when it comes to food security.

In a virtual press conference, industry leaders collectively voiced out their disdain against the agency's policies which they described as "import-dependent and antipoor."

"To be blunt, the government has never been serious in developing the agri-fisheries sector. It has been all about import liberalization," said United Broilers Raisers Association (Ubra) president Elias Inciong.

"The mindset in the last 25 years ... is that imports will lead to low retail prices for consumers and, at the same time, force producers to become more competitive. This certainly did not happen," he added.

Part of why most industry leaders decided to boycott the annual summit was the DA's stance in favor of lowering tariffs on rice and pork which, they said, would result in the demise of local industries amid the prolonged challenges brought by the coronavirus pandemic.

President Duterte recently issued two executive orders that slashed the tariffs on rice and pork and raised the import ceiling for pork. These measures were supported by the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) and the DA.

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There was also the proposal to liberalize the sugar industry which, however, was shelved by the Neda.

"What is the point of going to these summits when they don't listen to us in the first place?" said Nicanor Briones, vice president of the Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines (ProPork).

"A lot of agricultural groups were not even invited. Instead, they chose economic managers and bureaucrats to join. We might as well stage our own consultations," he added.

Listed speakers at the summit include economists Ramon Clarete, Cielito Habito and Rolando Dy. The others are Monetary Board member Bruce Tolentino, Sen. Cynthia Villar, Tugon Kabuhayan co-convenor Norberto Chingcuanco and Agrea Philippines president Cherrie Atilano.

Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) chair Raul Montemayor described the cut in rice tariff as a "cruel joke," adding that all the grounds for the adjustment were "baseless and deceptive" since the supply and prices of rice had been stable.

"The DA in turn has repeatedly claimed that we have ample rice supply and even announced plans to increase our output by one million tons in 2021," he added.

Aside from ProPork, Ubra and FFF, other groups that were expected to join the boycott are the National Federation of Hog Farmers Inc., Philippine Network of Food Security Programmes Inc., Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura, Magsasaka at Siyentipiko para sa Pag-unlad ng Agrikultura, Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, Climate Change Network for Community-Based Initiatives, Pesticide Action Network Asia and Pacific, Sibol ng Agham at Teknolohiya, and Bantay Bigas. INQ

The Manila Times

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Pork tariff adjustment to boost supply

BY JORDEENE B. LAGARE

THE government's recent move to adjust tariff rates on imported pork products will bolster local supply, the Philippine Association of Meat Processors Inc. (Pampi) said on Monday.

In a statement, Pampi said President Rodrigo Duterte's recent directive "will effectively reduce landed cost of pork and help augment local supply."

"We are confident that it will cause no harm to the local hog sector, as they are still recovering from the damage brought about by the African swine fever (ASF)," it added.

On Saturday, Duterte approved the recommendation of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) to reduce the most favored nation (MFN) tariff on imported rice and further modify the MFN tariff rates for imported pork products.

Under Executive Order (EO) 135, the MFN tariff rates for rice were reduced to 35 percent from 40 percent (in-quota) and 50 percent (out-quota) for one year in order to diversify the country's market sources, augment rice supply, maintain prices affordable, and reduce pressure on inflation.

Meanwhile, the Palace said through EO 134, the MFN tariff rates for pork products were further modified "in recognition of the plight of all concerned sectors and stakeholders, including the local hog industry."

To recall, EO 128 temporarily reduced the tariff rates for pork meat for one year at a graduated basis, from 30 percent (in-quota) and 40 percent (out-quota) to 5 percent (in-quota) and 15 percent (out-quota) for the first three months, and 10 percent (in-quota) and 20 percent (out-quota) from the fourth to the 12th month.

"Given the continuing spread of African swine fever and its adverse effects, the adjusted tariff rates aim to strike a balance between the objective of making pork products available and affordable, and the concerns of all stakeholders especially the recovery of the local hog industry," the Palace said.

Aside from the pork import tariff, Duterte approved the Department of Agriculture's recommendation to increase the minimum access volume for pork imports to 254,210 metric tons (MT) from the previous 54,210 MT.

"We urge the Department of Agriculture and the MAV Advisory Council to immediately engage stakeholders to finalize implementing guidelines so that the benefit is felt by the consuming public soonest," said Pampi.

Manila Standard

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Pangilinan: Lower tariffs to further burden farmers

LOWERING rice tariffs will further Filipino farmers, Senator Francis Pangilinan said Monday.

"Our farmers will bear the brunt of this order. They are already hard-pressed as it is with the non-stop arrival of imported rice and the pandemi," Pangilinan said in reaction to the issuance of Executive Order 135 which lowers rice tariffs from 50 and 40 percent for in-quota and out-quota respectively to 35 percent for imports coming from so-called Most Favored Nations, particularly, India, Pakistan, and China.

