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Only the President can resolve these two agriculture challenges

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

No person other than President Marcos can decisively settle the stalemate we're seeing insofar as smuggling and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) are concerned.

The two issues are related. RCEP, pursuing the free trade philosophy, will result in more agriculture imports into the Philippines. If much of this is smuggled, our local products will suffer.

On smuggling

Smuggling makes all these trade mechanisms irrelevant. It will result in job losses, more poverty and an unfavorable environment for both local and foreign investors.

The next step is to minimize smuggling before we open our borders to more smuggled products through broader free trade arrangements like RCEP. Unlike the industry and services sectors, agriculture was not given an opportunity to suggest improvements in the RCEP.

This is because the international relations committee of the legislated public-private Philippine Council of Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF) was abolished. All the agriculture sector can now ask for is protection from unfair imports.

Smuggling dwindled twice in recent history. It was accomplished by a structure that reported directly to the President. The smuggling rate decreased by 25 percent the first time under President Gloria Arroyo, and by 31 percent under President Benigno Aquino Jr.

That structure was a public-private oversight antismuggling committee that reported to the President and had meetings with the Bureau of Customs (BOC) Commissioner and his senior officials.

In that committee, there was high level representation from the departments of Agriculture, Trade and Industry, Finance, Justice, and Interior and Local Government. There was also one representative each from the agriculture and industry sectors.

I personally saw how the BOC responded effectively because their actions were systematically reported monthly to the president. However, the committee was abolished, revived then abolished again. One thing was clear: smuggling flourished each time the structure was abolished.

On RCEP

President Marcos recently asked the Department of Agriculture (DA) for its position on RCEP. With Marcos' call for unity, he will consider not only the DA view, but also an opposing position officially submitted to the Senate by 104 signatories (83 organizations and 21 leaders).

The private sector strongly disputed the DA claim that RCEP poses no threat to agriculture and that it will not implement measures in preparation for the country's accession to the trade deal. The position from the private sector is contained in a 23-page RCEP Primer submitted by the Agrifisheries Alliance to each senator's office.

Last July 12, at the quarterly meeting of PCAF's international trade committee, it was reported that the DA had not called any of the 104 signatories to find out why they believed RCEP has significant threats. With his unity advocacy, Marcos can now urge both sides to discuss a win-win solution that will address the concerns of the private sector.

Net benefit

While RCEP is disadvantageous to agriculture, it may be advantageous to both industry and services. If RCEP's net benefit is positive, then the winners will prevail. But we must act as a unified people. The winners should not only think of their interests, but also see what they can do for the losers.

Expertise from the industry and service sectors may be harnessed to support agriculture. Some areas are our very inadequate border controls and quarantine, health and safety measures. Another critical area is where Vietnam excels, and where our industry and services sectors are more experienced: identifying the most vulnerable sectors, recognizing the threats and formulating the strategic responses to address these threats.

Only the President can significantly decrease smuggling. And only the President can unite the agriculture, industry and services sector behind a mutually beneficial RCEP which protects our farmers, fisherfolk and agriculture stakeholders. We must now all work together to address these two significant challenges. INQ

The author is Agriwatch chair, former secretary of presidential flagship programs and projects, and former undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Trade and Industry. Contact is agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com.

Daily Tribune
WITHOUT FEAR ▫ WITHOUT FAVOR

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State of Agriculture Address

SOUTHERN OPTICS
JUN LEDESMA

President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. will deliver his first State of the Nation Address on Monday. My take is that the essential substance of his speech will be on food security. I do not know how he would do the balancing act considering the fact that his economic advisers are not about to give up on the Rice Tariffication Law and the importation of food commodities against his agenda. As Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, he is focused on increasing agricultural productivity.

> ***"Where there were irrigation canals that snaked through rice fields, the embankments became veritable roads used by barangay dwellers to commute and deliver products to the markets.***

Recovering from his second bout with Covid, his first face-to-face meeting was with his agriculture team. On top of the agenda was farm-to-market roads. His subalterns came out on TV the following day detailing to his audience the importance of farm-to-market roads. He sounded banal and worse, that he is clueless about what is happening on the ground.

I cannot blame PBBM if he is not aware that his father established a network of farm-to-market roads along with the many irrigation systems that were constructed during his term. Where there were irrigation canals that snaked through rice fields, the embankments became veritable roads used by barangay dwellers to commute and deliver products to the markets. These actually served as secondary and tertiary roads because there were networks of municipal and provincial roads that were built during the incumbency of PFM.

Irrigation systems then were well-maintained and included parallel roads along the canals. What's saddening is that when the Aquino government took over up to the present, the irrigation systems had been abandoned. Canals had been silted, grasses deterred the flow of water, the embankments had been eroded and the roads no longer passable. Given that condition, the allocation of irrigation water was erratic and there was so much waste along the way.

I am glad that PBBM took note of this issue as he will be hitting several birds with one stone: The rehabilitation of farm-to-market roads and irrigation systems (canals), the systematic allocation and maximization of irrigation waters, and the planting of palay twice a year.

As a hanger-on, in addition, may I contribute some pieces of advice/proposals to President Marcos:

1. Assess the condition of the facilities of The National Food Authority (NFA) e.g. silos and rice mills and FTI cold storage facilities and other assets. Restore all said facilities back to efficient working conditions and if necessary replace them. Equip each warehouse with hauling trucks. Provide the NFA with sufficient initial funds to purchase farmers' production at the farmers' gate at a justifiable price. Eventually, the NFA can be self-sustaining.

2. Pass an executive order or a piece of legislation requiring domestic airlines, and passenger buses, to allocate cargo space or tonnage for the Food Terminal Inc. (FTI) perishable goods at the rate of 30 percent less than their rack rates. The government may further shoulder 20 percent of the remaining 70 percent which can be credited to the transport firms in terms of tax credits.

3. Have a special lane for reefer vans carrying aggie products from Central and Northern Luzon, Mindanao and Visayas or buy ro-ros (roll-on, roll-off vessels) only for this purpose to ferry perishable products to FTI in Taguig. Trains traveling from the provinces must allocate space for agricultural cargoes. Perishable goods include vegetables, hogs, and poultry meat, fish, fruits, and even cut flowers.

Revive Masagana 99, Masaganang Maisan and include Sorghum. Open special window facilities in Land Bank and DBP for cheap loans to rice and corn farmers and fishermen or cooperatives. DA's provincial and municipal officials must be out in the fields and not in their offices.

