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FOR THE BENEFIT OF COOPERATIVES Agriculture Secretary William Dar led the awarding of several trucks to farmers' cooperatives in Benguet on Oct. 29, 2021. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

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TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Farmers seek consultations before RCEP ratification

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

A farmers' group is urging the Senate to defer the ratification of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade agreement as stakeholders have yet to be consulted on its impact on the country's agriculture sector.

In a statement yesterday, the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) claimed that the Department of Agriculture (DA) has not conducted any formal consultations with farmers and other stakeholders on the scope and levels of tariff and other commitments it has pledged under the RCEP.

"We are in the dark as to what the government has committed to other RCEP countries with respect to our agricultural products," said FFF national manager Raul Montemayor.

"There used to be a committee of International Trade (CIT) under the DA, through which stakeholders were regularly consulted on the department's negotiating strategies and positions. Unfortunately, Secretary William Dar disbanded this committee when he assumed office in 2019, and there has been absolutely no consultation ever since on any trade negotiation, including the recently concluded Philippines-Korea Free Trade Agreement, and now the RCEP," he said.

The RCEP is a multilateral trade agreement between and among ASEAN countries, including the Philippines, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

It provides for an open, inclusive and rules-based trading system to promote deeper economic integration in the region.

The RCEP is expected to boost Philippine exports through enhanced market access in the region.

It would provide cheaper goods for production and manufacturing, as well as ensure transparent rules and clear mechanism for resolving trade issues and concerns, and would also allow micro, small and medium enterprises to participate in the global value chain.

According to the FFF, the Philippines has generally not taken advantage of trade opportunities arising from previous trade agreements, including the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade-Uruguay Round (GATT-UR) under the World Trade Organization (WTO), and regional agreements such as the ASEAN Trade In Goods Agreement (ATIGA), and bilateral agreements with China, Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

"Our exports have not grown significantly, and we have failed to promote and export goods other than traditional commodities such as banana, pineapple and coconut-based products. There is no dedicated program to help farmers produce export-grade products, nor are processors and exporters given ample support to comply with international standards and compete with other countries," Montemayor said.

"Meanwhile, our imports of food and other agricultural products have increased, resulting in escalating agricultural trade deficits and reduced farm incomes during the past two decades," he said.

The FFF urged the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to require the DA to undertake a detailed and comprehensive consultation with stakeholders before taking further action on the RCEP ratification proposal.

The group also asked the committee to instruct the DA to commission an independent review and assessment of the impact of ongoing free trade agreements on Philippine agriculture and small farmers, and the potential effects of RCEP on the country's sensitive agricultural sectors.

The RCEP was ratified by President Duterte on Sept. 2 and is now with the Senate for concurrence.

"We hope to finish the concurrence process the soonest possible time so that the Philippines can already deposit its instrument of ratification, and be one of the first set of economies to benefit from the agreement once implemented by early 2022, as targeted," Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez said last week.

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DA targets 1.3-M hectare hybrid rice area for 2022

By MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has targeted an unprecedented hybrid rice area of 1.2 to 1.3 million hectares for crop year 2022 after a lull in planting amid the pandemic.

Frisco M. Malabanan, DA rice program consultant, said at least 700 hectares of hybrid rice are being readied for the bumper dry season of 2022.

"For our third year now, we have aggressively pursued hybrid rice planting. That is the reason why we have been able to attain the highest level of rice production this year. With hybrid rice, you're sure to automatically harvest an additional 1.52 metric tons per hectare versus inbred," said Malabanan.

The Philippines posted a record rice harvest of 19.44 million MT in 2020 from 18.81 million MT in 2019. But this requires a DA budget for the food security to ensure a sustainable hybrid rice program.

"The budget of DA for food security has yet to be approved. It's still being discussed in the Senate," said Malabanan.

Private seed growers have committed to supply DA with the needed hybrid rice seeds. They are now readying the rice area involving DA's rice clustering program.

The clustering program consolidates a hybrid rice area of at least 100 hectares, particularly in 15 priority provinces.

"We assure the government of our support for this public partnership program. It will be the key to our goal for food sufficiency and food security," said Rice Board President Recher Ondap.

"We hope to be assured of the government's budget allocation as many farmers have started land preparation for the dry season 2022. Budgetary support should not only be for this rice clustering program but for the entire food sufficiency and resiliency program," he added.

Out of the 15 priority provinces, five provinces already been identified. These top five provinces are Bukidnon, Bicol, Nueva Ecija, Isabela, and Ilocos.

DA has been successful in restoring the hybrid rice program after DA secured a budget for this in the last two years.