"Now, it is as if they are burying our farmers in more hardships with the tariff reduction," said the former head of the National Food Authority Council.

Pangilinan said he found it odd that the government is slashing the tariff when economic managers have assured the public of a steady supply of rice in recent hearings at the Senate.

He said rice farmers groups have been calling him up to seek his intervention on the executive action.

"This is a double whammy for our rice farmers. They have reduced funds under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund and now they have more competitors in the market," he said.

Pangilinan, who was also able to save the government some P6 billion in public funds when he made the rice importation process transparent, accountable, and competitive during his stint as Presidential Assistant on Food Security and Agricultural Modernization, pointed to a bigger problem with the continuing liberalization of food and agricultural products.

"ur rice sufficiency level dropped from 95 percent in 2017 to 79.8 percent in 2019. We don't have the figures for 2020 yet," he said.

"If this goes down further, or if rice farmers can no longer have decent earnings, we will lose our farmers. We will become dependent then on other countries for our agriculture sufficiency," he said.

Daily Tribune
WITHOUT FEAR ▪ WITHOUT FAVOR

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Who craves imported pork?

Dear Editors,

First off, former NEDA (National Economic and Development Authority) Director General Ceilito Habito should drop the pretense and stop using Filipino consumers as an excuse. If they are actually concerned for "100 million pork-eating Filipinos" suffering hunger, his neoliberal ilk should have long pushed for more *ayuda* and heavier government support for domestic food production. Besides, the millions of Filipino hog raisers, corn and coconut farmers, agricultural workers, butchers, transporters, retailers and their dependents are themselves pork consumers – the two are not in opposition. Habito should be honest and consistent; their real concern in taming inflation rates is to protect the country's foreign credit ratings.

Secondly, the presentation of arguments supposedly in support of increased pork imports actually exposes its fundamental flaws. High global pork prices due to an ongoing ASF (African swine fever)-induced global supply slump, and the investments necessary to absorb increased imports due to current limits in domestic cold chain facilities (as did the Agriculture Department, spending P45 million for 2,500 freezers) – these factors, presumed true, translate to added costs. How then can increasing imports now make pork affordable? It is obvious that increasing minimum access volume (MAV) and lowering tariffs are made solely to allow importers to cut costs from taxes and continue to profit. Besides, as many have pointed out, importers never withhold windfall profits to significantly lower retail prices.

Indeed, what has agricultural trade liberalization done with Filipino food self-sufficiency? After allowing unlimited rice imports through the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), the country saw its rice self-sufficiency drop to 79.8 percent in 2019, the lowest since 1998. Rice inflation may have somewhat stabilized since 2017, but it has never dropped to the promised P27 per kilo, remaining unaffordable to many as wages and income remain stagnant. Worse, this early trend in rice self-sufficiency mirrors the tragic fate of Filipino garlic.

The Philippines was 100 percent self-sufficient in garlic in 1994. However, after joining the World Trade Organization in 1995 and the enactment of Republic Acts 1296 and 8178, allowing the entry of unlimited garlic imports, garlic self-sufficiency dropped incessantly. By 2019, garlic self-sufficiency is at a measly 7.9 percent, making the country almost absolutely import-dependent. It's as if Filipino garlic has completely disappeared in the span of 24 years. Several Filipino crops, such as coffee, *monggo*, and onion, among others, had the same trajectory.

With the massive losses incurred by Filipino hog raisers due to the mishandling of ASF, and of rice farmers due to the RTL, and the broader economic impacts of the militarist response to Covid – today is a very crucial time. The government's agricultural policies now will have deep and lasting effects. Do we want to be dependent on imported pork, on imported rice?

As such, for several months now, numerous national farmer organizations, vendor associations and consumer groups have commonly opposed the move to increase pork imports. The public pressure has already compelled economic managers to tame its original proposals.

It is only proper to ask, then, who exactly craves imported pork? The list is unsurprisingly short: Foreign businesses, local importers and processors, and neoliberal bureaucrats.

The National Pork Producers Council, "the global voice for the US pork industry," has already applauded the move, allowing it to "(secure) better access to the Philippines market (a) top, long-term trade priority." Contradicting Habito's claims, the US Meat Exporters Federation has also proclaimed that there is sufficient global supply, pointing out that US pork exports to the Philippines have already increased 600 percent last year. Spanish and Canadian pork exporters are likewise closely monitoring the issue. Meat Importers and Traders Association and Philippine Association of Meat Processors Inc. celebrated the proposals and had hurriedly booked pork imports of up to 600,000 metric tons. This amount, equivalent to more than a year of total imports, is set to enter for just three months from April. Lastly, no one else has pushed the move but the likes of Habito – old bureaucrats who have long wielded powers to transform Philippine economy for the benefit of Filipinos yet have only succeeded in worsening the situation due to their blind adherence to failed neoliberal dogma.