4. Pass laws imposing stiffer penalties and prison terms against the smuggling of agricultural commodities.

5. Remove tariffs on fertilizers and agrochemicals.

> ***"Open special window facilities in Land Bank and DBP for cheap loans to rice and corn farmers and fishermen or cooperatives.***

6. Designate the Department of Science and Technology in cooperation with the University of the Philippines-Los Baños and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) to come up with the technology that would convert water hyacinth in Laguna de Bay, Pasig River and Liguasan marsh into organic fertilizer to help restore the fertility of farmlands. Organic fertilizer, however, should only complement chemical fertilizer.

7. Provide certified seeds of high-yielding variety of rice, corn and sorghum.

8. Conduct massive rehabilitation of irrigation canals that had been totally neglected after the PFEM regime. So much irrigation water is wasted.

9. Develop simple electro-mechanical dryers that farmers can afford. IRRI was said to have developed a mobile "bubble solar dryer" that uses solar panels and batteries which can be laid in the farmer's compound or in the fields. It seems like this technology never left the confines of IRRI for lack of government interest. The DA should evaluate this and distribute the technical design to farmers and assist in the fabrication of the unit.

10. The cost of palay production differs in every region. Therefore, come up with the best farm practices, evaluate, and come up with best practices to reduce cost and increase productivity.

Thank you and good luck, Mr. President. My father who is a farmer and now in heaven must be smiling ear to ear.

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PART 1 of 2

BBM: Stop agri-smuggling

As DA reviews Rice Tariffication Law, studies reviving NFA importation

By Maricel Cruz

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered the officials at the Department of Agriculture (DA) to crack down on smuggling even as the government begins reviewing a law that liberalized rice importation.

In a statement, the DA said the President, who is concurrently the Agriculture secretary, said vegetable smuggling and illegal importation of other agricultural products must be addressed in coordination with the Bureau of Customs and Congress.

At the same time, the DA is reviewing the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), which allowed private traders to import rice and barred the National Food Authority (NFA) from doing the same.

Before the law was passed under the Duterte administration, the NFA was responsible for regulating the rice trade and was the only agency allowed to import rice shipments.

But Agriculture Undersecretary Kristine Evangelista said the department is studying if the NFA can be allowed to import rice again, even under a liberalized trading regime.

"That is something being studied and

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BBM:...

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is for further discussion and recommendation," she said in an interview on ANC.

Although the law sets aside P10 billion a year from tariffs paid to help farmers mechanize their farms and gain access to seedlings, critics of the RTL say the law has failed to lower the cost of rice and hurts farmers by allowing the untrammeled entry of cheap imported rice.

Evangelista said the DA is focusing on "strengthening the NFA to buy more palay from... farmers" as the government pushes for a better yield.

"Our priority will be increasing local production," she said.

Part of this effort could be an additional subsidy for fertilizers and ways to improve their distribution.

The DA said an additional subsidy is reasonable, especially since the current amount—about P3,000 per farmer—is barely enough as the fertilizer prices continue to shoot up.

Evangelista said a cropping calendar that local government units would follow would significantly prevent production wastage, such as an oversupply of onions from Mindoro or tomatoes from Bukidnon.

"A cropping calendar will also tell us that at this time of the month, this is the expected harvest volume of our farmers. We can work with the municipal agriculturist also to guide them on what the demand is, not only the demand in their area, [but] the demand in the region also. Then overall, the national demand and international demand, if there is one for a certain product," she said.

This would involve engaging with LGUs to get them to be more active in agriculture.

The department is also doing an inventory of existing post-harvest facilities, to extend the shelf life of agricultural products, Evangelista said.

"Proper storage facilities are important because they will also extend the shelf life of our produce. Not only storage facilities but other facilities involved in post-harvest, our trading post, processing centers, and even slaughterhouses. We are trying to make an inventory and check if it's still operational. And make sure that if we are to add more, it will be strategic. Strategic in the sense that it's [in close] proximity to producers which are the source and also the accessibility to buyers," she said.

Evangelista said the DA is also looking at a "Masagana 150" program that aims to produce 150 cavans of harvest per hectare.

Masagana 99 was a program of President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. designed to increase rice production by giving farmers high-yielding rice varieties through loans. The policy was discontinued as it left farmers in deeper debts.

But the Masagana 150 program will employ new technology to increase yields, Evangelista said.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the House committee on ways and means stressed the importance of cheaper fertilizers in the government's efforts to lower food prices.

Rep. Joey Sarte Salceda, the panel's chairperson said that "fertilizers will almost certainly be mentioned" in the President's State of the Nation Address.

"One of his quickest victories as Agriculture secretary can be fertilizers. I commend his effort to pursue government-to-government procurement of fertilizers. That gets rid of a lot of middlemen margins," Salceda said.

He said apart from G2G procurement, he urged the President to release fertilizer discount coupons, backed by the national government.

"We used this system heavily in the province of Albay, when I was governor. It will have immediate consequences to food yield during the ongoing rainy season planting time," Salceda said.

Salceda said he particularly sees it "being most useful in palay, which is fertilizer-intensive, and in corn, which has cascading effects on the prices of feeds, and therefore of poultry and pork."

"The tradeable coupons are very strategic at this point, because regardless of whether the farmer beneficiary actually uses them or trades them to another farmer, the end result will be that the discounted fertilizer will find its way into the land. And that will bring higher yields for key crops, while also helping address high fertilizer prices."

Citing the World Fertilizer Price Index, Salceda said current prices are 75 percent higher year-on-year.

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Pandemic recovery plan

Food security, national debt also among awaited SONA topics

BY RAYMOND AFRICA

GOVERNMENT'S response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its plans for economic recovery and transition to normalcy are among subjects several senators want to hear President Marcos Jr. discuss in his first State of the Nation Address on Monday.

They also want to hear how Marcos will address the P12.68-trillion national debt, unemployment, the territorial dispute with China, among others, and how he will ensure food security and improve digital connectivity and e-governance.

"The SONA has always been the preamble of every new administration. I am looking forward to hearing President Marcos' specific plans on the country's pandemic recovery and transition to a 'better normal.' I hope that it is one that is aligned and attuned to the climate path," said Sen. Loren Legarda.

Sen. Christopher Go said he expects the President to outline his legislative agenda "with special focus on pandemic response and full and inclusive recovery."

Go also said he expects Marcos to continue to strengthen the country's healthcare system, assure enough supply of affordable food, safer communities during times of disasters or calamities, and continue infrastructure programs.