"Secretary (William) Dar has been supported by the economic managers in the budget for hybrid rice. Prior to this, our hybrid rice area was only at around 300,000 to 400,000 hectares," Malabanan said.

Under the hybrid rice program, the DA allocated a seed subsidy of ₱5,000 per hectare. This is with fertilizer support of three vouchers per farmer equivalent to ₱1,000 per voucher.

But these are not the only things needed for the DA rice program to take off. The programs on irrigation, fertilization, mechanization also have to be funded.

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BFAR: Closed fishing season for 'galunggong' starts to bear fruit

THE Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) on Wednesday announced that the three-month closed fishing season for *galunggong* in Northern Palawan has started to rejuvenate fish stocks in the area.

The BFAR, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture, said the closed fishing season started last November 1 and will last until January 31.

Under the closed fishing season rules, the use of purse seine, ring net and bag net in catching roundscad *(galunggong)* within the conservation area of northeast of Palawan are prohibited, according to BFAR.

"Serving as a conservation measure, this policy is aimed towards protecting the species during its peak spawning season, and further addressing overfishing, climate change, among other concerns," it said in a statement.

"Already in its 7th year of implementation, the closed fishing season has continually yielded significant positive results in the increased catch of *galunggong* in the area."

Citing government assessment, DA-BFAR said *galunggong* catch by purse seine has increased to 434.98 metric tons (MT) in 2020 from 233.07 metric tons in 2015, while those caught by ring net grew to 206.30 MT from 187.02 MT in the same period.

"The recorded increase in catch of *galunggong* in the area has been made possible by the strong cooperation and support of the government, commercial fishers and other stakeholders in a bid to take care of our country's fishery resources," BFAR National Director Eduardo Gongona said.

"We strongly urge our fisheries stakeholders to be one with the government in the implementation of the closed fishing season in Palawan. This measure will help protect the commercially-important *galunggong* species, ensuring its availability as part of our efforts following the guidance of Agriculture Secretary William Dar on achieving food security and fostering sustainable growth in the fisheries industry."

The DA-BFAR said Palawan is one of the major suppliers of *galunggong* to Metro Manila as it accounts for 95 percent of the *galunggong* catch landed at Navotas Fish port.

"To further supplement the fish supply while the closed fishing season is in effect, the bureau will give emphasis to aquaculture products as an alternative, as well as ensuring the availability of fish products in the market through programs such as Oplan ISDA."

Due to the ban on catching *galunggong* during the period, the price of *galunggong* and other fish in the market are affected by the decrease in the market supply as most of the fish sold in Metro Manila come from the area.

To address the increase in the price of *galunggong*, the government is importing fish to augment the supply of locally-caught fish, triggering howls of protest from militant fishermen.

Pamalakaya, for one, insists that flooding the market with imported fish has not helped reduce the cost of fish in the market. The group said it added to the burden of small fishermen as it pulls down the price of local *galunggong*, which could cut their income.

This prompted the group to ask consumers to boycott imported fish, which they say may be "unsafe" as this may be laced with chemical preservatives unlike the fresh *galunggong* caught by local fishermen.

Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data showed that *galunggong* production in Palawan in 2020 rose to 9,033.55 MT from 7,507.03 MT in 2016.

PSA data also indicated that the province's *galunggong* output in the first half went up by 6.31 percent to 6482.46 MT from last year's 6,097.62 MT. ***Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas, Jonathan L. Mayuga***

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'Aerial spraying delays to cut banana output'

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

LOCAL banana growers and exporters sought the government's help to fast-track the renewal of the licenses of their pilots and aircraft so they can resume aerial spraying in their plantations to avert billions of pesos in losses.

In a letter to the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP), the Pilipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association (PBGEA) raised concerns about the delays in the renewal of licenses of the group's pilots and the release of the Certificates of Airworthiness for their aircraft. It was addressed to CAAP Director General Captain Jim C. Sydiongco.

PBGEA said their pilots and aircraft have remained grounded, hampering operations in banana plantations as they cannot conduct aerial spraying of pesticides to prevent the spread of diseases.

The group said this could lead to production losses as the absence of pesticide would result in a lower banana bunch weight.

"Failure to spray for one cycle would mean that at least one leaf will be unprotected and without fungicide coverage [for Cavendish banana, one leaf emerge every week before the coming of the bud or 'puso']," according to the letter dated October 20, a copy of which was obtained by the BusinessMirror.

"The loss of one leaf due to Sigatoka [a banana disease] especially before shooting will be critical since this is the stage when the fruit starts to develop. Study shows that losing one leaf due to Sigatoka will result in a reduction of 0.57 kgs of the potential bunch weight at harvest assuming there will be production."

