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BusinessMirror

NOV. 12, 2021
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Amid food security worries, govt extends meat labeling rules halt

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
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THE government has extended indefinitely its moratorium on strict labeling requirements for imported meat products following appeals from stakeholders that the measures are detrimental to the country's food security as they hamper the movement of goods.

The Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) and the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) issued Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) 03 on November 4, extending the moratorium for the strict implementation of the minimum labeling requirements for imported meat.

Both BAI and NMIS are attached agencies of the Department of Agriculture (DA), which oversees the country's meat value chain.

"In consideration [of] the appeal of stakeholders, along with the global impacts of Covid-19 on food security, an extension of the moratorium for strict implementation of the minimum labeling requirements is hereby extended indefinitely until existing guidelines are reviewed and amended," the document read.

This is now the third extension made by the government of the moratorium, with the previous one scheduled to expire on December 31. The previous extension was granted following appeals from meat importers and the Embassy of the United States, based on BAI-NMIS JMC 02 issued on August 20.

The first moratorium was made on August 10 through BAI-NMIS JMC 01, and lasted until September 30.

The moratorium is for the supposed implementation of NMIS MC 07-2021-018, which reiterated the strict implementation of minimum labeling requirements for imported meat. With the moratorium, the government will not seize, confiscate and dispose any meat shipments that do not comply with the labeling requirements.

The BAI-NMIS JMC 03 noted that all meat import arrivals shall be guided by NMIS MC 08-2021-024, which bears rules on the rectification of noncompliant meat labels upon arrival of shipments.

"This flexibility, however, is already noted in Section XI.B of Administrative Order No. 26 [2005]," the United States Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service in Manila said of the moratorium extension.

The BusinessMirror first broke the story in August that the sudden implementation of NMIS MC 07-2021-018 led to the seizure of meat shipments, catching importers off-guard. In fact, less than a week after its implementation, at least 2.5 million of imported meat products were held in cold storage facilities pending resolution of the labeling issue.

Meat importers and processors have lamented that the issuances made by the NMIS on meat labeling requirements have put the country's meat supply at risk since they have caused confusion within the industry and among exporters, resulting in hesitancy to ship products to the Philippines.

Just last week, the government rescinded its supplemental guidelines on labeling of imported meat products following concern raised by certain industry groups that the new rules may cause shortages in the days leading up to the holidays because exporters were reportedly reluctant to ship to the Philippines on account of these. ***(Related story: https://businessmirror.com.ph/2021/11/01/govt-recalls-new-imported-meat-label-rules-amid-furor/).***

Industry players pointed out that the issuances made by the NMIS were done without proper and extensive consultation with stakeholders, both local importers and representatives of the country's trade-partners.

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THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Corn production may drop this year

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The country's corn production is expected to further decline this year to 7.8 million metric tons (MT) mainly due to unfavorable prices caused by imports, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

In a report by its Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), the USDA said it is revising downward its forecast for corn production from its earlier projection of eight million MT.

The 7.8 million MT projection is also lower than the 8.03 million MT production in 2020.

In contrast, the USDA is maintaining its forecast for area harvested at 2.5 million hectares, which is three percent lower than the areas harvested in 2020.

"Philippines corn production and area declines are primarily due to unfavorable market prices as imports of feed corn have driven domestic corn prices to low levels," the USDA said.

"Although local corn production costs have been lower, profit margins have continued to decrease since 2018. Additionally, African swine fever has caused a reduction in hog and broiler feed consumption, which has swayed farmers' decisions to plant less corn this year," it said.

The USDA said that yield is estimated at 3.12 MT per hectare, three percent lower than its earlier projection.

This is also four percent lower than the 3.2 MT per yield registered last year.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported earlier this week that the value of corn production in the third quarter dropped by 18.6 percent to P32.68 billion.

In terms of volume, production of corn in the third quarter also declined to 2.29 million MT.

This brought corn production in the nine months to 6.17 million MT, lower than the 6.5 million MT in the same period last year.

Local feed producers earlier urged the government to impose a uniform tariff of five percent for yellow corn imports, emphasizing that the local supply of yellow corn has been falling in previous years, which is one of their main requirements to produce animal feeds.

"A uniform tariff of five percent is expected to immediately create a level playing field for livestock growers, most especially swine raisers adversely affected by the entry into the country of low-price imported pork," the Philippine Association of Feed Millers, Inc. (PAFMI) said earlier.

Currently, corn imports are levied 35 percent within Southeast Asia following the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA). Corn imports are slapped 50 percent for those outside ATIGA.