Legarda said she also wants to hear the President's plans for health and education, food security, agriculture and sustainability programs, economic and fiscal policies, human rights and social justice, unemployment and underemployment, legislative agenda, and the critical role of the local government.

She said the President must also outline his plans to strengthen the country's education system considering that the World Bank, in its 2021 report, said that 80 percent of Filipino students fall below the minimum proficiency levels.

"The number suggests that we have a crisis in education," she added.

Legarda also said Marcos should also make clear his "response to the staggering national debt" which now stands at P12.68 trillion, his foreign policy including on the West Philippine Sea dispute, and his plans on addressing or limiting the adverse effects of inflation amid the continued oil price hike.

Sen. Grace Poe said she wants to hear the President's plan on food security especially now that he is also secretary of the Department of Agriculture.

"With no less than the President at the helm of Department of Ag-

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FOOD

riculture, we expect that focus and funding will be poured into the sector to scale up the country's agricultural production. Support to our local farmers, fishers and producers is crucial as they bring food on the table and provide the backbone towards food security," Poe said.

She said Marcos should also reveal his plans for the unemployed and present updates on the country's mass transportation projects.

"We also look forward to the President's earlier marching orders to improve digital connectivity and e-governance in the country to reach residents of far-flung communities. We must break free from connectivity that is unstable, slow and expensive to one that is reliable, fast and affordable," she added.

Sen. Juan Edgardo Angara said he expects to hear details of the President's plans on the economy and assistance to be given to sectors that need help.

Angara said he is also interested in knowing the specifics of the plan of the President to work with the private sector as partners.

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Long-term plan for fertilizer industry needed

By Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza
Reporter

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s plan to secure cheaper fertilizer from other countries would help lower agricultural production costs, but the government should come up with a long-term plan to help boost the competitiveness of the domestic fertilizer industry, experts said.

"The main advantage of cheaper fertilizer from bilateral deals is potentially moderating production costs and saving on foreign exchange," Sonny A. Africa, executive director of research group Ibon Foundation, said in a Facebook Messenger chat.

"This should just be a short-term lifeline though and the long-term approach should be to develop a domestic fertilizer industry, especially in organic fertilizers, as part of an overall plan for food self-sufficiency," he added.

Earlier this week, Mr. Marcos said he would reach out to China, Russia, Indonesia, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates to secure cheaper fertilizer through government-to-government deals.

The state's move is in response to insufficient local fertilizer supply, said Leonardo A. Lanzona, who teaches economics at the Ateneo de Manila University.

"The issue is that the fertilizer industry here is not efficient enough to supply the fertilizer demand in the country," he said in a Messenger chat.

Allowing the government to import more fertilizer through bilateral deals would force local fertilizer producers to boost the quality of their products, he said.

"By raising the level of efficiency from these imports, the fertilizer industry here should learn to be more competitive," he added.

Raul Q. Montemayor, national manager of the Federation of Free Farmers Cooperatives, Inc. said the move "should have been done much earlier by the previous administration."

"A little bit late now for the current crop because farmers have already started planting," he said in a Viber message. "But if they can bring in the fertilizer in a few months, it can be used for late planting or for the next crop that will be harvested early next year."

Fertilizer, S1/9

Fertilizer,
from S1/1

Russia is the largest global exporter of fertilizer. Western sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine have affected shipments of fertilizer around the world.

"We expect a tight fertilizer supply until next year," Mr. Montemayor said.

Worried about how the government will "fund and handle" the supply from other countries, Mr. Montemayor said the government should consider partnerships with the private sector.

"They may have to link up with the private sector which can provide the needed logistics," he said.

Mr. Montemayor noted that the only fertilizer the Philippines "used to produce" was ammonium sulfate. This was produced at Philippine Phosphate Fertilizer Corp.'s plant in Leyte.

"However, I think the plant stopped its operations after it was hit by Yolanda," he said, referring to the supertyphoon that hit the Philippines in 2013. "Even then, I think we were importing most of the sulfate that was used in the plant."

"For oil-based fertilizer, we have no capacity to produce our own, so we have to import," he added.

PHILIPPINE STAR/WALTER BOLLOZOS

VEGETABLE vendors are seen at a public market in Marikina.

Unstable fertilizer prices due to global shocks should nudge the government and the agriculture sector to pursue alternative ways to boost crops, said Arnold Padilla, a program coordinator at the Pesticide Action Network - Asia Pacific.

"When global fertilizer prices have been skyrocketing, the more we need to look for ways that veer away from too much dependence on imported inputs, even if they are done through bilateral government deals," he said in a Messenger chat.

"We should look for ways to improve local production in a more sustainable way such as through agroecology and less dependence on chemical, much less, imported inputs."

Mr. Padilla said the transition to agroecology would not be easy and could "take time." "But it should be the general direction. At the minimum, while in transition, the necessary step is to lessen dependence on imports."

Mr. Montemayor, who represents a group of farmers, said the government should expand the country's production of substitutes that can improve soil quality, such as organic fertilizer, organic soil ameliorants, fermented extracts and plant nutrients.

"This will take some time because the Department of Agriculture has always been promoting the use of inorganic inputs," he said. "We should complement these with proper soil testing, so that we know what types and quantities of fertilizer are needed in specific areas. There are also technologies that help rejuvenate the soil."

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ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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DA, BOC at Kongreso, sanib-puwersa vs agri smuggling

MAGSASANIB-puwersa ang Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Customs at Kongreso para sugpuin ang pagpupuslit ng gulay at iligal na pag-aangkat ng iba pang agricultural products.

Ipinag-utos kasi ni Pangulong Marcos sa DA na makipagtulungan sa BOC at Kongreso sa bagay na ito.

"On the issue of vegetable smuggling and illegal importation of other agriculture products, the President also directed that the country's system of importation should be fixed in coordination with the Bureau of Customs, the House of Representatives, and the Senate," ang nakasaad sa kalatas ng DA.

"We need an immediate plan to ensure that our food supply and the food prices are within reach of ordinary Filipinos from now until the end of the year," ayon naman kay Pangulong Marcos.

Matatandaang, nitong nakalipas na buwan, siniguro ng BOC na nakikipagtulungan na sila sa DA upang matanggal ang lahat ng smuggled items sa merkado.

Sa ulat nauna nang sinabi ni BOC spokesperson Vincent Philip Maronilla na nagpadala na sila ng mga tauhan sa mga pamilihan, katulong ang mga tauhan ng DA, upang galugarin ang mga imported agricultural products na ipinupuslit sa bansa.