BUSINESSMIRROR FILE PHOTO

Growers and exporters could lose as much as $29.832 million or P1.491 billion if the licenses and the certification will not be renewed immedi-

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ately. The group noted that there are about 44,000 hectares of corporate banana farms in Mindanao.

The estimated potential losses represent 2 percent of the banana industry's export receipts last year, when the value of shipments reached $1.644 billion, based on BUSINESSMIRROR's computation using latest government data.

"In connection to the above and to avoid another pandemic to the already ailing banana industry, we are earnestly requesting that temporary licenses and certificates to operate be granted," the group said.

The letter was also sent by the group to various Cabinet secretaries including Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar, Finance Secretary Carlos G. Dominguez, and Transportation Secretary Arthur P. Tugade.

PBGEA Executive Director Stephen A. Antig told the BUSINESSMIRROR that CAAP has not yet responded.

The country's banana output last year declined slightly to 9.056 million metric tons (MMT) from 9.157 MMT recorded in 2019 due to spread of diseases, such as Fusarium wilt.

Despite a 14.38-percent contraction in shipments, the Philippines remained as the world's top exporter of bananas for the third consecutive year in 2020. The country exported 3.725 MMT of bananas last year.

Trade map data of the International Trade Centre analyzed by the BUSINESSMIRROR showed that the Philippines was able to secure its spot in the global banana market despite a double-digit decline in shipments caused by anemic production and logistical problems.

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Vizcaya farmers join pilot citrus project

KASIBU, Nueva Vizcaya: At least 13 citrus growers from Barangay Malabing Valley have been selected to participate in the pilot testing of balanced fertilization and pesticide use as a means to boost harvest in the Cagayan Valley Region.

"Our objective is to rejuvenate unproductive citrus orchards in order to increase yield and address the infestation/infection of insect pests and diseases that affect production," said Lovelyn Gaspar, research division chief of the Department of Agriculture's Regional Field Office 2 (DA-RFO2).

She urged the citrus growers to cooperate and gave assurances that all the necessary technologies would be provided by the Agriculture department and other agencies in the region.

Valeriano Corales of DA's Nueva Vizcaya Experiment Station said unproductive citrus orchards along the road were chosen for the project, which began implementation last October 19. A field assessment had found that many had unproductive trees that were already 30 to 35 years old. Rind borers and pink disease was also found in the area.

Growers will be encouraged to use chicken dung, controlled release fertilizer, foliar fertilizer, agricultural lime for acidic areas, soil drenching and mykovam — a soil-based biofertilizer containing fungi that was developed by the University of the Philippines Los Baños' Institute of Biotechnology.

The pesticide component, meanwhile, includes the need-based application of organic fungicides, insecticides and bactericides and even pheromones, among others.

Daniel Bartong, Malabing Multipurpose Cooperative manager, expressed thanks to the DA-RFO2 and the provincial government of Nueva Vizcaya, led by Gov. Carlos Padilla, for their continued support of the organization and local farmers.

"We are thankful that we were chosen to be part of this research, which mainly aims to improve our productivity," Bartong said.

The DA-RFO2 said the project was in support of agriculture modernization under the OneDA Reform Agenda.

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FFF urges Senate to defer RCEP agreement

NONGOVERNMENT organization Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) urged the Senate to defer the ratification of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade agreement pending the conduct of consultations with key stakeholders and studies on the potential impact of the agreement on Philippine agriculture.

The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations chaired by Sen. Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel 3rd recently started hearings that may lead to the ratification of, and formal entry of the Philippines into the trade agreement.

In a statement on Tuesday, FFF claimed that the Department of Agriculture (DA) has not conducted any formal consultations with farmers and other stakeholders on the scope and levels of tariff and other commitments it has pledged under the RCEP trade agreement.

"We are in the dark as to what the government has committed to other RCEP countries with respect to our agricultural products. There used to be a Committee of International Trade under the DA, through which stakeholders were regularly consulted on the department's negotiating strategies and positions," said Raul Montemayor, FFF national manager.

For instance, no consultation on any trade negotiation has been conducted for the recently concluded Philippines-Korea Free Trade Agreement, Montemayor stressed.

FFF noted that the country has generally not taken advantage of trade opportunities arising from previous trade agreements, including the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade-Uruguay Round under the World Trade Organization and regional agreements, such as the Asean Trade In Goods Agreement and bilateral agreements with China, Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

"Our exports have not grown significantly and we have failed to promote and export goods other than traditional commodities such as banana, pineapple and coconut-based products. There is no dedicated program to help farmers produce export-grade products, nor are processors and exporters given ample support to comply with international standards and compete with other countries. Meanwhile, our imports of food and other agricultural products have increased, resulting in escalating agricultural trade deficits and reduced farm incomes during the past two decades," Montemayor explained.

EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

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Filipino farmers turn to brown rice production

BY EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

GETTING the nod of most doctors and leading rice growers in the country, brown rice has greatly improved both the income of farmers and the welfare of Filipinos, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A lot of Filipinos are now choosing brown rice because it improves their digestive system and overall health.

Many Filipino farmers have ventured into producing high-quality brown rice. They observed that demand for brown rice has increased because more Filipinos are switching from white to brown rice regardless of its price in the market.

One of the locally produced brown rice that is accessible to the public is the Doña Maria brown rice by SL Agritech Corp.

"To have this high-quality brown rice in the market, it has undergone the precise process from planting to harvesting and packaging. With the 1,055 farmers from Nueva Ecija, Laguna and Mindoro with approximately 5,000 hectares in total and an average of two cropping seasons, Doña Maria brown rice became available nationwide," Tiffany Lim Ngo, SLAC marketing director, said in a statement.

The World Health Organization suggested including fruits, vegetables and whole grain, such as brown rice, in one's diet to stay fit and healthy with a stronger immune system against Covid-19.

Research also shows that brown rice as compared to white rice has a more significant percentage of nutrients because when rice is polished, the bran is completely removed, along with its key nutrients. Scientists found out that the rice bran serves as a storage of micronutrients, which our body needs to improve resistance from viruses and bacteria.

A study from the Department of Agriculture's Philippine Rice Research Institute recommends foods with low glycemic index (GI), including brown rice, which can regulate blood sugar levels. Other than having a low GI, brown rice has more nutrition including antioxidants, fiber, iron, zinc, magnesium, selenium, and vitamin B1, B3 and B6.

"With our progressive plans and programs for brown rice in the Philippines, we will continue to prioritize the profits of our local farmers and, of course, the health of Filipinos. We want to strive for both so the next generation will have something to eat nutritiously," SLAC chairman Dr. Henry Lim Bon Liong said.

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From abaca to polymer

FINER POINTS
FERMIN ADRIANO

IN early 19th century Britain, a group called the Luddite movement emerged to oppose the increasing use of machines in the textile industry. Led by Ned Ludd, they protested the introduction of machines, which they thought were displacing the workers and rendering them jobless.

With the Luddites' protest unheeded by the British authorities and industrial capitalists, they resorted to violence by destroying machines in order to preserve their jobs. Their penchant for anarchy made the movement notorious. Thus, until now, the term "Luddism" has become synonymous to any protest action targeted against the introduction of innovation or what is termed nowadays "disruptive technology."

The history of technological innovation is replete with reactionary responses to its adverse impact on employees of old technology or the old order. The use of the steam engine to propel ships and trains was met with resistance by many workers dislodged by the introduction of this innovation. Similarly, the use of conveyor belt in factories was condemned as an act of dehumanization of labor in the workplace as human action was now dictated by the rhythm of the conveyor belt system rather than by the free and fluid action of the human beings.

More recently, the shift to analog technology to digital technology led to protests by workers in the copper industry. Copper is the main ingredient used in analog technology. Hundreds of thousands of highly skilled workers also lost their jobs in this gigantic technological shift. The introduction and advancements in home and then laptop computers, which replaced the giant IBM office computer machines and the smartphone equipped with sophisticated camera that replaced the traditional SLR camera, upturned operations.

Resistance against polymer

This short digression to history highlights the resistance confronting our Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) in its plan to pilot test the use of polymer in the fabrication of our banknotes. At present, our banknotes utilize abaca (raw materials come from us but we import processed products), and polymer will replace abaca as the raw material, leading to a decline in demand for abaca and the possible loss of jobs by our abaca workers. As if history is repeating itself, there is resistance from the stakeholders of the abaca subsector, from the authority in charge of its development (the Philippine Fiber Development Authority or PhilFiDA) to the two companies supplying abaca as raw materials for banknotes, and the abaca growers. Expectedly, the claim is that it will result in export revenue losses, income drop for abaca farmers and job contraction in abaca farms.

The arguments would have been more convincing if the objectors were able to provide robust empirical evidence on how much the country will lose in terms of export revenues, farmers' income and the number of jobs lost. At present, we just have to take their words as a matter of faith.

BSP response

It is said that the better prepared mind wins debates. Obviously, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) is better prepared because it has already commissioned a team of experts to look into the issues raised by the objectors.

