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"REGIONAL UPDATES"

DA to establish 1st agricultural imports inspection facility in Subic

THE DEPARTMENT of Agriculture (DA) is setting up the first of several border control facilities for agricultural imports at the Subic Bay Freeport Zone in Zambales. In a statement on Wednesday, the DA said Secretary William D. Dar met with Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) Chairperson Wilma T. Eisma on June 30 to discuss the proposal to use a 2,000 square meter lot at the freeport zone for a 25-year period and renewable upon mutual agreement. "The DA and the SBMA have agreed in principle, pending approval of the SBMA Board, to establish the country's first of the five planned so-called 'first border control facility,' aptly termed as the Cold Examination Facility in Agriculture," the department said. The other planned locations are at the ports of Manila, Batangas, Cebu, and Davao. These facilities are intended to conduct full and thorough inspection of containerized agricultural commodities through risk assessment, together with x-ray screening by the Bureau of Customs, subjecting all agricultural and food imports to 100% sampling and laboratory testing. "Each facility will feature controlled temperature systems that will capacitate quarantine officers to thoroughly inspect the contents of an identified high-risk containerized shipment and prevent the possible spread of hazardous biological agents, such as toxins, and radioactive elements carried by imported agricultural products," the DA said. The inspection facilities have a P521-million allocation from the Office of the President, according to the DA.
— **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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Date: JULY 09, 2021 Page: B4

DA wants 100% inspection of all farm imports

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas @jearcalas

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it will conduct a 100 percent inspection of all imported farm products once it completes the construction of its examination facilities in the country's key ports.

The DA issued the statement following its recent meeting with officials of the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA). They have "agreed in principle" to put up a cold examination facility in agriculture (CEFA) at the Subic Bay Freeport Zone in Zambales, the agency said.

The proposal, which would allow the DA to use a 2,000-square meter lot at the freeport zone for 25 years, renewable upon mutual agreement, is subject to the approval of the SBMA board.

The facility to be established at the Subic Bay Freeport Zone is one of the five CEFAs that the government is targeting to build. The Manila International Container Port and the ports of Batangas, Cebu and Davao are other possible sites for the CEFAs, which will cost P521 million.

The DA said the partnership with SBMA for the establishment of CEFA will transform the Subic International port into the "country's major hub for agricultural product imports."

"We thank SBMA Chair and CEO Wilma Eisma for the smooth negotiations, pending approval of the SBMA board, that will jumpstart the process of procurement. We wish the facility constructed as soon as possible," Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar said in a statement.

The DA said the Subic CEFA will be able to conduct "full and thorough" inspection of containerized farm imports through risk assessment, which will be complemented by the x-ray screening of the Customs bureau.

"This means all farm, fishery, meat, and food imports will be subjected to 100% sampling and laboratory testing," it added.

The Subic CEFA would earn at least P130 million yearly from testing and inspection fees on top of the expected employment generation, according to the DA.

Dar said the CEFAs will "initiate a new way of conducting first-border inspections" for imported farm goods as inspectors can open all arriving imports in one cold warehouse and have ample time to examine shipments.

The CEFA network, formerly known as Agricultural Commodity Examination Areas, will be equipped with laboratories and manned by quarantine officers from the various DA bureaus.

The DA said each CEFA will have controlled temperature systems that will enable quarantine officers to thoroughly inspect the contents of an identified high-risk containerized shipment and prevent the possible spread of hazardous biological agents, such as toxins, and radioactive elements carried by imported agricultural products.

"In all, the completion of the CEFA network will be one of the major accomplishments of the Duterte administration, as global biosecurity and quarantine protocols are put in place and strictly implemented to keep the country's agriculture and fishery sector free from transboundary pests and diseases, and protect the health and welfare of Filipinos."

The Manila Times

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100% agri import inspection set

BY EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is targeting a 100-percent inspection of the country's food imports to ensure food safety and prevent the entry of transboundary pests and diseases.

The DA said it had made an agreement in principle with the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) to establish the country's first of the five planned first border control facility.

The project will be known as Cold Examination Facility in Agriculture (CEFA) that will be built at the Subic Bay Freeport Zone in Zambales.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar met with SBMA Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Wilma Eisma last week, who expressed support for the said proposal.

"We thank SBMA chair and CEO Eisma for the smooth negotiations, pending approval of the SBMA Board, that will jumpstart the process of procurement," Dar said.

Under the planned CEFA network, the DA is proposing to use a 2,000-square meter lot at the freeport zone for 25 years, renewable upon mutual agreement.

Once operational, the Subic CEFA will be able to conduct thorough inspections of containerized agricultural commodities through risk assessment, complemented by x-ray screening of the Bureau of Customs.

"The Subic Bay Freeport Zone is an ideal location because it is well-connected to the main Metro Manila highways," Dar said.

The CEFA project has a total of P521-million fund allocation from the Office of the President, which will be used to for laboratories manned by quarantine officers and technical staff from the DA's bureaus and the National Meat Inspection Service.

Each facility will feature controlled temperature systems that will enable quarantine officers to inspect the contents of high-risk containerized shipment and prevent the possible spread of hazardous biological agents, such as toxins, and radioactive elements.

