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Agri chief urges increased food production amid Ukraine conflict

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The Department of Agriculture (DA) emphasized the need to boost local food production amid the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine as this will lead to higher global food prices.

"The convergence of all the global challenges like increasing petroleum prices, distortion of the global supply chain, increase in shipping costs, increase of prices of agricultural inputs like fertilizers, feeds and now the Ukraine crisis will definitely lead to global food price spike leading to higher food inflation," Agriculture Secretary William Dar told **The STAR** in a Viber message.

Dar stressed the need to boost productivity in the agriculture sector, which will lead to higher levels of local food production.

"We are going to increase efforts to implement Plant, Plant, Plant Program Part 2. This program is for all agricultural commodity industries which includes urban and peri urban agriculture," Dar said.

The DA first implemented the Plant, Plant, Plant program at the beginning of the pandemic, which is aimed at increasing national agri-fishery output through intensified use of quality seeds, appropriate inputs, modern technologies to increase levels of productivity across all commodities, and thus ensure food productivity, availability, accessibility and affordability amid the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Apart from boosting productivity, Dar said the DA would also strengthen the Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita, its direct marketing program, to link producers to markets.

On Thursday, Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, urged the government to grant urgent fuel subsidies to the agriculture, fisheries and other marginalized sectors as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is further pushing oil prices up.

"The Philippine government must immediately suspend the excise tax on local petroleum products and grant urgent fuel subsidies to marginalized sectors in transport, agriculture, and fisheries," KMP chairman emeritus Rafael Mariano said in a statement.

Reuters reported that Brent crude oil prices surged to $105 a barrel on Thursday after Russia's attack on Ukraine.

"The military actions of Russia toward Ukraine will likely further push global crude oil prices upward and have a domino effect on domestic oil prices, given the monopoly pricing of oil companies," Mariano said.

"Prices of food and other commodities will also increase rapidly in the coming days, further burdening consumers and the public," he said.

The Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC) said on Thursday the government is preparing to release P2.5 billion for the Fuel Subsidy Program of the Department of Transportation, which is aimed at providing fuel vouchers to over 377,000 qualified PUV drivers who are operating jeepneys, UV express, taxis, tricycles, and other full-time ride-hailing and delivery services nationwide.

The DA also has a budget of P500 million to provide assistance through fuel discounts to farmers and fisherfolk who either individually own and operate agricultural and fishery machinery or operate through a farmers organization or cooperative.

"This will help mitigate the impact of elevated fuel prices on production and transport costs of farm and fishery products," the DBCC said.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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DA to build 'biosecure farms' to revive ASF-hit hog industry

By Jordeene B. Lagare
@jordeenelagare

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is providing farmers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs) P5.5 million each to build biosecure facilities that will help manage or contain the spread of deadly diseases affecting the hog industry.

The DA released late Thursday guidelines on building biosecure farms as part of efforts to revitalize the industry battered in recent years by the African swine fever (ASF).

The agency has yet to provide the number of recipients and the total budget for the project.

In a memorandum order, the agency said the biosecure facility—inclusive of perimeter fence, climate-controlled animal house, waste management, basic farm equipment, office, shower area, feeds/biologics support and piglets—should be situated in a land area of at least 2,000 square meters.

To ensure the proper implementation of this project, the Bureau of Agricultural and Fisheries Engineering and the Regional Agricultural Engineering Divisions (RAEDs) of the DA's regional field offices will orient FCAs on the modular design for the facilities.

"Subject to prior consultation with concerned [local governments], mobilize and capacitate the [local governments'] Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering Groups and licensed Agricultural and Biosystems Engineers on the design and construction of the biosecure facility as DA's partner in project implementation," the circular stated.

The DA is partnering with the Philippine Society of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineers to assist in the implementation of this initiative.

This is part of the agency's community-based swine production and repopulation efforts via farm clustering through the Integrated National Swine Production Initiatives for Recovery and Expansion (Inspire) program, aimed at helping the swine industry recover from the ASF outbreak.