First, BSP noted that there are already 50 countries in the world that have adopted, in varying degrees, the use of polymer in their banknotes. Their main reasons for the switch are the following: security (difficult to counterfeit); durability (polymer lasts 2.5 times longer and hence saves government money); hygienic (bacteria and viruses do not latch long on the banknotes); economical (no need to frequently print because they last longer); and environment-friendly as polymer (inactive carbon) does not contribute to greenhouse gas emissions.

Second, in terms of foregone export revenues, another study by BSP estimated that if the abaca raw material in the P1,000 notes is fully replaced, the revenue loss will range from P17.7 million (for a price of P60 per kilogram for the abaca) to a price of P48.4 million (P120 per kilogram) in 2023 (when the polymer banknotes will be extensively used).

Third, in terms of abaca farms to be adversely affected (and assuming that other uses of abaca fiber are not developed by PhilFiDA), the same BSP study calculated that around 440 hectares would be impacted in 2023 and may increase to around 605 hectares in 2026. Total land area devoted to abaca production is around 180,000 hectares in 2015.

And fourth, in terms of labor displacement, BSP estimated that foregone employment may reach a total of 438 jobs for a typical farm and 1,002 jobs for a good farm in 2023. This might rise to 599 jobs for the former and 1,370 jobs in the latter by 2026. Total abaca farmers numbered around 129,000 in 2016.

Finding alternatives

The above discussion clearly manifests that the adverse effects of the shift from abaca to polymer are minimal while the benefits to society are enormous. Our bias toward the adoption of polymer is not merely based on our belief that we have to modernize our economy if the country is going to be prepared for the challenges of the 21st century. It is based on the mere computation of the benefit-cost of pursuing a certain course of action compared to maintaining the status quo. Our valuation process shows that the benefits of adopting the innovation far outweigh the costs.

[illegible] of the few of our poor abaca farmers who would be adversely affected by this shift? This is where the role of the government, particularly PhilFiDA under the Department of Agriculture, comes in.

Abaca has many uses besides being a raw material for banknotes. It can also be used as paper material for other official documents such as passports, land titles and birth certificates. There are other uses of abaca that can be explored, such as face masks, bags, ornamentals, among others, the demand for which is rising in both the local and international markets. What is needed is the injection of more funds into research and development to improve the design and quality of these products.

Only the lazy and uncreative minds will project a doomsday scenario for the abaca industry once the banknotes market is lost to polymers. They are the virtual Luddites in our midst who attempt to stop the march of progress and history. As the student activists in the 1970s and 1980s declared, "They will end up in the dustbin of history." And it sounds more cruel when translated to our dialect, *"Ang paglalagakan nila ay ang kankungan ng ating kasaysayan!"*

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Rabies cases decline in QC

QUEZON City is no longer in the list of top 10 cities with the highest rabies cases in the Philippines because of its expanded anti-rabies vaccination and animal castration drives, Mayor Josefina "Joy" Belmonte said on Wednesday.

"We made it, and I am citing the concerned personnel of the City Veterinary Department (CVD) for its ramped-up inoculation drives to eradicate the virus from our pets," she said.

Quoting the data of the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Animal Industry, she said the city recorded a 65 percent drop in rabies cases from 2018 to 2019.

From 17 cases, the city was able to bring down its number to eight, according to the mayor.

From January to September 2021, the CVD was able to give anti-rabies shots to 82,241 pets in the city, and 1,817 animals underwent spay and neuter procedures.

"Despite the pandemic, the city government continues to conduct anti-rabies vaccination drives, and spay and neuter procedures in 142 villages," City Veterinarian Ana Marie Cabel said.

"Rabies can be fatal to humans if not treated. So, if a person gets bitten, he/she should get shots of anti-rabies vaccine. Rabies is 100 percent preventable if treated on time," Cabel added.

ARLIE O. CALALO

Malaya
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Closed fishing season for galunggong in Palawan starts

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) announced the annual closed fishing season in northern Palawan started last Monday, November 1.

Lasting until January 31 next year, the closed fishing season will prohibit the use of purse seine, ring net and bag net in catching galunggong within the conservation area of northeast of Palawan, a major source of the fish.

BFAR said imposing closed fishing helps grow the population of galunggong in the waters of the area while addressing overfishing and climate change, among other concerns.

BFAR said this is the seventh year of the implementation of closed fishing which has continually yielded significant positive results in the increased catch of galunggong in the area.

Based on the National Stock Assessment Program of BFAR and the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute, catch estimates of the species caught by purse seine has increased from 233.07 metric tons (MT) in 2015 to 434.98 MT in 2020, while those caught by ring net bumped up from 187.02 MT to 206.30 MT in the same period.