Based on DA's estimates, the Subic CEFA would earn at least P130 million yearly from testing and inspection fees.

The Agriculture department also said that the construction and operation of the Subic CEFA and four other first border control facilities are expected to generate employment in the respective localities.

"In all, the completion of the CEFA network will be one of the major accomplishments of the Duterte administration, as global biosecurity and quarantine protocols are put in place and strictly implemented to keep the country's agriculture and fishery sector free from transboundary pests and diseases, and protect the health and welfare of Filipinos," Dar said.

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL
Everybody's Newspaper

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DA readies aid for Batangas fishers, farmers

AGRICULTURE Sec. William Dar has assured Taal Lake fisherfolk, Batangas farmers, and their families that the government through the DA is ready to help in the event Taal Volcano erupts again.

"Our 'OneDA' family in Calabarzon led by the Regional Field Office and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources is ready to provide technical assistance and distribute agri-fishery and livestock interventions in areas that may be affected," Dar said.

He said the agency has laid out immediate action plans and strategies for fisherfolk and farm families in lakeshore areas as well as nearby barangays who were also affected.

On July 1, Taal Volcano Island and lakeshore barangays and municipalities were placed under Alert Level 3 by the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology.

The DA chief hopes there would not be a second massive eruption as the volcano did on January 12 last year. The 2020 event displaced thousands of families and recorded P3.4-billion losses in infrastructure, agriculture, fisheries and livestock in Batangas, Laguna and Cavite, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

BFAR 4A regional director Sammy Malvas said an estimated volume of 109 metric tons of bangus and tilapia valued at P8.999 million was lost to a fish kill in Talisay, Batangas.

Despite this, Malvas said "consumption of fish from Taal Lake is safe, but it must be confined to those that are fresh and caught alive. Fish must also be washed thoroughly, internal organs removed, and cooked properly".

Even fish pen operators and fisherfolk operating in Taal Lake assured the public that their tilapia is safe for consumption despite the current restiveness of Taal Volcano.

"The phreatic explosion doesn't affect tilapia. The debris fell only within surrounding areas of the island while sulfur dioxide only affects plants. Moreover, fish do not consume ash from the volcano)," Nestor Natanauan, president of Taal Lake Aquaculture Alliance Inc., said.

Natanauan said fisherfolk and fish farmers are aware of the dangers of Taal's possible explosion. Hence, feeding is done only in the morning, after which workers immediately return to the mainland.

He acknowledged the presence of Coast Guards in the area which prevents unscrupulous elements from stealing fish.

He also assured the public that Taal fisherfolk only harvest and sell fresh and live tilapia.

He said daily fish production from the 6,000 cages of TLLAI members is around 200-250 tons per day. This excludes artisanal tilapia caught outside their cages, as well as tawilis, maliputo, biya and other local species.

Malvas said for five years, the average tilapia production from Taal Lake is around 60,100 MT, of which 40 percent or about 24,000 MT are transported and supplied in Metro Manila.

Dar said there should be no price increase in fish. The average prices of tilapia and bangus are stable at P120 and P160 per kilo, respectively.

"We have more than enough catch from Taal Lake and other areas. We ask the traders not to take advantage of the situation. They should be part of the solution in providing sufficient food at affordable prices to our consumers," he added.

Meanwhile, Malvas proposed a P282-million budget for immediate assistance, and rehabilitation and recovery initiatives.

Daily Tribune
WITHOUT FEAR ◊ WITHOUT FAVOR

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Taal fish cage operators get boost

BY GAB HUMILDE VILLEGAS
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The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said that it is willing to help fish cage operators affected by the fishkill incident at Taal Lake last Tuesday.

BFAR-CALABARZON regional director Sammy Malvas disclosed that they are set to provide assistance to fish cage operators in Taal Lake following the deaths of more than 100 metric tons of *tilapia* and *bangus* in the Talisay-Tanauan area with an estimated worth of P8.99 million.

The agency also released a water quality assessment report to local government units and fish cage operators within Taal lake.

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Meat imports up by 44.3% in H1

MEAT IMPORTS in the first half rose 44.3% year on year to 581,827.61 metric tons (MT) led by pork, buffalo, beef, and turkeys, the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) said.

The BAI said pork imports for the period rose 175.8% year on year to 277,850.59 MT.

Buffalo imports increased 102.9% year on year to 27,279.1 MT, while turkey imports rose 25% to 844.03 MT.

Beef imports rose 0.7% to 83,347.06 MT.

Chicken imports fell 6% to 192,132 MT.

Imports of mechanically deboned meat (MDM) of chicken accounted for 52.2% or 100,253.78 MT of total chicken imports.

MDM is used by processors in products likes hotdogs and chicken nuggets.

Chicken MDM imports fell 21.5% year on year compared to 127,714.8 MT in 2020, despite taking up more than half of total chicken imports.

Lamb imports fell 75.6% to 319.44 MT while duck imports dropped 35.6% to 55.39 MT.