Clearly, this is not about feeding Filipinos, this is about raking in profits amid Filipino hunger and bankruptcy.

Rafael V. Mariano
Former DAR Secretary
Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP)

Malaya
Business Insight

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Golden Rice ready for mainstream

BY PAUL ICAMINA

Commercialization. Once the Golden Rice gets the permit for commercial propagation, the Department of Agriculture will prepare its deployment on a pilot scale in areas where Vitamin A deficiency is high.

A GENE-MODIFIED rice will soon be available in local markets.

Called the Golden Rice, its genes have been altered to add genes from corn and a common soil microorganism to enable the plant to produce beta-carotene in the rice grain.

Golden Rice is now in the final stage of biosafety regulatory assessments, the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) said in a statement released yesterday.

Once it gets the permit for commercial propagation anytime soon, the Department of Agriculture will be preparing for its deployment initially on a pilot scale in areas where malnutrition, especially vitamin A deficiency is high, it said.

See GOLDEN ➤ Page A2

Beta-carotene, which would otherwise be available only in the leaves and stems of ordinary rice plants, is a source of vitamin A required for mothers or lactating women and for the development of young children.

Scientists at the International Rice Research Institute have shared the Golden Rice technology with colleagues at PhilRice who, in turn, adapted Golden Rice to grow in local conditions while maintaining all other characteristics of ordinary rice.

Rice has a simple and easily digestible food matrix, which allows for a high bioavailability and bioconversion of beta-carotene into vitamin A.

Bioavailability is the total amount of the nutrients available in the rice grain, in this case, beta-carotene and other useful carotenoids. The nutrients should be digested, stored and converted by the human body into beta-carotene.

Measurements show there is sufficient beta-carotene in Golden Rice to meet the 30 percent to 50 percent estimated average requirement of vitamin A for young children and mothers or lactating women. "The efficient bioconversion rate of Golden Rice is promising from a dietary perspective, given rising food costs and the persistent inadequacy of Filipino diets in terms of providing macro- and micronutrients," PhilRice said in a statement.

Rice continues to be a top source of energy across all Filipino households regardless of socioeconomic status, according to the 2018 Expanded National Nutrition Survey of the Department of Science and Technology's Food and Nutrition Institute (FNRI).

While consumption of animal-based food increases with income, consumption of fruits and vegetables is consistently low across all households, the FNRI survey shows.

While the survey shows a slight decline in Vitamin A deficiency among young children, it continues to be a severe problem among children aged 12-23 months, as well as in children belonging to the poorest households.

Vitamin A intake in the Filipino diet is inadequate and prevalence of the recommended twice-yearly Vitamin A supplementation even among children without vitamin A deficiency is low, according to FNRI data.

Young children are disproportionately affected by the deficiency because proper nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life directly affects physical and cognitive development.

The prevalence of undernutrition, stunting, wasting and anemia is higher among vitamin A deficient children. When left untreated, the condition will have lasting effects on future productivity and quality of life.

It underscores the need for a consistent supply of Vitamin A-rich food sources.

A simulated analysis conducted at PhilRice shows that even substituting small amounts of ordinary rice with Golden Rice can improve vitamin A intake among target populations.

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
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Gov't reduces tariff for rice imports to offset climate change impact

By GENALYN KABILING

The government wanted to shore up the country's supply of rice given the threat posed by climate change when it reduced import tariffs on the staple food.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque defended the President Duterte's decision to lower the tariff rates on rice imports for a year, citing that climate change could have adverse consequences on the country's farmlands.

Under Executive Order No. 135, the President reduced the tariff rate for rice imports within the minimum access volume or within quota to 35 percent, from 40 percent. Rice imports outside the quota, on the other hand, will be charged 50 percent tariff rate for a period of one year.

"Sinisiguro lang natin na sapat ang ating magiging supply ng bigas kasi siguro sa lahat ng ating kinakain, we can afford tayong magkulang sa ilan pero hindi pupuwede sa bigas at nakita naman ninyo na napakatindi nitong panahon ng tag-init na ito so hindi natin alam kung ano epekto dito sa ating na pananim na palay pero im sure may epekto iyan (We just want to make sure we will have sufficient rice supply because we can afford to lack in some, but not rice. We have seen the very warm weather. I don't know the extent of the impact on rice plantation but I'm sure there's an effect)," Roque said during a televised press briefing Monday, May 17.