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7th year. Closed fishing in Palawan has continually yielded positive results, increasing the catch of galunggong. *(PFDA photo)*

CLOSED

Ninety five percent of galunggong catch that land at the Navotas Fish Port comes from Palawan.

"We strongly urge our fisheries stakeholders to be one with the government in the implementation of the closed fishing season in Palawan. This measure will help protect the commercially-important galunggong species, ensuring its availability as part of our efforts to achieve food security and fostering sustainable growth in the galunggong industry," said Eduardo Gongona, BFAR national director, in a statement.

While the closed fishing season is in effect, Gongona said BFAR will give emphasis to aquaculture products as an alternative paired with the expected entry of 60,000 MT of imported galunggong to the country until March 2021.

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Fishing season ends to give 'galunggong' chance to thrive

THE Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) on Wednesday announced the start of the closed fishing season in northern Palawan to allow "galunggong" (round scad) to thrive.

The DA-BFAR said during the three-month suspension of fishing from Nov. 1 to Jan. 31, 2022, the use of purse seine, ring net, and bag net is prohibited in catching "galunggong" within the conservation area on the northeast side of Palawan.

Serving as a conservation measure, this policy is aimed toward protecting the species during its peak spawning season, and further addressing over-fishing, climate change, among other concerns, the DA-BFAR said.

DA-BFAR's practice of closed fishing season started seven years ago, yielding positive results as the "galunggong" catch significantly increase in the area.

Based on the National Stock Assessment Program of the DA-BFAR and the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute, catch estimates of the species caught by purse seine has increased from 233.07 metric tons (MT) in 2015 to 434.98 MT in 2020, while those caught by ring net bumped up from 187.02 MT to 206.30 MT in the same period.

DA-BFAR National Director Eduardo Gongona, in a statement sent to reporters, said the recorded increase in catch of "galunggong" in the area has been made possible by the strong cooperation and support of the government, commercial fishers, and other stakeholders to take care of the country's fishery resources.

By virtue of DA-DILG Joint Administrative Order No. 1, series of 2015, the DA-BFAR has been working with the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and with the support of the fishery sector and other stakeholders through the Technical Working Group on Roundscad Fisheries Management in Palawan.

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Agri products a hit in Korea

By BETHEENA V. UNITE

Agri-food products of the Philippines were a hit in South Korea as almost 60,000 guests went to visit the four-day exhibition of local products held in October.

Various agricultural products were on display at the 2021 International Agriculture Exhibition (IAE) in Naju, Jeollanamdo from Oct. 21 to 31.

It was made possible through the Philippine Agriculture Office (PAO) in Seoul, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said Tuesday, Nov. 2.

Philippine Ambassador to South Korea Theresa Dizon-De Vega led the PH food promotion during the 2021 IAE International Business Day.

In celebration of the 72 years of Philippines and Korea relations, we are happy to share our deliciously fresh Philippine products to Korean consumers in this event. We thank the Jeollanamdo oval government and the organizing team for always supporting the Philippines' participation in the IAE," De Vega said.

According to the Ambassador, PAO collaborated with 28 Philippine agri-food export companies and three major fresh fruit importing companies in Korea namely Del Monte Fresh Produce, Dole Korea, and Sumifru Korea, to showcase a diverse range of Philippine agricultural products during the exhibition.

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Income from planting corn falls to 8-year low—report

DESPITE the reduction in production cost, Filipino corn farmers earned less last year as farm-gate prices fell to a 3-year low, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

In its latest report, the PSA said the net-profit cost ratio, which refers to the amount of income that a farmer earns for every peso they invest, fell to an 8-year low of 0.57 from 0.67 in 2019. This means that planters earned P0.57 for every peso they spent to produce corn.

"Net profit-cost ratio was biggest in Mimaropa region at 1.94 while the least was recorded in Cagayan Valley at 0.03," the PSA said in its report published recently.

PSA data showed that farmers' net returns per hectare of corn last year declined by 15.25 percent to a 4-year low of P14,336 from P16,950 in 2019.

"Net earnings in the Mimaropa region topped at P38,357 per hectare. Meanwhile, Zamboanga Peninsula netted the least at P568 per hectare."

The average farm-gate price for all corn (combined yellow and white) declined by almost 7 percent year-on-year to P12.4 per kilograms, the lowest in three years.

PSA data also showed that the total cost of producing corn declined to P25,090 per hectare from P25,252 per hectare in 2019.

"Across regions, Cagayan Valley had the biggest production cost in 2020 at an average of P51,014 per hectare. The least was recorded in Zamboanga Peninsula at P16,196 per hectare."