Early this month, the DA partnered with JG Agroventures Inc. and Pig Improvement Company (PIC) for the construction of a 5,000-sow level breeder nucleus farm in Sta. Rita village in Quezon, Nueva Ecija.

"Once operational, the state-of-the-art facility will be stocked with PIC great grandparent breeders, whose offsprings or grandparent piglets will be sold and distributed to commercial and clustered backyard swine raisers in Nueva Ecija and the rest of Luzon," it said.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar had said the agency would commit P80 million for this project to help speed up the government's hog repopulation efforts.

The National Livestock Program of the DA was tasked to draft a memorandum of agreement to formalize the partnership with the two companies.

JG Agroventures earlier applied for a P2.5-billion loan with the Land Bank of the Philippines to bankroll the project. INQ

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WITHOUT FEAR + WITHOUT FAVOR

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DA readies P3-B swine stimulus

DA likewise tapped several private groups such as Charoen Pokphand Foods Philippines Corporation, CJ Philippines, and JG Agroventures, Inc. to speed up the repopulation program

BY MARIA ROMERO
@tribunephl_mbr

The Department of Agriculture (DA) allocated P2.97 billion for its hog repopulation war chest this year as it continues to battle African swine fever (ASF).

Agriculture Secretary William Dar said Saturday his department will use the budget to implement the hog repopulation program through the Community-Based Swine Production and Expansion through Clustering and Consolidation.

Dar also reported that the DA-attached Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) – through partnerships with local government units (LGU), swine raisers' groups and veterinary associations – ASF incidences went down to 20 barangays in four municipalities in three provinces.

"This is a huge reduction from a high of 3,657 barangays in 678 cities and municipalities, in 51 provinces, since 2019," Dar said.

Tighter biosecurity

According to Dar, more LGU leaders should adopt the passage and implementation of either an ordinance or an executive order institutionalizing the Bantay ASF sa Barangay (BABay ASF).

As of 17 February, 42 provinces have crafted and approved said policy, particularly in implementing strict biosecurity measures.

Coupled with the BABay ASF program, the DA also implements a hog repopulation program called the Integrated National Swine Production Initiatives for Recovery and Expansion (INSPIRE).

More LGU leaders should adopt the passage and implementation of either an ordinance or an executive order institutionalizing the Bantay ASF sa Barangay.

The agriculture department also earmarked P400 million for the program, which provided 14,571 sentinel pigs to 5,638 farmer beneficiaries. It also provided insurance worth P6.5 million, covering 193,884 piglets raised by farmers in September 2021.

The DA likewise tapped several private groups such as Charoen Pokphand Foods Philippines Corporation, CJ Philippines, and JG Agroventures Inc. to speed up the repopulation program.

Commercial and clustered backyard hog raisers can borrow loans for their respective swine breeding and fattening enterprises from the Land Bank of the Philippines and the Development Bank of the Philippines, as they set aside P30 billion and P12 billion, respectively, for such ventures.

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Frozen pork inventory up

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The country's inventory of frozen pork slightly increased in the third week of February as imports remained high, the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) said.

Latest NMIS figures showed that the inventory of frozen pork in accredited cold storages reached 57,712.41 metric tons (MT) as of Feb.21, higher than the 57,069.66 MT the previous week.

The figure is also more than double the 21,668.55 MT of frozen pork in the same period last year.

Imported frozen pork accounted for the bulk of the inventory at 56,416.56 MT.

In contrast, local frozen pork only had a share of 1,295.85 MT in the inventory.

Central Luzon had the highest share of frozen imported pork at 20,899.62 MT.

This was followed by the CALABARZON with 15,979.33 MT. The region accounted for the largest share of local pork at 458.29 MT.

The National Capital Region also had a sizable share of the frozen imported pork at 13,637.90 MT.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) earlier said the supply of pork in the country was slowly stabilizing, driven by enhanced production and supply augmentation from other countries, supported by measures against the African swine fever (ASF).