Besides, Roque said the year-long reduction in import tariffs on rice was minimal.

"Kung papansin ninyo naman, from 40 naging 35 so maliit lang naman ang taripa na binaba. Hindi ganoon kalaki so ito just to ensure itong adverse consequences ng climate change ay hindi magdudulot ng kakulangan sa supply ng bigas (If you've noticed, from 40 percent, it was reduced to 35 percent so the tariff cut is small. It's not that huge so it's just to ensure the adverse consequences of climate change will not cause any shortage in the rice supply)," he said.

The Palace earlier announced the President approved the recommendation of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) to lower the tariff rates on imported rice to ensure food security and protect consumers. The tariff adjustment was made to diversify the country's market sources, augment rice supply, maintain prices affordable, and reduce pressures on inflation, the Palace said.

In EO 135, the President justified the decision to lower rice import tariffs mainly to boost supply and keep prices stable. Despite an increase in total rice stock, the order noted that the estimated local production may still fall short of the demand that necessitated importation.

The order also said there has been a continuous increase in the price of rice from other countries, especially those imported from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

It also mentioned that the present global economic situation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other factors affecting the country's traditional sources of imported rice, have caused "uncertainty in the steady supply of rice."

"Considering the increase in global rice prices and the uncertainties relative to the supply of rice, there is an urgent need to temporarily reduce the Most Favoured Nation tariff rates on rice, to diversify the country's market sources, augment rice supply, maintain affordable prices, and reduce inflationary pressures, all for the purpose of ensuring food security in the country and protecting consumers," the order read.

The executive order, signed on May 15, takes effect 15 days after publication in the Official Gazette or newspaper. It will be effective for one year from such date.

Farmers' groups earlier opposed the temporary tariff cut on rice imports, insisting that allowing the entry of cheaper imports was ill-timed and not reasonable.

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Led by Mayor Goma's 'plantdemic' ways, Ormoc endures quarantined life

By MARIE TONETTE MARTICIO

ORMOC CITY – Mayor Richard Gomez here shared his love for plants and how it influenced his constituents to sustain their needs during since the COVID-19 pandemic started.

Goma expressed pride in how Ormoc was able to survive even when they closed their borders during the height of the coronavirus disease (COVID1-9) pandemic early last year.

Since the lockdown started, they had their communal gardens and distributed seeds up to the farthest barangay. It eventually led to Ormocanons to get their food from their backyards.

"People will have to eat food every day. That is why my 5-year plan prioritizes food security. Agriculture in Ormoc is very strong and we also allot a big chunk of our budget for it because we have lowlands, midlands, and highlands with different produce," he said.

Ormoc is one of the largest producers of essential farm goods like pineapple, rice, corn, sugarcane, and vegetables in Eastern Visayas.

"I do not allow industrial ones, all are backyard poultries but we can produce as much as one million heads per day," Gomez said referring to the number of chickens they produce.

Gomez said they also propagate iron and giant bamboos for slope protection of rivers as part of their agricultural program.

A certified 'plantito', Gomez has always been fond of planting fruit trees when he was still in grade school.

He also has a lot of farm animals such as geese, dogs, a potbellied pig named Hamlet, free-range chickens, and colonies of bees.

Gomez added that he grows a lot of flowering plants to sustain his bee colonies at home and even at the city hall which his wife, Leyte Representative Lucy Torres-Gomez gets their honey as giveaways to friends.

"I have about 25 beehives. I harvest about 300 kgs. of honey that Lucy gives to her friends," Gomez said.

Moving to Ormoc to live a simple life away from the glitz and glam of showbusiness has not been too hard for him especially that he was able to integrate his passion with their agricultural projects.

"I was able to adjust well. I have always loved plants because I think I have a knack for growing them. I like fruit-bearing trees so I can take care of them until they bear fruits," he said citing that he has applied this in their tree-planting activities.

GOMA'S FARM. Ormoc City Mayor Richard Gomez harvests some of the okras from his farm. (Mayor Richard Gomez Facebook Page/MANILA BULLETIN)

MANILA BULLETIN

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Monetary Board's steady policy rates vital to economic recovery

Last May 12, a day after the Philippine Statistical authority (PSA) reported that the country's gross domestic product (GDP) contracted by 4.2 percent in the first quarter of the year, the Monetary Board (MB) of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) "decided to maintain the interest rate on the BSP's reverse repurchase policy at 2.0 percent." Moreover, the BSP said: "The interest rates on the overnight deposit and lending facilities were kept at 1.5 percent and 2.5 percent, respectively." Previously this year, on March 25 and February 11, the MB promulgated a similarly worded resolution.