Meat Importers and Traders Association President Jesus C. Cham said by mobile phone that higher pork imports reflect anticipation of growing consumer demand.

"On the other hand, strong buffalo and turkey import indicate the processors (are) searching for alternatives to chicken MDM," Mr. Cham said.

Mr. Cham said the slow reopening of the economy is still taking a toll on importers.

"This is due to a steady, albeit delayed, influx of products, whereas consumers apparently are not spending as much. Especially now we have entered the third quarter — the traditional low season. Further, restaurants are a mixed bag as there are cautious re-openings together with permanent closures," Mr. Cham said.

The government is relying on lower tariffs to boost import volumes, particularly pork, in order to augment supply after the hog inventory was depleted by the African Swine Fever outbreak.

Recently, the Bureau of Customs estimated the foregone revenue from lower tariffs at P1.356 billion on imports between April 9 and June 11.

Executive Order (EO) No. 134, signed by President Rodrigo R. Duterte on May 15, lowered the tariffs on pork imports for one year.

EO 134 cut tariffs on pork imports within the minimum access volume (MAV) quota to 10% in the first three months and up to 15% in the following nine months.

Meanwhile, tariff rates for pork imports outside the MAV quota were lowered to 20% and 25% during the first three months and subsequent nine months, respectively.

After one year, MAV pork imports will be charged 30% while out-of-quota pork imports will pay 40%.

Mr. Duterte also signed EO 133 which increased the MAV quota for pork imports to 254,210 MT from 54,210 MT.

MAV is a commitment by a government to import certain volumes of agricultural commodities at a favorable tariff, and is adopted by participants in the World Trade Organization system. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

Manila Standard

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Safeguarding the coco levy fund

OVERSIGHT

DANILO SUAREZ

AFTER decades of waiting and struggling, a law providing for the utilization of the coconut levy fund has finally been enacted. Last March, President Duterte signed Republic Act No. 11524, also known as the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act. The law creates a Trust Fund for all coco levy funds and assets which shall then be used for the benefit of our coconut farmers and the development of the coconut industry.

Last month, the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) drafted the law's Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) which is now in effect. The PCA, being the head agency for the implementation of the law, also announced that it has been working on the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP). Under the law, the CFIDP shall institute programs for coconut farmers to improve the delivery and distribution of coconut products, innovate coconut production, and provide social protection among coconut farmers, farm workers, and their families.

It is undeniable that the intentions of the law are good. Hence, it is important that the CFIDP should clearly enumerate the standards and criteria in the selection of beneficiaries and should be as inclusive as possible to all coconut farmers and their families. I share the sentiments of the Senate in asking that the registration be continuous. The government should consider the obstacles posed by the pandemic. Given that the law is supposed to benefit our coconut farmers who are mostly living in provinces and other far-flung areas, it is only right that we should allow them some leeway.

> *"The coconut industry remains a contributor to economic growth."*

It is also important that the programs be specifically identified in order to assess very well its impact on the lives of the coconut farmers. These programs should include educational support, scholarships, and medical assistance for the families of coconut farmers. We should provide them adequate support so that coconut farming continues to be a sustainable industry and livelihood.

The law also provides for improving processes and techniques in coconut farming. While this is so, I ask the implementing bodies to organize and conduct planting of new coconut trees to replace our old and damaged trees. The innovation and research in coconut production and distribution should be maximized to include all coconut-producing provinces in the country.

The Philippines is one of the world's top coconut-producing countries. Given that the pandemic and multiple lockdowns have crippled many industries in the country, we need to maintain the viability of our coconut industry as well as the quality of our coconut products, for both local and foreign consumption. The coconut industry remains a contributor to economic growth. It has so much potential to improve, if only we have the appropriate, modernized, and responsive programs.

Hence, we need to ensure that the IRR and the CFIDP of this law will live up to its promises. Local government units of coconut-producing provinces such as Quezon are willing to coordinate with the PCA in order to efficiently and effectively implement the programs and deliver the benefits intended to our coconut farmers. On the other hand, I urge the public to remain vigilant in the utilization of the coco levy fund. Now that the tool is made, we need to make sure that it is being used properly and honestly, and that it be responsive to the actual needs of our hardworking coconut farmers.

Manila Standard

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Pork tariff cut deprives gov't of P1.3-b gain, senator says

By Macon Araneta

THE P1.3 billion in foregone revenue from imported pork tariff could have gone to fighting the African swine fever and to uplifting small farmers and small entrepreneurs of the pork industry, Senator Francis "Kiko" Pangilinan said Wednesday.

The opposition senator said the amount represented the import value of at least 76 million kilos of pork under lower tariff on both in-quota and out-quota import.

Executive Order 134 issued May this year charged 10 percent for the first three months and 15 percent in the succeeding nine months of imports within the minimum access volume (MAV).

Those outside the MAV will be charged 20 and 25 percent, respectively, for the first three and succeeding nine months.

"Until now, the price of pork is still high,P380 per kilo for liempo," said Pangilinan, who filed Senate Bill 2176 seeking to create a Swine Competitiveness Enhancement Fund using proceeds from pork import tariffs.