Agriculture Secretary William Dar said there is enough pork supply in the country following efforts to strengthen and enhance local production and augment it through the support from other countries.

The DA noted that there has been an increase in the country's hog inventory from a year ago.

It cited figures from the Philippine Statistics Authority showing that the country's hog inventory stood at 9.8 million heads in January, higher than the 9.1 million heads registered in the same month in 2021.

Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) director Reildrin Morales said this was primarily due to the initiatives and efforts of the private sector, swine raisers' groups, and professional veterinary associations that continued to battle the threat of ASF with the government.

"These efforts, implemented in partnership with LGUs, have been instrumental in keeping the industry alive," Morales said.

According to the DA, only 20 barangays registered active ASF cases as of Feb. 17.

With the increase in hog population, the DA said pork supply has slowly stabilized, as production from local raisers across the country is augmented by frozen items sourced from other countries.

"These imported products are kept in cold storages and will be released to simply augment the supply gap. This is never meant to compete with the local producers," Morales said.

The prevailing price of kasim or pork ham in Metro Manila markets stood at P320 per kilo on Thursday, lower than the P340 per kilo price a month ago.

The price of *liempo* or pork belly was registered at P375 a kilo, slightly lower than the P380 per kilo price last month.

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Bird flu threat: Pangasinan bars entry of quails, ducks

By EVA VISPERAS

LINGAYEN, Pangasinan – A ban on the entry of quails and ducks in this province is in effect until the end of March.

Gov. Amado Espino III issued an executive order enforcing the ban starting on Feb. 25 due to cases of avian influenza or bird flu in Bulacan and Pampanga.

The EO cited tests conducted by the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Animal Industry, which confirmed that the affected birds were infected with the H5N1 strain of avian influenza.

"There is an urgent need to prohibit the entry of quails and ducks in the province of Pangasinan to safeguard its poultry industry as well as protect the general public from the ill effects of the bird flu disease," the EO read.

Espino directed provincial veterinarian quarantine officers to put up checkpoints in strategic areas such as the Tarlac-Pangasinan-La Union Expressway.

Under the EO, owners of poultry farms should present a certification that their poultries and establishments are not infected with avian flu.

"All local chief executives are directed to strengthen biosafety, hygiene and sanitation standards in slaughterhouses, abattoirs, public markets and poultry farms in their respective areas of jurisdiction," Espino said.

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PCIC, CARD Pioneer ink risk-sharing scheme

The Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. (PCIC) has partnered with CARD Pioneer Microinsurance (CPMI) in a risk-sharing program that would benefit the agriculture sector by insulating them from risks such as natural calamities.

This marked the first time a private insurance firm has taken the cudgels for risk sharing in the agriculture sector and is seen to bridge the insurance gap and contribute to the sustainable development of agricultural insurance in the country.

CPMI is a joint venture between CARD MRI, the country's largest microfinance provider, and Pioneer, one of the country's leading insurance groups.

Supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) under its Financial Inclusion Framework Strengthening technical assistance project, this initiative marks the first public-private partnership in the Philippines aimed at helping the smallholder farms recover losses associated with natural calamities such as typhoons.

Under a memorandum of agreement the two companies signed, PCIC, a government agency that insures smallholder farmers against losses from natural calamities, plant diseases and pest infestations, and CPMI will share risks underwritten for each smallholder farmer insurance policy with the latter as the lead insurer.

This co-insurance partnership will initially focus on insuring high-value crops in selected regions where the current penetration of PCIC's agriculture insurance products is limited. PCIC will provide capacity-building support to CPMI on various aspects of agriculture insurance, such as underwriting, policy administration, actuarial matters and claims management.

"Almost 24 percent, or roughly over 25 million of the Philippines population are engaged in agriculture – proof that that we have no shortage of natural resources suitable for agriculture. But we also know that exposure to natural calamities is a constant threat that continues to cause devastating damage to their livelihood," said Pioneer Inc. president and CEO Lorenzo Chan Jr.