PSA data indicated that the average cost to produce a kilogram of corn declined to P7.89 from P7.96 in 2019.

"On the average, production cost per kilogram of corn was highest in Cagayan Valley at P11.75. Mimaropa region had the lowest at P4.97."

For yellow corn alone, the average net returns per hectare declined by 30 percent year-on-year to P6,703, the lowest in 15 years, according to the PSA.

Furthermore, the net profit-cost ratio for yellow corn plunged to 0.15, the lowest since 2002, based on historical PSA data.

The total cost of producing yellow corn fell to P44,319 per hectare in 2020 from P44,719 in 2019. PSA data also showed that the average cost of producing a kilogram of yellow corn reached P10.61 last year.

The PSA reported in August that the value of corn production in January to June rose by 6 percent to P54.461 billion, from last year's P50.388 billion. ***Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas***

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EDITORIAL

A potent force

POLITICAL analysts acknowledge that the agriculture sector plays a key role in the outcome of next year's automated presidential, congressional and local elections.

In fact, farmers, fishermen and other farm workers, together with their loved ones, are a potent force to reckon with during national and local polls in the Philippines.

Bothered by the declining prices of their products, such as vegetables, these beleaguered Filipinos are likely to choose pro-agriculture candidates in next year's polls.

That's the reason why many candidates seeking national and local positions are expected to portray themselves as "champions" of farmers and fishermen.

Certainly, many farm workers and their families will be attracted by programs and reforms aimed at uplifting the living conditions of people in the countryside.

Note that majority of the people living in the impoverished countryside are farmers and fishermen, who now find it impossible to send their sons and daughters to college.

"Sa ngayon nga ay kulang pang pambayad sa utang ang kinikita namin dahil sa taas ng presyo ng abono, pesticide, gasolina at iba pang gamit sa bukid," according to a farmer.

"Kaya mahalagang may mga pro-farmer na lingkod-bayan, kagaya ng mga mambabatas, para may boses kami sa gobyerno," said an irate farmer in Alcala, Pangasinan.

Indeed, the agriculture sector is a major source of potential votes for candidates, notably those seeking the nation's top political posts - President and Vice President.

Talaga!

Malaya
Business Insight

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Wheat dips, corn drops

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat futures slid for a second session on Wednesday as the market's rally to its highest level since 2012 prompted heavy selling, although tightening global supplies and strong demand capped losses.

Corn lost more ground while soybeans eased after closing higher on Tuesday.

"New highs are finding new sellers is unsurprising," Tobin Gorey, director of agricultural strategy, Commonwealth Bank of Australia said, referring to gains in the wheat market.

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board Of Trade (CBOT) was down 0.3 percent at $7.89-1/2 a bushel, as of 0340 GMT, after hitting a December 2012 high of $8.07 a bushel on Tuesday.

Soybeans were down 0.4 percent at $12.50-3/4 a bushel and corn lost 0.6 percent to $5.69-1/2 a bushel.

The wheat market has rallied on the back of supply concerns and strong demand.

The US Department of Agriculture report on Monday showed "good-to-excellent" ratings for the US winter wheat crop fell to 45 percent - bucking analysts' expectations for an improvement. - ***Reuters***

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FAO: Actions now to feed the world and save the planet

POLICY-MAKERS must find a way to "feed the world and save the planet at the same time," QU Dongyu, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), said at the G20 Leaders Summit in Rome last Sunday.

"Climate change will compromise our ability to produce sufficient amounts of nutritious foods and increase poverty and deepen inequalities," Qu said.

Qu spoke during two sessions—one focused on climate change and the environment and the other on sustainable development—at the Summit hosted by Prime Minister Mario Draghi of Italy and attended, mostly in person, by presidents and heads of government representing around two-thirds of the world's population and an even higher share of its economic activity.

He expressed his thanks to Italy for its support to the Food Coalition initiative and for making sure that global food security was high on the agenda throughout the 2021 G20 Presidency. The Leaders Summit culminated a year with 175 events, 20 ministerial meetings, two other G20 Leaders-meetings—one on Health and one on Afghanistan—as well as dozens of working group sessions that have led among other outcomes to the Matera Declaration on Food Security, Nutrition and Food Systems, to which FAO was a major contributor.

Agri-food systems around the world are being threatened by a hosts of factors ranging from civil conflicts to biodiversity loss, and the Covid-19 pandemic has made things worse, pushing more than 800 million people into chronic hunger, while another 3 billion cannot afford healthy diets, the director-general said.

"We are not on track to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees," he said.