Pangilinan reiterated his earlier position that slashing tariff was not the best solution since it undermines the local pork industry and deprives the government of needed earnings.

"What's tragic here is when you ask around, no Filipino consumer —whether those who shop in wet markets or supermarkets—will say that they felt the easing of pork prices, he said.

"We warned from the start that such policy is never a win-win solution but a losing proposition to the government, the local industry, and the consumers," Pangilinan said.

Officials said the lower tariff aims to arrest the spiraling pork prices due to the lack of supply as an effect of the African swine fever that decimated a big portion of the local swine industry.

But Pangilinan said consumers continue to complain of high pork prices, especially in wet markets.

With lower revenues, Pangilinan said, the government will have less money to augment programs for the local hog raisers who badly need support to rise from the onslaught of ASF and to be competitive against imported pork.

The farmer-senator said the Senate will continue to keep watch on developments and review the policy when needed to make it more responsive to the local industry and consumers.

Malacañang earlier heeded Pangilinan's call to declare a state of calamity to allow government to augment the funds of the Department of Agriculture for calamity relief and rehabilitation, as well as provide indemnity funds for hog farmers and additional funding for biosafety measures.

He also proposed that affected hog raisers be given cash-for-work opportunities to help them get back on their feet.

The Bureau of Customs (BOC) has reported a spike in pork imports to 76 million kilograms (kg) from April to early June, following the issuance by President Duterte of a series of executive orders (EOs) cutting tariffs on incoming swine meat shipments and increasing the allowable import volumes for a temporary period to help stabilize the domestic supply and prices of pork for the benefit of Filipino consumers.

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PHL PORK IMPORTS RISE 176% IN H1 TO 277K MT

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

THE Philippines, the world's eighth largest consumer of pork, imported a record nearly 135,000 metric tons (MT) of pork bellies and cuts in the first half—more than quadruple from a year earlier—as the country rushed to boost domestic supply and temper rising prices, government data showed.

The 367-percent increase in the imports of pork bellies and cuts drove overall pork imports to expand by 176 percent to 277,850.59 MT from 100,745.261 MT in the first half of 2020, Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) data showed.

BAI data also showed pork imports from January to June already being 8.5 percent higher than the total pork imported by the country in 2020 of 256,017.458 MT.

Industry sources told the BusinessMirror that total pork imports this year may breach the record volume in 2018 of 392,154.307 MT given the current growth rate of imports across all cuts.

Foreign pork suppliers are already upbeat about exporting record volumes of pork to the Philippines this year as the country is in dire need of supply, with domestic production dented by the spread of African swine fever. ***(Related story: https://businessmirror.com.ph/2021/06/28/pork-shipments-to-phl-could-hit-record-high-this-year-suppliers/)***

The twin measures of the government to reduce pork tariffs to as low as 10 percent and increase the minimum access volume (MAV) of pork by 200,000 MT also whetted the appetite of both importers and exporters. The reduction of pork tariffs and increase in MAV only affects primal pork cuts, such as bellies, hams and shoulders.

The twin measures, initiated by the Economic Development Cluster (EDC), aim to boost domestic pork supply and meat inflation that drove overall inflation to accelerate further in recent months. With the twin measures in place, the Department of Agriculture (DA) aims to pull down the retail price of pork below P300 per kilogram from the current range of P310 to P390 per kilogram.

The DA pegged the country's pork supply shortfall this year at about 400,000 MT.

The country's meat inflation slowed to 19.2 percent in June 2021 from 22.1 percent in April and May, which, officials pointed out, is a result of the twin measures that government implemented in April.

"The declining meat inflation points to the positive effects of Executive Orders [EO] 133 and 134. These are expected to further bring down meat prices during the second half of the year," Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick T. Chua said recently.

Imports of pork bellies alone doubled to 26,753.354 MT from 13,006.932 MT while imports of pork cuts ballooned by 581 percent to 108,094.001 MT from 15,872.893 MT,

Continued on A2

PHL PORK IMPORTS RISE 176% IN H1 TO 277K MT

Continued from A1

based on latest BAI data.

Canada was the top supplier of combined imports of pork bellies and pork cuts as it accounted for 29 percent of total volume or about 39,701.563 MT, followed by the United States at a combined volume of 25,400.646 MT, based on BAI data.

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Solon: Pork tariff losses could have gone to fighting African swine fever

THE P1.3 billion in foregone revenue from imported pork tariff could have gone to fighting the African swine fever (ASF) and also uplifting small farmers and small entrepreneurs of the pork industry, Senator Francis N. Pangilinan said on Wednesday.

The foregone revenue was reported from April 9 to June 11 as the Philippines imported at least 76 million kilos of pork under lower tariff on both in-quota and out-quota imports of swine meat.

The policy is contained in Executive Order 134 issued in May which charges 10 percent for the first three months and 15 percent in the succeeding nine months imports within the minimum access volume (MAV). Those outside the MAV will be slapped 20 and 25 percent, respectively, for the first three and succeeding nine months.

"Pork remains expective; liempo is being sold for P380 per kilo. The cause of this is African swine fever," Pangilinan said a statement.