Sa datos ng pamahalaan, aabot na sa P1.99 bilyong puslit na agricultural products ang nasamsam ng BOC mula 2019.

KRIS JOSE

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Farm-to-market roadmap to promote food security

PRESIDENT Marcos wants the Department of Agriculture to come up with a farm-to-market road master plan that would serve as a guide for the government in its bid to promote food security and empower rural communities.

In a meeting at the Bureau of Soils and Water Management Convention Hall in Quezon City, the President, who concurrently heads the DA, told Agriculture officials that the masterplan should include regional maps detailing the exact locations of the farm-to-market roads to be constructed.

The masterplan must be studied thoroughly by the department and must be presented to the country's economic managers, Marcos stressed.

"Kung sabihin nila saan ba ang areas na talagang kailangan nating buksan? We will go to Public Works. And also, what are the areas that we really want to open, that really need the FMR? Iyon ang unahin natin," he said.

The plan should also include funding source, payment terms, as well as the time frame for project completion, he added.

The President also wants official development assistance-funded projects to be constructed in priority areas identified by the government.

For state-funded FMR projects, he insisted that the DA and the Department of Public Works and Highways should take charge of the implementation.

He also pointed out that the government must prioritize areas with active agricultural production to address supply chain concerns.

"FMR is the first step to solve some of the supply chain problem. So, unahin muna natin 'yung nagpo-produce," he said.

It was also suggested that agricultural infrastructure should be climate-change resistant such as projects that are not prone to landslides and other calamities.

The Chief Executive added that the process of streamlining the functions of DA continues, as part of efforts to bring a tighter focus on its mandate.

"Siguro naman you have been hearing the new term now is "rightsize". So that's also something that we are going to have to discuss. That we have to rightsize the DA," he told officials.

Marcos earlier cited the need to rightsize government functions and streamline the bureaucracy to promote efficiency in public sector management.

"I have asked all of the department secretaries to do the same thing for their departments. So seeing as I am now holding the portfolio of Secretary of Agriculture, we also have to do it in our department," he added.

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FOOD SECURITY

ENSURING food sufficiency for a so-called agricultural country remains a holistic challenge for the Philippines considering the post-coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic effects, the Ukraine-Russia conflict resulting in food crisis worldwide, and the accelerating global inflation.

But putting a premium on what President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. described as an "existential, even a moral imperative" is on top of the agenda of his administration to ensure end-to-end satisfaction for Filipinos or between local producers and consumers.

To realize this, the Department of Agriculture (DA) is now heading for an immediate tweaking of the value-chain system in the country, which aims to increase the production of local farmers and fishers.

In an interview with the Philippine News Agency (PNA) on Sunday, DA Undersecretary Kristine Evangelista laid out some of their initial steps to fast-track Marcos' directives.

"We are assessing our programs, napakarami pong programa ng (there are many programs in the) Department of Agriculture. And part of the assessment is 'what worked, what didn't work, what needs additional funding' because it is a program that is the immediate need ngayon (now)... So, our direction is to improve the yield of our producers for the farmers, improve the catch of fisherfolk, and also in the livestock sector, increase their production," she said.

A quick assessment would reveal the need to bring down the high cost of production which impedes local agricultural competence.

These costly prices of farm inputs are directly felt by farmers like 34-year-old vegetable farmer Jan Basilio from Benguet.

Basilio has been a farmer for around 15 years, securing a supply of potatoes, carrots, cabbage, chili, tomato, celery, and lettuce, among others, which are delivered to La Trinidad Vegetable Trading Post.

"Noon, kung maganda ang ani at presyong gulay na itinanim ay mabibili namin ang aming pangangailangan sa pang-araw-araw, mababayaran 'yung inutang na pang-capital at may kaunti na maililigpit pa. [Hamon sa'min] ang pagmahal lahat ng bilihin lalo na sa farm inputs tapos di kami sigurado kung bibilhin sa magandang presyo ang aming gulay kung sakali (Before, when the harvest and vegetable prices were good, we can buy our daily needs. We can pay our debts that we've used for capital. And we can still save. But we are now challenged by the increasing commodity prices, especially of the farm inputs, and yet we're not assured if our vegetables will be bought at a reasonable price)," he told the PNA.

For its part, the DA said it is now hastening efforts to subsidize seeds, fertilizers, and other biologics, as well as digitize the system for efficient aid distribution.

"For the additional fertilizer subsidy, this is being discussed. And also, the improvement of our distribution system on fertilizers is being discussed if we have to tweak the program to ensure that the voucher system of distribution will be efficient... Because at the end of the day, it's not enough that we have fertilizer [supply]... the program intends for these fertilizers to reach the farmers," Evangelista said in mixed English and Filipino. *PNA*

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PBBM mulls pursuing G2G fertilizer deals

President Marcos has expressed his willingness to pursue government-to-government talks to address the increasing prices of fertilizers.

Marcos, who concurrently heads the Department of Agriculture, said the government could avail of cheaper fertilizers through the G2G deals.

"Gusto tayong tulungan, gusto tayong lapitan, eh 'di take advantage naman tayo, 'di ba. Sige bigyan niyo kami ng fertilizer na medyo maganda-ganda ang presyo. That's the whole point of G2G," he told Agriculture officials during a meeting at the Bureau of Soils and Water Management Convention Hall in Quezon City.

The President said heis looking into communicating with China, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, and Russia for the country's procurement of fertilizers.

"I'm thinking would it be useful for us if sulatan ko silang lahat... and I'll say that we are in the market to buy this volume of fertilizer," he said.

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PBBM admin to modify value-chain for yield hike, affordable food

By STEPHANIE SEVILLANO

ENSURING food sufficiency for a so-called agricultural country remains a holistic challenge for the Philippines considering the post-coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic effects, the Ukraine-Russia conflict resulting in food crisis worldwide, and the accelerating global inflation.

But putting a premium on what President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. described as an "existential, even a moral imperative" is on top of the agenda of his administration to ensure end-to-end satisfaction for Filipinos or between local producers and consumers.

To realize this, the Department of Agriculture (DA) is now heading for an immediate tweaking of the value-chain system in the country, which aims to increase the production of local farmers and fishers.

In an interview with the Philippine News Agency (PNA) on Sunday, DA Undersecretary Kristine Evangelista laid out some of their initial steps to fast-track Marcos' directives.

