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P509-m agri-border control facility to rise in Subic

NEW FACILITY IN SUBIC. SBMA chair and administrator Wilma T. Eisma and Agriculture Secretary William Dar seal the agreement for the construction of the country's first Cold Examination Facility in Agriculture located at the Subic Bay Freeport Zone.

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—The Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) for the establishment of a control facility for fresh and frozen agri-fishery commodities entering the country through the Subic Bay Freeport Zone.

SBMA chair and administrator Wilma T. Eisma and Agriculture Secretary William Dar formalized the agreement on Friday, following initial talks in July.

The proposed Cold Examination Facility in Agriculture (CEFA) in Subic—the first of five such facilities planned to be built nationwide—will cost P509.5 million and will facilitate 100-percent inspection of agri-fishery cargoes arriving here.

"It will also enhance industrial and commercial activities in Subic and foster the free flow of goods in the Freeport Zone," Eisma noted.

The project supports the national government's thrust to strengthen the food safety regulatory system in the country to protect consumer health as mandated by Republic Act No. 10611, or "An Act to Strengthen the Food Safety Regulatory System in the Country to Protect Consumer Health and Facilitate Market Access of Local Foods and Food Products."

Dar said the Subic CEFA will ideally be constructed in a 2,000-sqm area along the San Bernardino Road near Subic's New Container Terminal. The CEFA will be completed within eight months upon the start of construction, he added.

Dar said the DA will use the property strictly as a "first border facility" to thoroughly inspect imported containerized agri-fishery commodities and prevent the entry of transboundary agri fishery pests and diseases.

He said the facility will house examination areas and laboratories intended for the execution quarantine and inspection protocols enforced by the agency's Bureau of Animal Industry, Bureau of Plant Industry, and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

"We have also taken into consideration the volume of cargoes arriving here," Dar pointed out. "We expect 26,000 containers of meat, meat products, fisheries and plant commodities to enter the Subic Freeport each year," he added, citing the need to examine all these cargoes.

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LandBank joins DA cash subsidy distribution to farmers

By MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR

The Land Bank of the Philippines (LANDBANK) has joined the Department of Agriculture (DA) in the distribution of cash grants to Nueva Ecija rice farmers under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund-Rice Farmer Financial Assistance (RCEF-RFFA).

The RCEF-RFFA program aims to provide unconditional cash assistance to registered rice farmers with landholdings of two hectares and below, in line with the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

According to LANDBANK, 41,811 rice farmers in Nueva Ecija are eligible to receive cash assistance of P5,000 under the RCEF-RFFA program. So far, 238 farmer-beneficiaries already received their share.

LANDBANK will facilitate the crediting of cash grants to the existing LANDBANK cash cards of farmer-beneficiaries, as well as to the Interventions Monitoring Card (IMC) currently being developed in partnership with DA that will serve as both an identification and cash card.

Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar and Nueva Ecija 3rd District Representative Rosanna V. Vergara led the ceremonial distribution event last week, alongside DA Assistant Secretary for Operations Arnel V. De Mesa, DA Regional Director for Region III Crispulo G. Bautista, Jr., and LANDBANK Central Luzon Branches Group Head, Senior Vice President Sylvia C. Lim.

LANDBANK also serves as the disbursing agent for the DA's RFFA and Financial Subsidy to Rice Farmers (FSRF) programs, with combined releases amounting to ₱4.08 billion that benefitted 816,373 farmers nationwide.

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Rice tariffication law 'game changer' -- DA

DESPITE criticisms, the rice tariffication law is a game-changing reform policy that broke the decades-long inefficiency of the country's rice sector and enhanced its prospect of being globally competitive, Agriculture Sec. William Dar said

."The RTL is a transformative reform that benefits all industry stakeholders – most particularly farmers and consumers – as it liberalizes rice trade by imposing tariffs on imports in lieu of quantitative restrictions and provides a yearly PHP10-billion budget through the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) for six years to empower Filipino rice farmers and enable them to compete with their ASEAN counterparts," Dar said.

He said rice is now cheaper compared to pre-RTL years, benefitting millions of consumers and farmers.

"Despite the blabber and noise by detractors, we see the RTL and RCEF as testaments to what a sustainable policy can do to help ensure food security for more than 100 million Filipinos," he said.

Ther DA chief said data from the Philippine Statistics Authority and DA-Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service showed that the RTL has significantly brought down the retail prices of rice.

The regular-milled rice is now cheaper at P36 to P38 per kilogram or P2 to P8 less than in 2018; well-milled rice is also cheaper by P2 to P5; and premium and special rice are sold P1 to P6/kg less than in 2018, the data showed.

Several milestones have also been achieved through the sustained implementation of the RCEF in combination with the DA Philippine Integrated Rice Program.

Among these are the average palay production has increased by 17 percent to 4.26 metric tons per hectare, from 3.64 MT/ha in 42 RCEF provinces; average production cost was reduced by P1, from P12.52/kg to P11.52/kg; and Seed requirement per hectare using mechanical seeder decreased by 67 percent from 90 kg to 30 kg; and by 33 percent to 60 kg via manual method.

Through its full six-year term, the RCEF aims to increase the country's average palay production to five MT/ha from 3.64 MT/ha in 2019; reduce the production cost by P2/kg to P3/kg; reduce postharvest losses by two percent to three percent; and increase the average farmers' income by 30 percent for those who have availed of RCEF drying and milling facilities.