Pangilinan reiterated his earlier position that slashing tariff was not the best solution since it undermines the local pork industry and deprives the government of needed earnings. The lawmaker filed Senate Bill 2176 which seeks to create a Swine Competitiveness Enhancement Fund from pork import tariffs.

"What's tragic here is when you ask around, no Filipino consumer—whether those who shop in wet markets or supermarkets—will say that they felt the easing of pork prices. So who benefited from this policy?" he asked.

"We warned from the start that such policy is never a win-win solution but a losing proposition to the government, the local industry, and the consumers."

Officials said the lower tariff aims to arrest the spiraling pork prices due to the lack of supply as an effect of ASF which decimated a big portion of the local swine industry.

But Pangilinan said consumers continue to complain of high pork prices, especially in wet markets.

"The lowering of pork prices was not felt by our people. What is very evident based in government data are the revenues we did not earn because of the slashed import duties," he said.

With lower revenues, Pangilinan said, the government will have less money to augment programs for the local hog raisers who badly need support to rise from the onslaught of ASF and to be competitive against imported pork.

The lawmaker said the Senate will continue to keep watch on developments and review the policy when needed to make it more responsive to the local industry and consumers.

Malacañang earlier heeded Pangilinan's call to declare a state of calamity to allow government to augment the funds of the Department of Agriculture for calamity relief and rehabilitation, as well as provide indemnity funds for hog farmers and additional funding for biosafety measures.

He also proposed that affected hog raisers be given cash-for-work opportunities to help them get back on their feet.

The Manila Times®

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Mindoro State U gets demo farm

A TECHNO-demo-learning farm established under a Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) project has been turned over to Mindoro State University (MinSU) in Victoria, Oriental Mindoro.

The ceremonial turnover of the "Upgrading the Calamansi Value Chain toward Improving the Calamansi Industry of Oriental Mindoro" project to showcase good agricultural practices (GAP) was held part virtually and part on site. Presiding were Glenn Gregorio, Searca director, and Levy Arago Jr., MinSU president.

"Searca put up the techno-demo-learning farm at the MinSU campus with technical assistance from the University of the Philippines Los Baños, a partner in the calamansi project. DA-BAR (Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agricultural Research) provided the funds for its establishment . . . while MinSU provides counterpart funds for the implementation and monitoring of the learning site," Gregorio said.

Pedcris Orencio, Searca program head for research and thought leadership, noted that one of the project objectives was to promote faculty and student exchanges. Although this was constrained by the pandemic, it gave rise to the idea of a techno-demo-learning farm by which project results could be delivered directly to stakeholders, he added.

Land preparation at the field demo farm has been completed, followed by planting of new seedlings and rehabilitation of old trees, Orencio continued.

A Searca-organized webinar that coincided with the demo farm turnover highlighted GAP and good manufacturing practices (GMP). Participants included representatives of agriculture offices in Oriental Mindoro and other key industry stakeholders as well as members of the Searca-UPLB-MinSU project teams.

Topics covered included protocols for clean and disease-free planting materials and nursery management; GAP in calamansi production such as nutrient, water and canopy management; perspectives to improve post-harvest handling; compliance with standards and market potentials of processed calamansi-based products; and the global market landscape.

Christine Pine, Oriental Mindoro provincial agriculturist, said the demonstration farm would showcase appropriate technologies and results could be used as inputs to the Annual Investment Plans of local government units.

Christian Anthony Agutaya, MinSU vice president for research, development and extension, expressed hope the undertaking would help continue the university's contribution to sustainable development and economic recovery given the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Searca's Orencio said, "The project is not the end of Searca's research interventions; rather, it opens windows for future collaborations to upgrade the calamansi value chain and improve the calamansi industry in the province."

In 2016, Searca partnered with MinSU and the municipality of Victoria for a project to increase yields and production of calamansi-based products, diversify products and markets, and boost incomes.

It also helped organize the Victoria Kalamansi Farmers' Federation and supported it through training and other learning activities.

Victoria town has the highest production in terms of volume, area and average yield among Oriental Mindoro's 14 towns.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO

The Manila Times

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Mandanas ruling: Implications on agriculture

FINER POINTS

FERMIN ADRIANO

THE Mandanas ruling is a 2018 Philippine Supreme Court decision asserting that the bases of the computation of the internal revenue allotment (IRA) for local government units (LGUs) are erroneous, thus denying LGUs a just share of the IRA. The IRA is computed based on gross national internal taxes of the third fiscal year prior to the current fiscal year.

As there was an increase in the tax collection effort three years ago, the effect of the Mandanas ruling is to provide additional funds to LGUs, estimated to be in the amount of P225.3 billion starting in budget year 2022. This incremental increase in the IRA represents around 1 percent of the country's gross domestic product, raising the IRA's share to the total budget appropriation to around P1.1 trillion in 2022. This will constitute the biggest budgetary line item in the General Appropriations Act.

The Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991 stipulates that the IRA should be spent by the LGUs in the following manner: 20 percent is for capital outlays (infrastructure projects); 55 percent for personal services (meaning salary of local government employees); and 25 percent for maintenance and operating expenses. This means that only 45 percent (capital outlays plus maintenance and operating costs) of IRA funds can be used for development projects and their maintenance as the rest is to be utilized for paying the salaries of local government personnel.