"We are assessing our programs, napakarami pong programa ng (there are many programs in the) Department of Agriculture. And part of the assessment is 'what worked, what didn't work, what needs additional funding' because it is a program that is the immediate need ngayon (now)... So, our direction is to improve the yield of our producers for the farmers, improve the catch of fisherfolk, and also in the livestock sector, increase their production," she said.

Farm input price

A quick assessment would reveal the need to bring down the high cost of production which impedes local agricultural competence.

These costly prices of farm inputs are directly felt by farmers like 34-year-old vegetable farmer Jan Basilio from Benguet.

Basilio has been a farmer for around 15 years, securing a supply of potatoes, carrots, cabbage, chili, tomato, celery, and lettuce, among others, which are delivered to La Trinidad Vegetable Trading Post.

"Noon, kung maganda ang ani at presyo ng gulay na itinanim ay mabibili namin ang aming pangangailangan sa pang-araw-araw, mababayaran 'yung inutang na pang-capital at may kaunti na maililigpit pa. [Hamon sa'min] ang pagmahal lahat ng bilihin lalo na sa farm inputs tapos di kami sigurado kung bibilhin sa magandang presyo ang aming gulay kung sakali (Before, when the harvest and vegetable prices were good, we can buy our daily needs. We can pay our debts that we've used for capital. And we can still save. But we are now challenged by the increasing commodity prices, especially of the farm inputs, and yet we're not assured if our vegetables will be bought at a reasonable price)," he told the PNA.

For its part, the DA said it is now hastening efforts to subsidize seeds, fertilizers, and other biologics, as well as digitize the system for efficient aid distribution.

"For the additional fertilizer subsidy, this is being discussed. And also, the improvement of our distribution system on fertilizers is being discussed if we have to tweak the program to ensure that the voucher system of distribution will be efficient... Because at the end of the day, it's not enough that we have fertilizer [supply]... the program intends for these fertilizers to reach the farmers," Evangelista said in mixed English and Filipino.

The DA said an additional subsidy is reasonable, especially since the current amount barely aids farmers.

"Before, it was P3,000 per farmer, the pegged price. Then the fertilizer price increased from P800 to P1,500, to P2,500, and then to P3,200. So you can just imagine how supposedly numerous the fertilizer bags are projected to be given to farmers initially. But it dwindled and dwindled, and got reduced until such time that your P3,000 is not even enough for one bag of fertilizer," she said.

Evangelista also noted that the digitization of the voucher system, either through the Registry System for Basic Sectors of Agriculture (RSBSA) or the National ID System, will play a crucial role in ensuring timely distribution.

PNA

PREMIUM ON AGRI SECTOR — President and concurrent Agriculture Secretary Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. meets with the executives of the Department of Agriculture (DA) to discuss initial interventions and measures on Monday (July 18, 2022). Marcos earlier implied putting a premium on the sector as he vowed to ensure increased local production and affordable food for Filipinos. (*Photo courtesy of Department of Agriculture*)

Pilipino Star
NGAYON
Diyaryong disente ng masang intelihente

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'Masagana 150' gagamitin para mapababa ang presyo ng bigas

Gagamitin ng Department of Agriculture ang programang "Masagana 150" upang makagawa ng 150 cavans ng ani kada ektarya, ayon sa ulat ng ABS-CBN kahapon.

Matatandaan na ang Masagana 99 ay isang programa ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Sr. na idinisenyo upang pataasin ang produksyon ng palay sa pamamagitan ng pautang sa mga magsasaka na may mataas na ani ng palay.

Subalit hindi na ito ipinagpatuloy dahil naging dahilan umano ito upang ang mga magsasaka ay mabaon sa pagkakautang.

Sa panayam ng Headstart ng ANC, sinabi ni Agriculture Undersecretary Kristine Evangelista na ang Masagana 150 program ay gagamit ng "new tech" para mapataas ang ani.

"We plant in October, we harvest next year. To manage expectations, it's not going to be harvested this year. If Masagana 150 will be implemented, we're looking at it to bring down the price of rice and helping our farmers come up with better yield," ani Evangelista.

Para naman sa sustainability ng programa, sinabi ni Evangelista na makakatulong ang Agriculture Credit Policy Council sa mga kooperatiba sa pamamagitan ng pagbibigay ng pautang. *(Malou Escudero)*

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
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ROLE OF NFA MAY BE BROADENED

RICE TARIFFICATION UNDER REVIEW

By Jordeene B. Lagare
@jordeenelagare

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is reassessing the role of the National Food Authority (NFA) in ensuring food security, particularly in importing rice amid the liberalization of rice trading.

In an interview over ANC's program Headstart, DA Undersecretary-designate for consumer and political affairs Kristine Evangelista said the department is studying the proposal of the NFA to import rice under the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

Prior to the enactment of Republic Act No. 11203, only the NFA was allowed to import rice to the country. Only few private traders were authorized to bring in imported rice, subject to import quota set by the government.

When the RTL took effect in 2019, the quantitative restriction slapped on rice was removed and a 35-percent import tariff was imposed.

The NFA's role was scaled down to maintaining an emergency stockpile and was limited to purchasing unmilled rice from local farmers.

Evangelista said the DA is reviewing the positive and negative impacts of the RTL as well as the NFA's involvement in achieving the goal of food security.

"That part is something being studied and is for further discussion and recommendation," said Evangelista, referring to calls to repeal the RTL. INQ

The Manila Times®

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RICE IMPORTS

Workers carry sacks of rice to warehouses in Manila. According to the US Department of Agriculture, it has adjusted its forecast of Philippine rice imports in 2022 and 2023 to 100,000 metric tons for a total of 3.1 million. This is due to a strong demand for Vietnamese rice. PHOTO BY RENE H. DILAN

Manila Standard

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LANDBANK assisted the operations of A.R. Santiago Fish Farm, owned by Arnel Santiago (left photo) in San Mateo, Isabela, which now produces 300,000 to 500,000 tilapia fingerlings monthly that are sold regularly to fish pond operators, government agencies, and other buyers in the Cagayan Valley and Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR).

Isabela fish farm reels in success with LANDBANK support

SAN MATEO, Isabela—When Cagayan Valley, one of the country's largest tilapia-producing regions, faced a region-wide shortage of tilapia fingerlings in 1993, business graduate Arnel Santiago decided to establish his own fish hatchery to help boost local production and earn additional income.

With no prior experience in aquaculture but armed with determination to learn about fish farming, Arnel completed trainings on fish pond operations and established A.R. Santiago Fish Farm. He was able to sustain his operations until 2002, when running his business became a challenge due to lack of capital.