"Our initiative with PCIC aims to address that by helping smallholder farmers restart as typhoons, pests and plant diseases ravage their crops. We are honored by the trust extended to us to be part of the solution in addressing the needs of the industry that provides food for our table and dare I say – contributes to peace in our society. We hope this initiative will spur more synergies between the public and the private sectors in sustainably providing effective affordable insurance products to all farmers and ultimately help them manage the risks they face."

In 2021, CPMI achieved over 11 million enrollments from its microinsurance programs. It seeks to offer relevant needs-based insurance solutions to help underserved and unserved Filipinos recover, rebuild and restart after life's setbacks.

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Everybody's Newspaper

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Food makers back SRA's sugar import plan to ensure supply

The Philippine Chamber of Food Manufacturers Inc. has expressed support to the Sugar Regulatory Administration's plan to import 200,000 metric tons of refined sugar given the local shortage.

"Due to the current local shortage of refined sugar that conforms with the quality requirements of food manufacturers, particularly premium and bottler's grade refined sugar, we join the SRA in its assessment that there is an urgent need for such importation," the PCFMI said.

Members of PCFMI, also known as PH Food Chamber, have reported that their current stock of refined sugar would be exhausted as early as March.

The PCFMI said that of over 20 raw sugar mills in the country, only seven refineries produce refined sugar. Of this number, only four are able to supply to major food manufacturers.

"These suppliers have informed our members that the destruction to crops caused by Typhoon Odette last December damaged refineries and refined stocks, thus affecting local sugar supply. Also, affected refineries ceased production for a month until power was restored. Moreover, the lack of available containers and the congestion at the ports of Bacolod and Manila have further aggravated the sugar supply situation," the group added.

The Manila Times®

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Economic team: Food supply, oil prices stable

BY MAYVELIN U. CARABALLO

DESPITE concerns over the impact the current Russia-Ukraine conflict may have on the Philippines in terms of higher prices, particularly in food and energy, the economic managers are confident that these will remain stable.

"Our food supply sources are diverse and we are working on the livestock bill to improve our food productivity," Socioeconomic Planning Karl Kendrick Chua told *The Manila Times*.

He is referring to Senate Bill (SB) 139, or the "Philippine Livestock Development Industry Act," and SB 2176, or the "Affordable Pork Act," both of which, according to the Development Budget Coordination Committee, will help alleviate potential domestic supply constraints and prevent second-round price effects.

On his part, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Benjamin Diokno noted that while rising oil prices are anticipated to have a greater impact than higher food costs, the contribution of oil prices to inflation is substantially lower.

"The Philippines is less dependent on food imports; it produces a big part of its total food requirement. On the other hand, it is heavily dependent on imported oil for its energy needs," he told *The Times*.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), for its part, said that despite geopolitical concerns outside the Philippines, basic necessity and prime commodity

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PH food

prices have remained stable.

"So far, we have not yet received any request for price increase [from manufacturers] due to fuel," Trade Undersecretary Ruth Castelo said during the Laging Handa press briefing.

She went on to say that at the moment, manufacturers are bearing the brunt of any increase in fuel prices, which only adds 3 to 3.5 percent to production costs on average.

"We won't feel any impact soon [in terms of prices]," Castelo said, adding that "consumers can [be] rest assured that all prices of manufactured food products will be validated by the DTI."

She further said that Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez's instructions are to guarantee that manufacturers are properly aided so that they can continue to produce in order to avoid supply shortages.

'Speculative analysis'

Nomura, a Tokyo-based global investment firm, warned last week that a sharp spike in oil and food prices induced by the Ukraine conflict could strike Asian economies hard, with the Philippines among the "biggest losers."

Diokno said, however, that "all analysis on the impact of Russia-Ukraine conflict on individual jurisdictions, at this time, are speculative" and that "there are just too much uncertainties."