Will the extra fund be enough?

Many agricultural development advocates have been arguing that the additional funds to be received by LGUs under the Mandanas ruling should be mainly used to fund rural development projects, particularly in provinces and municipalities where agriculture constitutes a significant sector of the local economy. The problem that they conveniently forget, in their eagerness to champion the cause of agricultural development, that the additional sum of P225.3 billion is expected to finance other development projects that also cater to the other needs of poor constituents. These are projects related to health, housing, social services, water and sanitation, environment, education, among others. Ostensibly, the extra money is not enough to fund the huge appetite for development projects in our poor local provinces and municipalities.

Second, the World Bank noted that the distribution of the IRA has built-in flaws in the sense that some better-off LGUs (because of population or land size) are getting higher amounts while poorer ones are getting less despite having greater assistance needs. This situation is amply demonstrated by the National Capital Region and Calabarzon (Region 4A) barangays, which receive double the amount of IRA allocated compared to those located in far-flung and remote municipalities/provinces.

And third is that the disposition of the IRA for capital outlays is left at the discretion of LGU officials. What if the LGU executives decide that those extra funds, instead of being spent for agricultural projects, should be used to build a sports complex, barangay stations, health centers (without being manned by qualified medical personnel), improving roads in populous barangays, construction of basketball courts or town halls, among others? Then the potentials for triggering the development of the local communities with the additional IRA funds will be practically nil. On the other hand, those same projects might win more votes for LGU officials in the coming election.

Delineation and accountabilities

If more national government resources are to be poured to LGUs, the most important task is how to clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of national government agencies whose services are devolved to the LGUs (as mandated by the LGC) vis-à-vis the LGUs. A clear delineation will exact the appropriate corresponding responsibilities on both sides.

In the case of agriculture for instance, LGUs should be made accountable for any failure in the delivery of extension services if such are already devolved to them. If farmers are not able to bring their produce to the market during the peak harvest season, there is no reason why the central Department of Agriculture (DA) should be blamed for the lack of such assistance given that the particular service is already devolved.

I remember a friend of mine who dabbled in farming complaining that DA central had done nothing to arrest a decline in local vegetable prices during the peak harvest season. In turn, I asked him what his LGU had done to address the problem given that market assistance should be one of the services devolved to LGUs and that his LGU was more familiar with traders in their community. The blame game immediately stopped when he realized that the law already provided a clear distinction between the roles and responsibilities of LGUs and the DA central. Of course, I didn't expect him to blame his LGU officials knowing his fear of possible retribution. Acerbic criticisms are usually reserved for DA central officials who are far removed from the scene and therefore cannot personally respond to their attacks.

On the other hand, the proper role of the DA central is to provide LGUs with the latest information, know-how and technology on how farm productivity can be further increased; how pests or diseases should be managed; how the adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters can be mitigated; where logistical support and infrastructure should be built to bring down the costs of doing business; and how profitable markets for produce can be accessed. In turn, the application of such know-how and technology should be the main task of LGUs by virtue of the provision of the LGC and the fact that they are more knowledgeable of the local situation.

With this arrangement, the public will be better able to see who among the LGU officials are real performers and worth their votes and support. With the extra funds to be given to our LGUs under the Mandanas ruling, the public has all the right to make sure that our local officials are made accountable for them.

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Fish kill hits Taal Lake

SOME 109 metric tons of bangus and tilapia worth around P8.99 million were affected by a fish kill that hit Taal Lake, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources on Tuesday said.

The fish kill occurred as Taal Volcano continues to manifest unrest.

BFAR-4A regional director Sammy Malvas said the fish mortality that occurred in Taal Lake in Talisay area had no connection with the volcano's rumbling.

"Walang direct na kaugnayan 'yung sulfur na ibinubuga ng bulkan. Walang koneksyon doon sa pagbaba ng dissolved oxygen sa lawa," the BFAR regional director said.

"Hindi po acidic 'yung tubig sa lawa as of yesterday. Nasa alkaline pa o basic. Hindi po siya acidic, so wala pong direct na link 'yung ibinubugang sulfur ng bulkan doon sa pagbaba ng dissolved oxygen," he added.

Malvas said they are coordinating with the local government and the operators of the fish cages in Talisay, Batangas affected by the fish kill.

He said all dead fish were brought to the local government unit's mortality pit for safe disposal.

The BFAR regional head advised the public not to consume fish affected by the phenomenon for they were no longer safe to eat.

Jane Eleda

MANILA BULLETIN

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STILL RESTLESS — Lazy morning at a fish pen in Agoncillo, near Taal Volcano, where the price of the tilapia havest has plunged to ₱70 per kilo. Following a phreatomagmatic eruption, Taal Volcano remains under Alert Level 3, whose magmatic unrest is still under close monitoring by the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs). Towns in the vicinity of the volcano, like Agoncillo and Laurel in Batangas, are still considered high risk. (Ali Vicoy)

Taal manifests continuous 'magmatic unrest'; explosive eruption possible

By ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ

An explosive eruption remains a possibility for Taal Volcano as it remains under Alert Level 3 due to continuous "magmatic unrest," the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) warned on Wednesday, July 7.