It was then that Arnel availed of his first loan from the Land Bank of the Philippines (LANDBANK) to purchase feeds and modern equipment such as water pumps and a backhoe, as well as a 2.4-hectare agricultural land to expand his fish farm.

Through LANDBANK's continuing credit assistance over the years—which has since amounted to P6.4 million—Arnel's fish production increased from an average of 100,000 tilapia fingerlings to 300,000 to 500,000 fingerlings per month.

"*Isang taos-pusong pasasalamat sa* LANDBANK. *Dahil sa tulong nila ay umasenso at napalawak ko ang aking negosyo. Nakatulong rin ako na mapunan ang kakulangan sa produksyon ng tilapia dito sa aming rehiyon*," said Arnel.

A.R. Santiago Fish Farm now supplies fingerlings to various fish pond operators and buyers in Cagayan Valley and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR). The farm is also tapped by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource (BFAR) Region II and other local government units to supply fingerlings for their distribution activities to fish farmers.

With his increased income, Arnel was able to purchase a solar irrigation system to power his water pumps during daytime. This has since reduced monthly operational expenses by 30%.

"Consistent with the country's continuing recovery, LANDBANK remains committed to catering to the financial requirements of the fisheries sector. We are assisting fishers and other key players to boost their production and income," said LANDBANK President and CEO Cecilia C. Borromeo.

To support the local fishing industry in Isabela, Arnel offers technical assistance to new fish breeders who want to venture into the tilapia breeding business. The A.R. Santiago Fish Farm is now accredited as a 'Learning Site for Agriculture' by BFAR, the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

Arnel has also reaped various awards for his accomplishments as a fish farmer from the Department of the Agriculture (DA) and the Local Government of San Mateo.

"*Gusto kong ibahagi ang aking* expertise *at* technical knowledge *sa bagong henerasyon, para masiguro ang tuloy-tuloy na paglago ng* aquaculture industry *sa ating bansa*," Arnel added.

LANDBANK remains to be the biggest lender to the agriculture sector, with a total agri loan portfolio of P257.94 billion and having assisted more than 3.2 million small farmers and fishers nationwide as of 31 May 2022.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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US grants add'l sugar quota to Phl

By DANESSA RIVERA

The United States granted the Philippines an additional sugar allocation of 3,075 metric tons (MT) in the next crop year.

In an announcement posted on the website of the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), the Foreign Agricultural Service of the US Department of Agriculture announced the Philippines has an allocation of 145,235 metric tons raw value (MTRV) for crop year 2023, or Oct. 1, 2022 to Sept. 30, 2023.

This is higher than the 142,160 MT allocation in the previous fiscal year.

The allocation for the Philippines is the third largest next to Dominican Republic (189,343 MTRV) and Brazil (155,993 MTRV).

The US in-quota allocation for crop year 2022-2023 is placed at 1.117 million MTRV, the minimum amount committed by the US to the World Trade Organization.

The US tariff-rate quota (TRQ) for raw sugar allows countries to export specified quantities of a product to the US at a relatively low tariff but subject all imports of the product above a pre-determined threshold to a higher tariff.

Based on data from the Sugar Regulatory Authority (SRA) in the past five years, the Philippines exported 116,212 metric tons commercial weight (MTCW) in crop year 2017-2018, 103,685 MTCW in 2018-2019, 109,408 MTCW in 2019-2020, and 112,008 MTCW in 2020-2021.

Last year, the country did not export any sugar products to the US.

Based on Sugar Order 1 for crop year 2021-2022, 100 percent of the sugar allocation will go to the "B" or the domestic sugar market to stabilize of local supply.

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Farmgate palay prices rise in May

By DANESSA RIVERA

The farmgate prices of palay or unhusked rice increased by 1.6 percent in May from year-ago levels, a welcome development for farmers suffering from depressed prices.

The average farmgate price of palay inched up from P16.97 per kilogram in May last year to P17.24 per kilo this year, based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Out of the 16 regions, 11 regions saw higher annual increases, which contributed to the overall year-on-year growth.

The PSA data showed that Western Visayas registered the highest annual increment of 10.2 percent during the month followed by the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) with a 7.9 percent jump.

After exhibiting negative annual rates in the previous month, the agency noted that Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Visayas and Davao Region posted positive annual growths during the period.

Meanwhile, five regions recorded price declines, with MIMAROPA having the biggest drop at 5.8 percent followed by Calabarzon at 4.9 percent.

On a month-on-month basis, the average farmgate price of palay per kilogram increased by 0.1 percent from P17.23 per kilo in April.

The highest monthly growth was recorded in Cagayan Valley at 4.7 percent while the biggest decline was seen in SOCCSKSARGEN at five percent.

In a text message, former agriculture secretary and Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) chairman Leonardo Montemayor said the higher farmgate prices of palay – although only a slight uptick – is a welcome adjustment for farmers.

He said the farmers "have been suffering from low prices in the last three years due to excessive imports."

"Although the increase may be small, it will still help farmers cope with the situation and hopefully encourage them to continue producing," he said.

When asked what could have possibly driven up the farmgate price, Montemayor attributed the increase to higher fertilizer, production and marketing costs, slightly increasing import prices, and relatively tighter supply in the market compared to last year.

"Some traders may also be anticipating a spike in prices (both domestic and international) later this year when the 'food crisis' unfolds, so there is increased demand for palay at this time," he said.

For this year, the Philippine Rice Research Institute estimates the country's palay production to decrease by as much as 1.1 million to 1.3 million metric tons. This is coming from the record 19.96 million MT level of production last year.

Turn to B3

Farmgate

From B1

Palay production for the first semester already dropped by 6.8 percent to 4.5 million MT from 4.63 million MT due to rising prices of fertilizer.

Former agriculture Secretary William Dar earlier said the country would be forced to continue importing rice due to lower production, weighed down by reduced usage of fertilizer which has become more expensive.

More recently, Agriculture Undersecretary-designate for consumer and political affairs Kristine Evangelista said importation might still be needed for augmentation and for buffer stocking, but government will continue to prioritize local palay production.

"Although the government is trying to boost production in order to stabilize prices for consumers, it is also important that they provide the right price signals and incentives to farmers," Montemayor said.

The FFF earlier said government should institutionalize the protection of farmers from rice imports during the harvest period.