Corn growers group Philippine Maize Federation Inc. said any proposal to amend the tariffs on imported corn is a death sentence to the industry.

In late July, the DA created a technical working group to study possible reforms in the tariffs of imported yellow corn in a bid to provide a lower and steady supply of the commodity to farmers who use it for animal feed.

Results of the study have yet to be released by the DA.

MANILA BULLETIN

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How Lipa City, Batangas became ASF-free

AVANT GARDENER
YVETTE TAN

Last July 8, 2021, the Department of Agriculture declared Lipa City ASF (African Swine Fever)-free. Lipa was one of six Batangas cities considered "recovered from ASF." The others are San Jose, Malvar, Rosario, Taysan, and Nasugbu.

Through concentrated efforts between hog farmers and the local government, Lipa City not only managed to keep ASF to a minimum within their borders, but managed to eradicate it altogether for now.

Pre-ASF, the hog population of Lipa City was an estimated 200,000 heads, with 40 percent from backyard and smallholder farmers and the rest from commercial farms. This number has decreased by 40 percent since July 2020.

African Swine Fever, or ASF, is a highly contagious disease that affects swine. It was first reported in the Philippines in July 2019, and has since decimated the hog population of Luzon. But in Lipa, preparations to combat this dreaded disease started even before it was reported on Philippine shores. This included quick response teams, animal quarantine checkpoints, barangay level ASF awareness seminars and the organization of an ASF Task Force by September 2019.

The City registered its first confirmed case from a commercial breeding farm on July 7, 2020, and as of this editor's interview with Lipa City Veterinarian Dr. Samuel P. Comia, registered its last confirmed case on Dec. 23 of the same year, this time from a backyard smallholder farm, with a total of 14 barangays affected within that time span. Eleven of the 14 barangays were locally declared ASF-free on May 17, 2021 and as mentioned above, the whole city was declared ASF-free two months later.

The endeavor to prevent, contain, and eradicate ASF may sound easy now that it has been achieved but in actuality, it was not without its challenges. First, the LGU had to gain the trust of hog farmers. Part of this involved assuring growers that reporting ASF infections would not mean a loss of profit. There were other challenges to overcome, including the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

Despite Lipa City being declared ASF-free, Dr. Comia emphasizes that this is no reason for the industry to let its guard down. "We believe that ASF cannot be eradicated at this point in time since vaccine development is at its clinical trial currently," he said.

The veterinarian called for diligence, cooperation, and concentrated effort in the prevention, containment, and eradication of ASF on a nationwide scale. "Vigilance in controlling and eventually eradicating ASF is of enormous importance since pork forms a big chunk of our daily protein source. The contribution of the pig industry to the GDP is a valuable indicator of our economic progress," he said.

Malaya
Business Insight

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Shrimp producers appeal for level playing field

BY JED MACAPAGAL

LOCAL shrimp producers are appealing to the government to introduce policies that will level the playing field between local and imported produce.

Norberto Chingcuanco, chairman of the Philippine Shrimp Congress that was held this week,said local exporters are subjected to numerous rigorous tests while importers are not required to undergo the same level of scrutiny when their products enter the country.

"Fairness in competition like our hatcheries, farms and processing plants are subject to a lot of regulations yet when we import, we do not subject them to an iota of what we subject our domestic production to. If we simply subject imports with the same thing we subject our own farms, more so our exports, that would be more fair," Chingcuanco said during a virtual briefing Tuesday.

Chingcuanco added it would be especially hard to encourage small shrimp farmers to increase production when prices fluctuate too much, with the biggest factor being sudden importation.

Local stakeholders said from 2015 to 2019, except in 2018, local shrimp production has been above the local demand level. In 2019, production was at 66,251.24 metric tons (MT) equivalent to 103.19 percent sufficiency level.

Chingcuanco also said the government may initiate a policy to lower power rates for the seafoods industry in the same way semicon manufacturing firms are provided with preferential cost of electricity.

Meanwhile, Christopher Co, Philshrimp Inc. director for Visayas, said the government may also want to review the current rules in taxing finished animal feed products and raw materials for producing them.

PEOPLES JOURNAL Tonight

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EDITORIAL

Agri smuggling

IF the country's farmers, who comprise the bulk of the population, continue to wallow in "grinding poverty," blame it partly on smugglers of agricultural products.

This, despite the fact that government authorities, spearheaded by the Bureau of Customs (BOC), have intensified the nationwide campaign against smuggling.