"At Alert Level 3, magma extruding from the main crater could drive explosive eruption," Phivolcs said.

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Taal had a series of phreatomagmatic eruptions that occurred at 8:47 a.m., 9:15 a.m., 9:26 a.m., and 11:56 a.m. on Wednesday, July 7.

Phivolcs said the event at 8:47 a.m. generated a 300-meter high plume, while the 11:56 a.m. burst generated a 200-meter dark gray plume.

The events recorded at 9:15 a.m. and 9:26 a.m. lasted two minutes and five minutes, respectively.

Phreatomagmatic eruption is caused by magma coming into contact with groundwater.

Taal Volcano also spewed a "grayish" plume that rose 300 meters above the main crater at around 5:18 a.m.

The public remains prohibited from entering the entire Taal Volcano Island, which is a permanent danger zone.

Phivolcs also advised those in the high-risk barangays of Agoncillo and Laurel in Batangas to evacuate due to hazards of pyroclastic density currents and volcanic tsunami in case strong eruptions occur.

"All activities on Taal Lake should not be allowed at this time," it added.

Communities around the Taal lakeshores were also advised to remain vigilant and take precautionary measures against possible airborne ash and vog.

Phivolcs asked residents around Taal Lake to "calmly" prepare for possible evacuation should Taal Volcano's unrest intensifies.

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Aboitiz makes 'agripreneurs' out of IP farmers

THE Aboitiz Group, through its corporate social responsibility arm Aboitiz Foundation and food unit Pilmico, assists farmers in Iligan to be efficient 'agri-preneurs' and create a more sustainable livelihood.

Through the Inclusive Agribusiness Project (IAP), the Foundation and Pilmico donated farm equipment to Hindang Farmers to help increase their production volume and meet market demands. The Aboitiz Foundation also donated a corn sheller for the Marawi-Baloi farmers in Nangka, Baloi, Lanao del Norte under the 'Angat Lahat sa Agribusiness' or ALAB livelihood program in partnership with Go Negosyo.

"Through this inclusive agri-business project, the Aboitiz Foundation is committed to further help Marawi Baloi Farmers Association and Hindang MPC to attain organizational sustainability and scale up their production, taking advantage of the significant demand for yellow corn. Most importantly, together with our partners Pilmico Foods Corporation and Go Negosyo, we intend to contribute to achieving sustained income for their members, which will lead to an improvement in their quality of life and well-being," Aboitiz Foundation President and COO Maribeth L. Marasigan said.

Pilmico is one of the institutional markets that purchases yellow corn produce directly from the Hindang Banana Farmers Multipurpose Cooperative (Hindang MPC), which received a corn sheller, a moisture checker, PVC tarps, a weighing scale, and other farm inputs that the farmers can use in their crop production.

"We the members and officers of Hindang Banana Farmers Multipurpose Cooperative extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Aboitiz Foundation and Pilmico in helping us get back on our feet in this pandemic. This is a big help for us farmers in ensuring that we have bountiful crops. Thank you)," said Larry Coracol, Chairperson of Hindang MPC.

To ensure the sustainability of the project, Aboitiz partnered with the City Agriculture Office of Iligan City to provide skills training and updates on farming technologies. Aboitiz is also closely working with the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) to monitor the organizational performance of the cooperative.

MARAWI-IBALOI farmers inspect the corn sheller donated by Aboitiz Foundation and Pilmico. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

In 2018, Aboitiz Foundation together with Go Negosyo, Pilmico, and the Department of Agriculture started ALAB, a livelihood development project for Marawi's Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). ALAB is a business incubation program that identifies and directly addresses the needs of selected cooperatives and associations, while also providing them the support needed in order for them to scale up. At the end of the ALAB program, the cooperatives and associations will be equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools to become successful agripreneurs, creating a positive change in the Philippine agriculture sector.

"We would like to thank Aboitiz Foundation and Go Negosyo for their continuing efforts in helping small agri-businesses like us and for providing the needs for our business to grow especially in these times where our livelihood are deeply affected by the 2017 Marawi Siege and the Covid-19 pandemic. May Allah the God almighty bless all the people behind this program and may you all succeed in your goal," MBA Marawi Baloi Farmer Association President Abdul Baari Lininding said.

The enterprise development program of Aboitiz Foundation supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth as it continues to empower cooperative members with effective organizational management and technical skills, financial and infrastructure support, and access to markets to help grow and expand their businesses. Since 2016, the Aboitiz Foundation has extended over P90 million in enterprise development assistance to its beneficiaries nationwide.

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Del Monte PHL's fresh pineapple exports hit ₱5.85 billion in April

By Tyrone Jasper C. Piad
@Tyronepiad

DEL Monte Philippines Inc. (DMPI) saw its revenues from fresh pineapple exports reach P5.85 billion in April, with China as its primary market.