In a press statement, the MB said it was keeping "policy settings steady" considering that price pressures on food commodities are abating with improved weather conditions, the impact of Executive Orders No. 128 and 133, s. 2021, and the implementation of direct non-monetary interventions to alleviate supply constraints."

Executive Orders No. 128 and 133, s. 2021, refer to President Duterte's issuances liberalizing pork imports by raising the minimum access volume (MAV) to offset the reduction in pork supply arising from the outbreak of African Swine Flu in many regions of the country. Targeted at two to four percent for 2021, the inflation rate has slowed somewhat to 3.9 percent, down from the previous 4.2 percent.

Despite the fact that GDP growth has been negative for five consecutive quarters since the onset of the pandemic last year, the MB remains upbeat about the economy's recovery prospects. Cited as upside factors are the ramping up of vaccination efforts and the effect of government's "targeted fiscal interventions." These include the Bayanihan fiscal stimulus packages totaling ₱595.6 billion and the enactment of the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises (CREATE) Act and the Financial Institutions Strategic Transfer (FIST) Act to help dispose of non-performing assets and non-performing loans of banks and financial institutions.

Cognizant that the pandemic has greatly accelerated the pace and scope of digital transformation, the BSP has also pushed its financial inclusion initiatives. According to BSP Governor Benjamin Diokno, this is in line with the goal to "shift from a cash-heavy to a cash-lite economy." As envisioned in its Digital Transformation Roadmap for 2020 to 2023, the BSP aims to transform 50 percent of the total retail volume to digital payments and 70 percent of Filipino adults to be "financially included" in terms of digital literacy.

For the BSP's monetary policy initiatives to achieve full fruition, these must be aligned with those of the national government's fiscal measures. These must respond in a timely manner to quickly changing conditions, such as sudden surges in disease transmission.

In the ultimate analysis, the confluence of government efforts must result in enabling Juan de la Cruz to get back to productive livelihood and employment so he could provide food on the table for his family – as all members work with their neighbors in containing the pandemic while waiting for a speedier and more efficient COVID-19 vaccine rollout.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL
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Palace defends lowering of tariffs for rice imports

By ALEXIS ROMERO

Malacañang yesterday defended President Duterte's decision to lower the tariff rates on imported rice, saying it is necessary to ensure enough supply of the commodity.

Executive Order No. 135 signed by Duterte last May 15 reduced the most favored nation tariff rates on imported rice to 35 percent from 40 percent (in-quota) and 50 percent (out-quota) for one year, citing the "increase in global rice prices" and the "uncertainties relative to the supply of rice."

The EO also claimed that the global economic situation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors affecting the country's traditional sources of imported rice cause uncertainty in rice supply.

The Federation of Free Farmers has criticized the EO, saying there is no need to diversify the Philippines' foreign sources of rice because under the Rice Tariffication Law, importers may bring in rice from any country as long as they pass quarantine regulations.

There is no urgent need to increase the Philippines' rice supply and there is no emergency that has to be addressed, the farmers group added.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said the government wants to ensure that climate change won't affect the country's rice supply.

"We are just making sure that we will have enough supply of rice because perhaps, we can afford to have a supply lack in the food we eat but not rice. And you have seen the impact of the dry season. We do not know what will be its effect on our crops but I am sure it will have an effect," Roque said at a press briefing.

"It is just to ensure that the adverse consequences of climate change won't result in lack of rice supply," he added.

Duterte also signed EO 134 which further modified the rates of import duty on fresh, chilled or frozen meat of swine.

The order repealed EO 128 which temporarily reduced the tariff rates for pork meat for one year on a graduated basis, from 30 percent (in-quota) and 40 percent (out-quota) to 5 percent (in-quota) and 15 percent (out-quota) for the first three months, and 10 percent (in-quota) and 20 percent (out-quota) from the fourth to 12th month.

Under EO 134, the reduced tariff rates under EO 128 will be increased to 10 percent (in-quota) and 20 percent (out-quota) for the first three months, and 15 percent (in-quota) and 25 percent (out-quota) from the fourth to 12th month.

Officials have said the adjusted tariff rates seek to "strike a balance between the objective of making pork products available and affordable, and the concerns of all stakeholders, especially the recovery of the local hog industry."

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BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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How food secure are we?

NO FREE LUNCH

CIELITO F. HABITO

Ironically, our country's dogged pursuit of rice self-sufficiency in the name of food security had the reverse undesired result of *reducing* Filipinos' food security. This is because our food staple became less and less affordable over the years as government's tight regulation of rice imports progressively drove up the domestic price of rice, rather than keep it stable or even bring it down. And because rice is always the first food a poor family will buy, high rice prices leave less, if any, of its tight food budget for protein foods and vegetables. Our persistently high rates of severe malnutrition, which in young children compromises lifelong brain and physical development, could well trace to this.