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Isabela fish farm reels in success with LANDBANK support

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DA indefinitely extends moratorium on laboratory fees for avian flu tests

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has extended indefinitely its moratorium on laboratory fees for avian influenza (AI) tests for certain transactions to encourage local poultry producers to secure farm certification amid bird flu threats in the country.

Agriculture Undersecretary for Operations and Chief-of-Staff Leocadio S. Sebastian issued DA Administrative Order (AO) No. 21 series of 2022 that authorized the extension of moratorium on the charging of laboratory fees for AI tests.

The extension of the moratorium covers AI tests for local transport by the Animal Disease Diagnosis and Reference Laboratory (ADDRL) of the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) and the Regional Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratories (RADDLs).

Furthermore, the AO stipulated that the extension of the moratorium is only applicable to the following transactions: new application for farm certification; renewal of farm certification; and local transport of live poultry, poultry products and by-products as endorsed by provincial and city veterinary offices of the independent cities and veterinary offices in NCR.

The last moratorium on AI lab test fees by ADDRL and RADDLs expired last June 30.

"The previous moratorium was issued to support and give ample time to all clients to register their poultry facilities and other poultry-related facilities while strengthening AI surveillance and reporting," the AO read.

"The DA continually supports and encourages our local poultry industry stakeholders to comply with the government requirements while securing food safety and security, in compliance to the Republic Act [RA] 8485 as amended by RA 10631, R A 10631 or the Food Safety Act of 2013, other DA issuances related to the previously mentioned laws," it added.

The DA noted that it has allowed the movement of poultry-related commodities subject to "additional safety measures such as but not limited to AI testing" to "ensure supply chain continuity and local food sufficiency," while preventing further spread of AI Type A subtypes H5 and H7.

"This Order shall take effect upon signing shall still be in effect until revoked in writing," the document dated July 19 read.

The Philippines culled nearly 300,000 birds, mostly chicken layers, to prevent the spread of AI in the country, BAI data as of June 24 showed.

A total of 286,934 birds were culled by the government, of which 66.38 percent or about 190,468 were chicken layers, according to BAI data.

BAI data showed that the government also culled 47,667 ducks, 27,574 quails, 750 native chickens and 575 other birds. The attached agency of the Department of Agriculture said a certain farm owner conducted a pre-emptive culling of 19,900 broiler breeders.

The agency said the government has indemnified affected poultry farmers who received a total of P24.831 million. Based on its latest tally, BAI said bird flu cases in the country were confirmed in 95 barangays in 53 municipalities across 14 provinces in eight regions nationwide.

The BAI said 133,160 birds died due to the disease, bringing the total death count (mortalities and culled) to 420,094 birds.

Chicken layer accounted for the bulk of the recorded mortalities as of June 24 at 64,772 followed by quail at 55,616.

As of June 24, there were 10 ongoing bird flu cases out of the 142 confirmed cases nationwide. The government has resolved 132 bird flu cases since the resurgence of highly pathogenic avian influenza in February.

Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas

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Agribusiness groups talk about what they want to see in an improved DA

AVANT GARDENER
YVETTE TAN

The agriculture sector is in a weird state. Not enough Filipinos are worried about the declining industry and its implications on the nation's food security, yet everyone can feel — and complains about — the rising prices and lack of supply of certain food items, though many would still like to attribute these to external circumstances such as the Russia Ukraine war, refusing to see the lack in our agriculture industry.

We don't even have to compare ourselves to our more successful neighbors to see that there is a need to overhaul the way our agriculture systems are structured, as well as the mindsets of everyone involved, which means every Filipino, because anyone who eats or drinks is automatically part of the agriculture system.

At the first Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc. (PCAFI) roundtable held earlier this month, aside from laying out the five-point plan that the organization believes will be a good first step in revamping the industry, PCAFI President Danilo Fausto also mentioned a few points that need to be addressed as soon as possible to help secure the country's food future.

Increase corn production. The Philippines is so focused on rice production, sometimes to the detriment of other crops like corn. "We have a problem with corn [production]. If we solve the problem of corn, then we solve the problem of poultry and livestock," Fausto said, citing the need for machinery for post-processing, as well as better assurances for corn farmers that their harvests will be bought. "Let's give them a chance to make money."

Make fingerling production a domestic industry. About 70 percent of the fingerlings used in local aquaculture are imported. This means that there is a huge opportunity for local fingerling producers. "Bangus fry, tilapia fry, vannamei, mud crab — we are importing all of these fingerings. Let's produce these fingerlings locally," Fausto said. "Let fingerlings be produced in the backyard, like what they're doing in Vietnam and Thailand."

The need for more cooperatives. Farming cooperatives give small farmers the chance to band together as a collective platform which can help them achieve scale, secure buyers, share processing facilities, streamline marketing, negotiate deals and terms, professionalize farm businesses, and so on.

Other sectors

"We are asking... the President to create a Bureau of Agricultural Cooperative inside the Department of Agriculture (DA) so that we can establish [trusted] cooperatives," Fausto said, citing an example where business owners who work with small farmers are penalized because their suppliers are unable to provide receipts, which are required by the BIR. "Let's organise them and register them and teach them proper governance," he added.

Increase corn production. Make fingerling production a domestic industry. These are some of the points that need to be addressed to help secure the country's food future.

Atty. Elias "Bong" Inciong, president of the United Broiler Raisers Association, the biggest chicken producers organization in the country, addressed the question of a chicken shortage. He started by comparing 2022's chicken shortage with 2003's (which, in the industry, didn't count as a shortage), adding that "in 2003, there was no ASF (African Swine Fever), there was no Covid, there were no disruptions in the supply chain, no Ukraine war... That is a critical difference."

"Based on a higher standard, meaning overall food supply, then you can say, just to play it safe so that no one will be complacent, especially government, we might as well say we are in a very challenging situation, if not a shortage, in the next two quarters if we do not get together and address this thing," Inciong said.

Gregorio "Joji" San Diego, chairman of the Philippine Egg Board Association and the United Broiler Eggs Association (UBRA), addressed the speculation of eggs reaching ₱15 per piece, said in Tagalog, "I don't think that will happen because if you compute it, one kilo of eggs is around 16 pieces, and if one kilo of eggs costs ₱240, it'll cost more than a whole chicken... I don't think that'll happen."

Edwin Cheng, Agriculture subcommittee chair for livestock of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) and PCAFI director, spoke about ASF's effects on the hog industry, which is being encouraged to repopulate, leading to fairly stable farm gate prices in 2022. He also cited feed costs as a challenge, especially with the dip of the peso and the disruption of global supply chains caused by the Russia-Ukraine war.