With just nine agricultural seasons until the 2030 target date for the Sustainable Development Goals, "the urgency for climate action is stronger than ever," the director-general told the G20 leaders. "Politicians need to take stronger leadership, People need to take the ownership and all society must work in coherent partnership based on science and innovation."

The G20 Rome Leaders Declaration culminating the Summit encouraged partners and stakeholders everywhere "to collaborate with or join the Food Coalition launched by FAO as a means to respond to the impacts of Covid-19 on food security and nutrition." Leaders also recognized the importance of sustainable agri-food systems not only to combat hunger but also to "make a major contribution to tackling the interlinked global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss."

FROM left: Food and Agriculture Organization Director-General QU Dongyu speaks with President Joseph Biden of the United States of America, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom. FAO PHOTO

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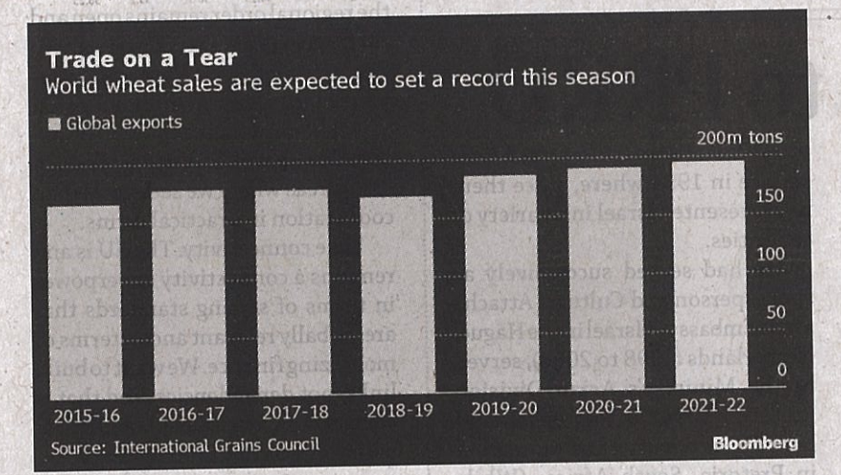
Soaring wheat prices are raising bread costs



WHEAT prices have surged from the United States to Russia, hitting a record in Europe and raising bread costs all over the world. And there may not be much relief soon.

The crop—grown on more land than any other—was hit by droughts, frost and heavy rain this year in key exporters. That's curbed supplies used in everything from pizza crusts and French baguettes to Asian noodles and African couscous, pushing benchmark prices in Chicago to an almost nine-year high.

That's not just threatening higher grocery bills—it's giving central banks a bigger inflation headache and risks worsening global hunger that's already at a multiyear high. The worry is that big crops looming in Argentina and Australia won't fully ease tight supply, and fields elsewhere are only just being planted.

"We could see further upside," said Carlos Mera, head of agricultural commodities market research at Rabobank in London. "The higher the price goes, the more fear there is in the market and the more panic buying."

Wheat in Chicago traded lower on Tuesday, after touching the highest since December 2012, while Paris futures reached a record 297 euros a ton before closing at 292.75 euros.

Here's what's driven the rally:

Dwindling stockpiles

WHILE the world has a lot of wheat, much of that's held in countries like China, which ships little abroad. Inventories in the top seven exporters —a better gauge of availability—are expected to sink to an eight-year low. Argentina and Australia just started harvesting, but it'll take the better part of a year before Northern Hemisphere silos are replenished with the next crop.

Protectionist measures

RUSSIA—last season's top shipper—started taxing exports this year to safeguard supplies and keep domestic costs in check, and signaled an overseas sales quota is likely. That's helped to slow shipments and support prices elsewhere, while giving rival suppliers the chance to grab more market share.

Import needs

ALTHOUGH top wheat buyer Egypt temporarily balked at high prices last month, appetite from importers remains strong, with Saudi Arabia booking more than double the expected amount in its latest tender. Countries typically stockpile several months of supply, but governments can't risk running out before the next major harvests.

The rising prices are becoming a bigger challenge. Turkey's president has blamed supermarket chains for a surge in food bills, Egypt is preparing to hike prices for the bread it subsidizes for its citizens and Tunisia doesn't expect any relief in durum wheat costs until next year's harvest.

Costlier fertilizer

WHILE wheat's rally is good news for farmers, their costs are going up too. Fertilizer prices are soaring from Europe to North America on production shortages, threatening to weigh on harvests next season.

Winter wheat makes up the bulk of supplies across the Northern Hemisphere, and while plantings are almost finished, farmers need to stock up on the nutrients now to boost yields and quality in the spring. French growers are already worried about fertilizer shortages.

Bloomberg News