Today and tomorrow, the Department of Agriculture is holding a National Food Security Summit, culminating many pre-summits that preceded it. But there must be a common understanding of the central topic of food security, because what it means determines the appropriate actions to be taken to pursue it.

The globally accepted definition came from the 1996 World Food Summit of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Food security, it said, exists "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." FAO defines four dimensions in this definition: availability, access, utilization, and stability. Since 2012, the Global Food Security Index has been used as an assessment tool, which examines 59 unique indicators grouped into four categories: Affordability; Availability; Quality and Safety; and Natural Resources and Resilience. The last was a new addition in 2020, in recognition that climate change poses a major threat to the stability of food systems worldwide.

So how food secure are we? The Philippines ranks 73rd, or within the bottom half of all countries rated. Within the Asean, we are behind everyone except Cambodia and Laos. Among the categories, our lowest rating is in Natural Resources and Resilience (with a score of 35.8 out of 100), reflecting our vulnerability to natural calamities, especially yearly typhoons and periodic El Niño and La Niña that bring droughts and flooding. On this, we are worse than all our Asean neighbors except for Indonesia. In food affordability, we are behind all but Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos. The three are pulled down by their lower average incomes, offsetting their advantage of lower food prices, being surplus rice producers and exporters.

People tend to confuse food self-sufficiency with food security, which are not equivalent. There is no question that food self-sufficiency is desirable for long-term food security, particularly if a country possesses the natural and technological endowments to make it possible. But food self-sufficiency is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for food security. Food self-sufficiency only ensures availability, but without wide accessibility and affordability of food, there is no food security for large segments of the population. A country can be food secure without being food self-sufficient, or it can be food self-sufficient but not food secure. Singapore would be an example of the first, and has consistently ranked among the most food secure in the world, and yet imports the bulk of its food needs. The Philippines is closer to the latter case, being nearly self-sufficient in our staple rice, but because Filipinos have to pay much more for their rice than consumers in our neighbors do, large numbers of Filipinos are food insecure, and malnourished.

Does this imply that we should just rely on imports for most or all of our food needs on the reasoning that they are cheaper? Of course not! What it implies is that we must pursue maximum domestic food production to the extent that we can produce it efficiently and productively, at a cost comparable to those elsewhere, as normally reflected by international prices. That, rather than relying on trade restrictions that only raised our food prices and food insecurity over the years, is what the Summit discussions and resolutions should be all about.

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Lower pork tariff stays one more month

By Samuel P. Medenilla
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THE lower tariff for pork products is expected to last by another month after President Duterte issued a new issuance for its implementation.

On Monday, Malacañang finally released a copy of Executive Order (EO) No. 134 (s. 2021), which increased the tariff for pork to 10 percent (in-quota) and 20 percent (out-quota) for the first three months, and 15 percent (in-quota) and 25 percent (out-quota) from the 4th to the 12th month.

The issuance repealed EO 128, which imposed the following schedule of tariff rate adjustments: from 30 percent (in-quota) and 40 percent (out-quota) to 5 percent (in-quota) and 15 percent (out-quota) for the first three months, and 10 percent (in-quota) and 20 percent (out-quota) from the 4th to the 12th month.

EO 128 took effect last April, but has now been replaced with EO 134, which will take effect this month once published in the Official Gazette or a newspaper of general circulation.

The lower tariff for pork is meant to address the shortage of the food item after the African Swine Fever (ASF) killed or led to the culling of 3 million hogs.

Rice tariff

IN a related development, Malacañang defended EO 135 against criticism from a farmers' group that the measure, which reduced tariff for rice, is unnecessary since the country is not suffering from a rice shortage.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said the government opted to facilitate the importation of the staple in Filipino diet to offset the expected drop in rice production this harsh summer, which he attributed to climate change.

"This is to ensure that the adverse consequence of climate change will not cause a shortage in rice supply," Roque said in an online press briefing on Monday.

Under EO 135, it is also stated President Duterte opted to bring in more imported rice amid the expected increase in the price of rice in some countries as Covid-19 affected its production.

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A broader look at today's business

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Rice tariff cut 'a double whammy'

By Butch Fernandez
@butchfBM

MALACAÑANG'S Executive Order 135 imposing lower rice tariffs adds a "further burden" on the back of Filipino farmers, an opposition Senator said on Monday.

Senator Francis Pangilinan protested the Palace order in a statement, warning that "lowering rice tariffs now might break the back of the Filipino rice farmers and the Philippine rice industry."