Under the RTL, Dar said the Duterte administration is also providing unconditional cash assistance of P5,000, called the Rice Farmers' Financial Assistance to Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture-listed rice farmers, tilling two hectares and below.

The RFFA is sourced from the excess rice import tariffs in 2019 and 2020 totaling P7.6 billion, net of the P20-B RCEF budget for the two-year period.

Dar started distributing the RFFA in October to RCEF beneficiaries, totaling 1.5 million farmers nationwide. The DA aims to complete the distribution by December.

Of the yearly P10-billion RCEF budget, P5 billion is allotted for farm machinery and equipment, P3 billion for inbred certified seeds, and P1 billion each for credit, and training, and extension.

The DA chief said 59,125 rice farmers in Nueva Ecija were the latest beneficiaries of P5,000 direct cash assistance.

"The program is one of the many positive results of the RTL," he said, adding that the RTL benefits outweigh the challenges.

"There are more people who are gaining from the RTL. It has also brought positive developments or outcomes for our nation," he added.

REMATE
ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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Hog raisers sa Isabela na apektado ng ASF, tinulungan ni Bong Go

TINULUNGAN at binigyan ng kinakailangang suporta ni Senator Christopher "Bong" Go ang hog raisers sa Isabela na naapektuhan ng African Swine Fever (ASF).

Ang pamamahagi ng ayuda sa tinatatayang 768 farmers ay isinagawa sa San Fabian Community Center sa Echague, Reina Mercedes municipal gym at San Isidro Municipal Amphitheater.

Sa hiwalay na distribusyon, namahagi rin ang mga kinatawan ng Department of Agriculture sa hog raisers ng P5,000 sa bawat "culled pig" para mabawi ang kanilang puhunan.

Sa kanyang video message, pinuri ng senador na miyembro rin ng Senate committee on agriculture, ang ginagawang pagsisikap ng local at national officials para maprotektahan ang livestock production sector.

Umapela si Go ng tulong sa gobyerno para matulungang maibalik ang kabuhayan ng mga farmer para na rin sa pangangailangan ng kani-kanilang pamilya.

"Primary source ng kabuhayan ng ating mga kababayan ang agrikultura kung kaya dapat mas palakasin pa natin ang mga programang pwedeng sumuporta sa ating mga magsasaka, mangingisda at iba pang kabuhayang pang-agrikultura."

"Suportahan at tulungan natin sila na malampasan ang

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A broader look at today's business

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'Include farmers in policy planning'

VICE President Maria Leonor "Leni" Robredo showed her concern for the agricultural sector by emphasizing the need for farmers' participation in policy development from planning to implementation.

Robredo said that she wanted to focus on this sector since it was a key part of her experience working at Saligan (Sentro ng Alternatibong Lingap na Legal), where she saw firsthand the issues and hardships that farmers face.

"Kailangan bigyan ng mas maraming boses iyong mga magsasaka natin (We need to give our farmers more voice). I think the best policies will be implemented if we give more space or give more seats at the table because they are the ones being directly affected," Robredo said.

Robredo is also eyeing establishing a farmer's bank that will focus on financing for small-scale farmers.

If she wins in the presidential race, Robredo intends to set aside at least P116 billion for agriculture in her first year, nearly double the allocation in the national budget.

Speaking in Filipino, she promised to examine both the entire budget and its allocation in order to ensure that the overall budget distribution is reasonable.

According to Robredo, more climate-friendly crops should be funded so that farmers may harvest them according to local conditions. Because rice, corn, bananas, and coconuts are given priority, other crops such as cucumbers, pepper, calamansi, and lettuce that may be used and have export quality are overshadowed.

AGRI 2022 is a platform that all presidentiables are invited to attend to share their goals and policy suggestions on agricultural concerns. It also wants to know the candidate's stand on the 12 policy proposals they came up with. This effort is a collaboration between the agriculture sector's five components, namely machinery, land under cultivation, fertilizers and pesticides, irrigation, and a variety of plants.

Robredo also signed a covenant with a group of labor leaders to promote the welfare of workers.

She inked the covenant on Monday with the Alliance of Labor Leaders for Leni Robredo. Among the signatories is senatorial aspirant Sonny Matula, national president of the Federation of Free Workers.

They agreed to "support the passage of a Security of Tenure bill in Congress and other related proposed laws and policies that will ensure and strengthen job security for workers in both the private and public sectors, and eliminate or curb the rampant use and abuse of contractualization."

They also pledged to implement "a robust public employment program that would provide guaranteed jobs for those who are unemployed, guaranteed incomes for those unable to work and wage subsidies to preserve jobs when needed."

The agreement seeks to increase the "meager" wages of employees to bring the minimum wage closer to a living wage for all types of workers.

MOISES CRUZ AND REINA TOLENTINO

Malaya
Business Insight

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Wheat rebounds on strong demand

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat futures climbed more than 1 percent on Monday, bouncing back from the previous session's losses as tightening global supplies and strong demand buoyed the market.

Corn rose for a fifth consecutive session while soybeans gained 1.3 percent.

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board Of Trade (CBOT) rose 1.3 percent to $8.51 a bushel.

Wheat dropped 1.2 percent on Friday as news of a new coronaviurs variant discovered in South Africa dragged down global markets.

"We are sceptical that the Omicron variant will diminish wheat demand by much," said Tobin Gorey, director of agricultural strategy at Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

Soybeans were up 1.3 percent to $12.68-1/2 a bushel and corn rose quarter of a cent to $5.87 a bushel.

Adverse weather has impacted wheat supplies from key Northern Hemisphere exporters. – ***Reuters***