The consequences of the conflict on Russia, Ukraine and some European countries, or those who rely on Moscow gas, the central bank chief highlighted, might be significant.

However, the impact of the conflict on the Philippine economy is seen to be minimal, if at all, in comparison to those who are directly affected by the crisis, he said.

"But these are early days … We continue to monitor developments. BSP evaluates the impact of foreign and local developments in output and inflation prior to its policy meeting," Diokno said.

Inflow risks

Meanwhile, the risks to cross-border financial flows as a result of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Oxford Economics said, are expected to increase for a twin deficit country like the Philippines.

It warned in a report released over the weekend that threats to cross-border financial flows must be continuously monitored despite the fact that the dangers to Asia's financial sector from Russian bank sanctions appear to be lower at first glance.

Past crises have shown that, in an increasingly linked global financial system driven by the United States dollar, unforeseen disruptions can occur swiftly, the think tank based in the United Kingdom noted.

"It's likely that Asian markets will remain volatile for the foreseeable future in a risk-off environment. But eventually we are likely to see more differentiation based on economic fundamentals," it said.

Oxford Economics added several Asian markets could gain from their status as relative safe havens, increasing their share of global capital flows.

"These risks, however, are likely to increase for the twin deficit countries — India, Indonesia and the Philippines, and also Malaysia to some degree, given its dependence on foreign borrowings," it cautioned.

The term "twin deficit" is used to describe economies that have both a fiscal and a current account deficit. In the case of the Philippines, the country's budget deficit was P1.33 trillion in the first 11 months of last year, while the current account deficit was $2.6 billion in January-September 2021, equivalent to -0.9 percent of the gross domestic product.

"From a policy perspective, higher inflation and deteriorating deficits will increase the pressure on the RBI (Reserve Bank of India) and the BSP (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas) to act more aggressively, even as growth is slowing," Oxford Economics said.

"How they navigate this policy dilemma will be crucial for investor sentiment and the future growth outlook. For now, we maintain our view of a more widespread, but relatively muted, tightening in Asia ex-China this year," Oxford Economics said.

The BSP's policymaking Monetary Board chose to keep key interest rates in the Philippines at historic lows of 2.00 percent, 1.50 percent, and 2.50 percent for overnight borrowing, lending, and deposit, respectively, during its first rate-setting meeting of the year.

"On balance, the Monetary Board deems it prudent to maintain the BSP's accommodative policy stance given a manageable inflation environment and emerging uncertainty surrounding domestic and global growth prospects," Diokno said.

Abante TONITE
MABILIS SA BALITA

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Pangasinan naghigpit kontra bird flu

Ipinagbabawal muna sa Pangasinan ang pagpasok ng itik, pato, at pugo para mapigilan ang pagpasok ng avian influenza o bird flu na naunang namataan sa Bulacan at Pampanga, ayon sa Pangasinan Veterinary Office (PVO).

Ayon kay PVO officer Dr. Jovito Tabajeros, ang pagbabawal ay batay na rin sa ibinabang executive order ng provincial government ng nasabing lalawigan upang masiguro na ligtas ang mga Pangasinense at ang poultry industry mula sa nabanggit na sakit.

Sa nasabing EO, babantayan ang mga border sa lalawigan, partikular sa mga bayan ng Mangatarem, Bayambang, Infanta, Rosales, San Fabian, at sa lahat ng exit ng TPLEX, upang tingnan lahat ng mga sasakyan na magdadala ng mga itik, pato, pugo at iba pang mga produkto gaya na lamang ng balut sa lalawigan, lalo na kung ito ay mula sa probinsya na nakapagtala na ng kaso ng bird flu.

Hindi naman kabilang sa mga ipagbabawal na makapasok ang mga manok, ngunit sa kaso naman ng mga panabong, kinakailangan na ang mga magdadala nito sa probinsya ay may certification na ito ay galing sa avian influenza-free area. **(Allan Bergonia)**