And note that Republic Act (RA) No. 10845, which took effect in 2016, declares large-scale smuggling of agricultural products as "economic sabotage," which is a serious crime.

In signing the law, the late President Benigno Aquino said the illegal importation of agricultural products "significantly impacts" production, stock availability and stability of prices.

Records show that in the first half of 2021 alone, concerned government authorities seized a total of P221.81 million worth of smuggled agricultural products, like vegetables.

In 2019 and 2020, smuggled agricultural products totaled P398.47 million and P284.62 million, respectively.

Perish the thought of ever seeing the end of the illegal entry of agricultural products and other goods into the country if corrupt public servants remain in the government.

Yes, there's really an urgent need to rid the bureaucracy of unscrupouous elective and appointive government officials who use their positions to enrich themselves.

We agree with well-meaning Filipinos that the drive against smuggling of agricultural products should be pursued by the incoming administration if we are to encourage Filipinos to go back to farming.

Kung hindi ay baka wala ng gustong magtrabaho sa bukid dahil bumabaha naman ng mga puslit na produktong agrikultura, kagaya ng mga gulay, ang lokal na merkado.

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Business Insight

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Wheat hits over 1-week high; soybeans gain

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat futures climbed on Thursday to their highest in more than a week on expectations of strong US export demand as global supplies tighten.

Soybeans rose for a third consecutive session, while corn lost ground.

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board Of Trade (CBOT) added 0.1 percent at $8.03-1/2 a bushel, near the session high of $8.05 a bushel - the strongest level since Nov. 2. Wheat closed up 3.1 percent on Wednesday.

Soybeans were up 0.4 percent at $12.21 a bushel and corn lost 0.2 percent to $5.68-1/4 a bushel.

"A couple of things helped prices gain. Perhaps the most important was from Russia," said Tobin Gorey, director of agricultural strategy at Commonwealth Bank of Australia.- ***Reuters***

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Farmers grappling with 'apocalyptic' food crisis

FOR Australian cattle farmer Jody Brown, the most chilling evidence of drought is the silence. Trees stand still, the warbling of birds gone. Lizards and emus have long departed, while kangaroo mothers, unable to sustain offspring, kick baby joeys from their pouches, leaving them to perish in the devastating heat.

"You just feel like you're in some kind of post-apocalyptic scene," 37-year-old Brown said from her family's ranch in Queensland's central west. The constant dryness means her cattle herd has dwindled to around 400, down from 1,100 at its peak in 2002, and at times there have been no animals on the land at all. The native grasses, once green sustenance, have disintegrated into grey ash.

The world is facing a new era of rapidly increasing food prices that could push almost 2 billion more people into hunger in a worst-case climate crisis.

Confronting the dire predictions, farmers have begun to adapt. On Brown's ranch in Australia, she's experimenting with regenerative-farming practices better suited to drought. And across the globe, farmers are swapping crops, switching seeds, increasing irrigation and even putting face masks on their cows in the battle to both increase output and reduce their own emissions. Meanwhile companies including Syngenta Group, the Swiss agrichemicals giant, are developing new varieties for vegetables like cabbages that are more resistant to extreme weather.

"We've got to adapt," Brown said. She's exploring alternatives to traditional grazing methods that don't push the land as hard, like grouping together livestock into tighter, more compact groups and rotating them quickly across paddocks.

"Potentially, there were always better ways of doing things, but you just didn't notice because you weren't put under the pressure that climate change puts you under," she said.

It's a fight against the floods, drought, frost and scorching heat that have plagued farms from Brazil to Canada and Vietnam, which scientists predict will only worsen in the decades ahead.

Global crop yields could fall about 30% because of climate change, while food demand is expected to jump 50% in the coming decades, according to United Nations' estimates. Fisheries and water supplies are increasingly threatened, too, said Zitouni Ould-Dada, deputy director of the office of climate change, biodiversity and environment for the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

One of the biggest challenges for farmers is that there isn't currently the large-scale coordination or access to funds that would be critical to undertake the kind of massive transformation that's needed.

"If you have to deal with millions of farmers around the world, that you have to coordinate, that's a huge ask," said Monika Zurek, senior researcher at University of Oxford's Environmental Change Institute.

The UN's FAO is calling on leaders attending the COP26 climate summit to pledge more global actions to help farmers scale up solutions. The group is targeting annual investments of $40 to $50 billion through 2030 to fund things like innovation in digital agriculture.

Without widespread change, the result could be a spiral higher for food prices that will hit importing nations particularly hard.