The fruit canner wants to have more retail outlets in tier 1 cities in China and to further penetrate the market for tier 2 and tier 3 cities with new distributors. It aims to double its fresh pineapple retail distribution network by 2025 from the current 15,000 outlets.

China, with an import volume of 182 million kilograms last year, is Del Monte's primary market in North Asia. The country's import of fresh pineapples has a compounded average growth rate of 18 percent from 2015 to 2020.

Citing analytics and consulting firm GlobalData, DMPI said in a statement that it is the biggest fresh pineapple exporter to China last year with a 53-percent market share. It is also a major supplier in Japan and South Korea, accounting for 33 percent and 21 percent of the market share, respectively.

Del Monte's fresh pineapples are sold primarily under the "S&W Sweet 16" brand in China, Japan, and South Korea.

"Chinese consumers prefer trusted brands such as S&W which consumers are willing to pay a premium for," said Liu Zhijie, owner of Goodfarmer Foods Holding Group Co. Ltd., one of DMPI's key distributors in China.

"We are very pleased to be a partner of DMPI in expanding the fresh pineapple business in China where per capita consumption of imported pineapples is much lower than in other North Asian markets."

PHOTO FROM WWW.DELMONTE.COM

"The high quality of fresh pineapples that we source from DMPI is the reason why they are among the market leaders in Japan. They have established a reputation for quality," Union Co. Ltd. President Tatsuya Ishiguro added. Union is Del Monte's biggest distributor in Japan.

The company earlier reported that its net income for fiscal year 2021 ending April improved by 33 percent to P4.6 billion from P3.5 billion the previous year. It attributed the higher bottom-line figures to better sales, lower costs and expenses and enhanced efficiency.

It also recently revived its plan to launch an initial public offering to raise as much as P44 billion.

The Manila Times®

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■ Aboitiz Foundation is also leading efforts to assist farmers in Iligan City. PHOTO FROM ABOITIZ

Aboitiz turns Iligan farmers into agripreneurs

THE Aboitiz Group, through its corporate social responsibility arm Aboitiz Foundation and food unit Pilmico, is assisting farmers in Iligan City to be efficient "agripreneurs" and create more sustainable livelihood.

Through the Inclusive Agribusiness Project, the Aboitiz Foundation and Pilmico donated farm equipment to Hindang farmers to help increase their production volume and meet market demands. The former also donated a corn sheller for the Marawi-Baloi farmers in Nangka, Baloi, Lanao del Norte under the Angat Lahat sa Agribusiness (ALAB) livelihood program in partnership with Go Negosyo.

"Most importantly, together with our partners Pilmico Foods Corp. and Go Negosyo, we intend to contribute to achieving sustained income for their members, which will lead to an improvement in their quality of life and well-being," Aboitiz Foundation President and Chief Operating Officer Maribeth Marasigan said in a statement.

"We, the members and officers of Hindang Banana Farmers Multipurpose Cooperative (MPC), extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Aboitiz Foundation and Pilmico in helping us get back on our feet in this pandemic. This is a big help for us farmers in ensuring that we have bountiful crops. Thank you)," said Larry Coracol, chairperson of Hindang MPC.

Marawi Baloi Farmer Association President Abdul Baari Lininding expressed gratitude towards Aboitiz Foundation and Go Negosyo for their continuing efforts in helping small agribusinesses in the province "and for providing the needs for our business to grow especially in these times where our livelihood is deeply affected by the 2017 Marawi Siege and the Covid-19 pandemic."

EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

Pilipino Star
NGAYON
Diyaryong disente ng masang intelihente

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Imported pork wa epek, mamimili dusa pa rin sa mahal na karneng baboy

Taliwas sa pahayag ng gobyerno na bababa ang presyo ng karneng baboy kapag nag-angkat nito, iginiit ni Senador Francis "Kiko" Pangilinan na patuloy pa ring umiiral ang mataas na presyo ng karneng baboy sa mga pamilihan na nagpapahirap sa mga mamimili.

Una nang ibinida ng mga ahensiya ng gobyerno na makatutulong ang pag-aangkat ng karneng baboy para mapigil ang pagtaas ng presyo nito na nag-ugat sa kakulangan ng supply bunsod ng African swine fever (ASF) na nanalasa sa mga babuyan sa Luzon.

Ngunit sinabi ni Pangilinan na hanggang nga-yon ay hindi pa rin ito nararamdaman ng mga mamimili dahil nasa P380 pa rin ang bawat kilo ng liempo sa mga palengke.

Mula Abril 9 hanggang Hunyo 11, nag-angkat ang bansa ng hindi bababa sa 76 kilo ng karneng baboy batay sa mas mababang taripa na ipinataw ng gobyerno.

Dahil sa mababang taripa, nawalan ang gobyerno ng halos P1.3 bilyon na maaaring gamitin sa paglaban sa ASF at sa pagtulong sa maliliit na magbababoy at iba pang nagtatrabaho sa industriya ng karneng baboy.

"Ang problema ng mataas na presyo ng baboy ay nasa pagsugpo ng African swine fever," giit ni Pangilinan *(Gemma Garcia)*