He deplored the "double whammy" inflicted on local rice farmers already reeling from the unabated entry of imported rice in the local market. "Our rice farmers are gonna get hit again. They've collapsed from the series of arrivals of imported rice," Pangilinan said, adding: "They reeled even more from the pandemic. Now, it seems they're going to be buried with the report of lower tariffs."

Pangilinan issued a statement following issuance of Malacañang's Executive Order 135 "lowering rice tariffs from 50 and 40 percent for in-quota and out-quota respectively to 35 percent for imports coming from so-called Most Favored Nations, particularly, India, Pakistan, and China."

Senator Francis Pangilinan

He noted that EO 135 has not been published, adding he has yet to see a copy of the executive order. When he made the statement, it had not yet been published, but is coming out Tuesday, March 18.

"Why should we lower rice tariffs when our economic managers themselves said, during our hearings on pork prices, that the supply of rice is steady?" Pangilinan wondered aloud, and said as rice farmers have been calling him up asking for intervention this executive action.

"Like what happened to our local hog raisers in the case of pork import tariffs, didn't this issue affecting our farmers not go through consultations again?" he asked.

The senator recalled that during his stint as presidential adviser on food security in the Aquino administration, they lowered rice inflation from 14.4 percent in 2014 to 0.10 percent in July 2015. He noted reports that rice inflation has been low for the past seven months: October 2020, -0.5 percent; November 2020, -0.1 percent; December 2020, 0.1 percent; January 2021, 0.1 percent; February 2021, 0.5 percent; March 2021, 0.9 percent; and April 2021, -0.3 percent.

"That's a double whammy for our palay farmers. The RCEF [Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund] proceeds that should go to them will be reduced [as a result of lower tariffs] and at the same time, they will have more market rivals. That's tough," the lawmaker lamented.

Pangilinan claimed he was "also able to save the government P6 billion in public funds" when he made the rice importation process "transparent, accountable, and competitive."

Pointing to a bigger problem with the continuing liberalization of food and agricultural products, the senator said the backlash is likely to hit local traders. "Our rice sufficiency level dropped from 95 percent in 2017 to 79.8 percent in 2019. We don't have the figures for 2020 yet," he added.

Pangilinan indicated he is "looking to file" a joint resolution to withdraw Palace Executive Order 135 amid questions on the power of the President to lower tariffs two days before Congress resumes session.

Daily Tribune
WITHOUT FEAR ◊ WITHOUT FAVOR

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Ilocos Sur fishkill losses at P2M

The fishpond owners are just recovering from the financial losses they experienced last year

BY ALDWIN QUITASOL

BAGUIO CITY – The Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO) of San Vicente, Ilocos Sur recorded P2 million worth of losses from the fishkill that took place at Urdas, Barangay San Sebastian in San Vicente.

According to MAO chief Genesis Fronda, the *tilapia* deaths in fishponds were caused by the extreme heat being experienced in the area and affected at least 30 fishpond owners in the area.

Fronda said that the fishpond owners are just recovering from the financial losses they experienced last year, but with the incident, they are doomed to lose more in their business amid the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

He added that fishpond owners incurred high expenses in maintaining their ponds and some of them even borrowed their capitals, but stressed that the municipal government of San Vicente will extend financial assistance to those affected by the fishkill.

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BW FILE PHOTO

IN THE fisheries subsector, the Philippines can produce more than it requires, with the surplus exportable.

Comprehensive industry database needed to improve food production

THE PHILIPPINES needs to develop a comprehensive farming-industry database to improve food production and GUIDE policy decisions, food advocacy group Tugon Kabuhayan said.

Tugon Kabuhayan co-convener Norberto O. Chingcuanco said in a virtual briefing Monday that especially for fisheries production, the government needs to compile updated information on volume and value of production in ponds, cages, and other areas where the commodities are located.

"Reliable data will guide us what and when to produce and help us evaluate whether imports are indeed necessary for a certain commodity and season," Mr. Chingcuanco said.

He said food production can be improved by reducing the agriculture sector's postharvest losses, noting that around 25% is usually lost in the supply chain.

He added that in terms of the fisheries subsector, the Philippines can produce more than it requires, with the surplus exportable.

"We can become a dominant exporter while still caring for and providing gainful economic growth to local communities. All these are possible if we produce efficiently, sustainably, and responsibly," Mr. Chingcuanco said.

Mr. Chingcuanco added that the agriculture and fisheries sector can benefit from the development of better farm-to-market links while bringing to the mainstream value-added products and processing.

"A circuitous and relatively long multi-layered marketing chain in the fishing sector results in more losses and, of course, higher prices," Mr. Chingcuanco said.