From Russia to India, here's an up-close look at the measures being taken by farmers in countries across the globe.

BRAZIL

Lucas Lancha Alves de Oliveira is making a drastic change on his farm in the countryside of Sao Paulo state. He's ripping out half his coffee trees to plant corn and soybeans instead. It's a bold move because the trees are typically an investment meant to last years, but Oliveira is being forced to change course after coffee crops were slammed first by drought and then an extreme frost — a toxic combination for the sensitive trees.

"We got seven months without rain," said Oliveira, who runs the family-owned company Labareda Agropecuaria, focused on gourmet coffee sales. The drought was followed by the cold blast, which damaged 20% of the area. "Many trees that would produce a lot of beans were chilled by freezing conditions. The losses will be huge next year."

But the shift won't last forever. After next year's harvest, Oliveira will start to replant coffee trees gradually, with an important change: the crops will be fully irrigated. It's a huge upfront cost, but given the extreme drought he's seen over several years, Oliveira wagers it's worth the expense.

"We'll only plant coffee with irrigation from now on," he said.

SOUTH AFRICA

Francois Slabbert, a farmer in the Northern Cape, said the shift in seasons is forcing grape growers to sow other crops like pecan nuts. Where winters usually occurred between mid-May and mid-August, it's now not underway until about a month later, exposing grape farmers to frost that damages their crop.

While it take as long as 11 years for pecan trees to start yielding nuts, the crop can be lucrative as about 95% of production in South Africa is exported, Slabbert said.

"It takes time, and there's a huge economic impact to the shift," he said. "But when you've done it, when you've completed it, it's good in terms of the turnover."

Meanwhile, for Japhet Nhlenyama, a cattle farmer in the eastern KwaZulu-Natal province, drought has gotten so bad that it's left his livestock emaciated because there's no grass to feed on. He's considering giving up on farming. In previous years, he's gotten some government assistance, but he hasn't gotten any aid so far this year.

"My living livestock gets blown over by the wind and others are dead because of the drought and not having any food to eat," Nhlenyama said. "We honestly don't know what are going to do to survive." — ***Bloomberg***

FULL STORY

Read the full story by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or by typing the link <bit.ly/FoodCrisis111221>

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL
Everybody's Newspaper

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USAID backs new climate-smart food security bid

THE United States Agency for International Development has pledged fresh assistance for climate-smart agriculture research and innovation to help promote food security worldwide.

Such commitment is aligned with the climate-smart agriculture and food systems innovation bid of Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate, the global initiative United Arab Emirates and United States launched at the ongoing 26th UN climate conference in the Scottish city of Glasgow.

"In support of AIM4C, USAID will undertake a number of efforts to dramatically increase research and innovation to develop cutting-edge climate-smart agriculture that is effective and sustainable so that families and communities, particularly those on the front lines of the climate crisis, are better equipped to face a rapidly changing climate," USAID Administrator Samantha Power said during a virtual session of the conference.

Power said USAID committed to investing at least $215 million in Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, the world's largest public sector agricultural research partnership.

"USAID's investment will support scientists and researchers at CGIAR - 19 of whom have been awarded the World Food Prize since its founding - to make it possible for people in the developing world to feed themselves and their families in ever more harsh conditions by creating new resilient crop varieties and seeds like drought-tolerant maize that can weather extreme conditions," she said.

CGIAR's entire network of 8,000 scientists and 15 world-class research centers worldwide will - for the first time in its 50-year history - focus on the sole core mission of transforming food, land and water systems to help address the climate crisis, she noted.

University partners

Aside from its pledge for CGIAR, Power said USAID would further partner with universities in the US and research institutions in low- and middle-income countries so these can tackle some of climate change's most pressing challenges to agriculture and food security.

The partnerships would be through Feed the Future's Innovation Labs, she noted.

She said every $1 invested in climate-smart agricultural technologies developed through such labs enabled smallholder farmers to gain USD4 in benefits.

Feed the Future is the US government's global hunger and food security initiative.

"I am pleased to announce that the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Current and Emerging Threats to Crops is being awarded to Pennsylvania State University," Power further said at the session.

The Penn State lab "will lead efforts to prevent and forecast pests, diseases and weeds that harm crops like peanuts, cassava, and cowpea which are vital to food security," she said.

Earlier, USAID announced awarding $36 million to the University of California-Davis to lead the Innovation Lab on Horticulture.

Work in such lab aims to help increase the productivity of small-scale horticulture producers through sustainability, storage and commercial innovations while promoting climate-smart farms, noted USAID.