"If managed well, the industry will generate more jobs. We are also looking at promoting the consumption of processed commodities. This will definitely contribute to job creation. In our estimate, even if only half of the urban population patronizes deboned milkfish (*bangus*), this will create additional 7,000 jobs in a year. That is the beauty of value-adding," he added.

Tugon Kabuhayan said it hopes the upcoming National Food Security Food Summit staged by the Department of Agriculture on May 18-19 will result in a clear plan for the farm sector.

"The initiative is important to properly assess and plan for food security in light of the projected growth of the population and the many uncertainties brought about by the pandemic and the ongoing activities in the West Philippine Sea," it said. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

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Pilipino Star
NGAYON

PAPAYA PEEL FOLIAR FERTILIZER

Pampabulaklak at pampabunga

Ang mga tanim na kamatis ng Magsakang Reporter na once a week na ini-ispreyan at diniligan ng Papaya Peel Foliar Fertilizer kaya hitik ang bunga.

Ang Magsasakang REPORTER

ni MER LAYSON

Ngayon araw na ito ay ise-share ko sa inyo ang paggawa ng natural at organic na Fertilizer mula sa balat ng hinog na Papaya o Papaya Peel Foliar Fertilizer.

Ang balat ng matamis na papaya ay nagtataglay potassium na nagsisilbing pampabulaklak at pampabunga.

Nagtataglay din ng Macro at Micro Nutrients na kailangan ng isang halaman.

Ang paraan ng paggawa ay gupit-gupitin ng maliliit ang balat ng isang hinog at matamis na papaya saka ilagay sa isang bote na may lamang isang litro ng tubig at i-ferment ng 48-oras o dalawang araw bago ito gamitin.

Kung ipandidilig ay kanawin ng mabuti saka direktang ibuhos sa lupa na katabi ng puno ng isang halaman.

Kung gagamitin na pang-spray, dapat salain muna, gamit ang stainles na pinong pansala o kaya ay katya at iba pang manipis na tela para hindi bumara sa gagamiting spreyer.

Isang beses kada isang linggo ang application ng Papaya Peel Foliar Fertilizer sa ating mga namumungang halaman.

Upang magkaroon po kayo ng magandang gabay sa paggawa ng Papaya Peel Fertilizer ay panoorin po ninyo ang latest video tutorial ko sa Youtube na ANG MAGSASAKANG REPORTER.

Ang Papaya Peel Foliar Fertilizer ay magsisilbing daan para dumami ang bulaklak ng isang halaman at ang lahat ng ibinulaklak ay matutuloy lahat sa bunga.

Ang Papaya Peel Foliar Fertilizer ay subok na subok ko na at matagal ko nang ginagamit sa aking mga tanim na Kamatis, Okra, Sitaw, Talong, Ampalaya, Patola, Kamias, Ubas at iba pang namumulaklak at namumungang halaman.

Kapag nasa sampung araw na mula sa pagkakalipat ang tanim ng isang halaman ay maaari nang mag-spray ng Fermented Plant Juice (FPJ) at kapag malapit ng mamulaklak ang isang halaman ay ispreyan at diligan ng Papaya Peel Foliar Fertilizer.

Nawa po ay nakapag-share ako ng kaalaman at impormasyon ngayong araw na ito tungkol sa paggawa ng Papaya Peel Foliar Fertilizer.

Para sa iba pang tips at sikreto sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman ay maaari kayong manood ng aking TV program na Masaganang Buhay tuwing Linggo, alas-7:00 hanggang alas-8:00 ng umaga sa OnePH Cignal TV, Channel 1 ng TV-5. Mapapakinggan din sa Radyo Singko 92.3 News FM.

Maaari rin kayong manood at mag-subscribe sa aking Youtube Channel na ANG MAGSASAKANG REPORTER.

Tuwing araw ng Martes naman ay regular ninyong mababasa ang aking kolum dito sa **Pilipino Star Ngayon** (**PSN**) ng Star Group of Publications.

Sa mga tanong at komento ay maaari ninyo akong i-text, huwag pong tawag ah, sa 09178675197. STAY SAFE, HAPPY FARMING, GOD BLESS US ALL.

Ang ginawang Papaya Peel Foliar Fertilizer ng Magsasakang Reporter.

Malaya
Business Insight

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Corn hits near 3-week low; wheat falls

SINGAPORE- Chicago corn futures slid for a fourth straight session on Monday, with the market dropping to its lowest in nearly three weeks on long liquidation and easing concerns over supplies.

Wheat fell more than 1 percent, while soybeans also lost ground.

"The agriculture market got a bit ahead of itself," said Phin Ziebell, agribusiness economist at National Australia Bank. .- ***Reuters***