"So far, during this rainy season, we're seeing that the pigs are growing faster and that's why there's some softening in our farm gate prices. But of course, this is seasonal," Cheng said in Taglish. "We need to build our capacity. Increase the number of sows, which, from 1.7 million is now down to less than a million."

He stressed that the farm gate prices are due to many factors, many beyond the producers's control. "We are making good use of whatever resources we have."

One of the many questions asked of the panel was if it was indeed possible to bring down the price of rice to ₱20 per kilo, as the President promised. To this, Fausto said, "It cannot be done immediately, but I think it can be done. I told the President, 'Let's subsidize the input and not the output.'"

There are many things that need to be done to revamp the agriculture industry. These are but some suggestions that, if done correctly, will benefit every Filipino because even if one is not a farmer, one is sure to be a consumer.

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'Masagana 150' eyed to lower rice prices

By JEL E. SANTOS

The Department of Agriculture (DA), headed by President Marcos in concurrent capacity, is looking into the possibility of implementing the "Masagana 150" program, which aims to harvest 150 cavans of rice per hectare of land.

Agriculture Undersecretary-designate for Consumer and Political Affairs Kristine Evangelista said that by increasing harvest under the Masagana 150 program, prices of rice are expected to drop and income for farmers will increase.

A similar program – dubbed "Masagana 99" – was implemented under the administration of then President Ferdinand E. Marcos in 1973. It sought to solve the country's worsening rice shortage then. But this was discontinued after the program was marred with issues, leaving farmers in deeper debt.

In an interview with ANC on Thursday, July 21, Evangelista said the DA is currently studying the implementation of the "Masagana 150" nationwide.

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'Masagana 150' eyed to lower rice prices 1◂

She said the implementation of the program, a brainchild of those involved in the rice program, is a DA recommendation.

"They are putting in technology and new things to increase the yield. This is anchored on increasing the yield based on the technologies we can avail of... It's science-based. The idea is to reach that much as far as cavans is concerned," Evangelista said, referring to the Masagana 150 program.

"We are looking at how this can be implemented and when can it be implemented," she added.

"We plant in October, we harvest it next year. To manage expectation, it's not going to be harvested this year," she said.

"But definitely, if Masagana 150 will be implemented, we are looking at it as a way of bringing down the price of rice in our market, and at the same time helping our farmers come up with better yield, thus increasing their income as well."

Success and failure of Masagana 99

Masagana 99, an emergency program to address rice shortage due to pests and natural calamities that hit the country before, was discussed in a webinar attended by some members of the UP College of Agriculture Class 1960. Those who attended the webinar, held in September 2020, were mostly part of the Masagana 99 program.

In an article posted at the UP Los Baños website, one of the panelists, Dr. Santiago Obien, said the program was successful in producing the needed rice production, averting potential social problems then.

But the project had its own problems. Some of these, according to former DA secretary Domingo Panganiban, were the replacement of technicians with non-agriculturists and implementers forgetting about the small farmers.

Other problems and issues mentioned in the article include problematic credit system, use of pesticides that damaged the environment, and loss of properly trained personnel.

It added that these are important lessons that should be taken into account for future programs.

Cooperatives

When it comes to the program's sustainability, Evangelista said the ACPC (Agriculture Credit Policy Council) can assist cooperatives by granting loans.

Just recently, the President raised the possibility of engaging in government-to-government (G2G) deals in a bid to address the increasing prices of fertilizers in the country.

The government is planning to communicate with China, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, and Russia for the country's procurement of fertilizers.

Marcos has also ordered DA officials to come up with a farm-to-market road master plan that will serve as a guide for the government.

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PH gets 145,235 MT US sugar quota allocation

By BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT

The US government has granted the Philippines 145,235 metric tons of in-quota raw cane sugar allocation for fiscal year 2023, the office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) announced. .

The USTR said that 1,117,195 metric tons raw value (MTRV) in total in-quota sugar allocation may enter the US market under the tariff-rate quotas (TRQs) on imported raw cane sugar and sugar-containing products for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 (October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023). The USTR announcement followed after the Foreign Agricultural Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the establishment of the in-quota quantity for raw cane sugar for FY 2023 on July 11, 2022.

The sugar volume allocation is the minimum amount to which the US committed under the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement. The sugar in-quota allocation is being divided among sugar producing countries.

After the Dominican Republic, which has in-quota allocation of 189,343 MTRV, the Philippines got the second biggest allocation.

TRQs allow countries to export specified quantities of a product to the United States at a relatively low tariff, but subject all imports of the product above a pre-determined threshold to a higher tariff.

The allocations of the raw cane sugar WTO TRQ to countries that are net importers of sugar are conditioned on receipt of the appropriate verifications of origin. Certificates of quota eligibility must accompany imports from any country for which an allocation has been provided.

With respect to the in-quota quantity of 64,709 metric tons (MT) of the TRQ for imports of certain sugar-containing products maintained under Additional U.S. Note 8 to Chapter 17 of the HTSUS, USTR is allocating 59,250 MT to Canada. The remainder, 5,459 MT of the in-quota quantity, is available for other countries on a first-come, first-served basis.

Other countries granted with sugar in-quota allocation by the US include Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Swaziland, Fiji, Gabon, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Jamaica, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mexico, Mozambique, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, South Africa, St. Kitts & Nevis, Taiwan, Thailand, Trinidad & Tobago, Uruguay, and Zimbabwe.

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EDITORIAL

A member of the Philippine Press Institute
The National Association of Philippine Newspapers

PBBM's fertilizer procurement plan

ONE of the principal ways to assist the agriculture sector is to reduce the prices of fertilizers, to ensure the commodity's supply and availability, and ultimately to lessen the Filipino farmers' dependence on imported fertilizers, mostly the chemical variety.

The Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority (FPA), an agency under the Department of Agriculture, said the average price of urea, the most commonly used fertilizer, has increased to P2,781 per 50-kilo bag for the period July 4-8 this year, significantly higher than the P1,321 a year ago and P1,050 in 2020. The cost of complete fertilizers has also doubled to P2,369 per 50-kilo bag from P1,187 in July 2021.

'Our farmers tilling their relatively small farms and planting mostly rice, corn and sugar, will not be able to compete given these high prices, without government subsidies.'

These skyrocketing prices, which are felt all over the world, may be traced to the outbreak in February of the Russia-Ukraine war, where most of these fertilizers are manufactured and sold. Our farmers tilling their relatively small farms and planting mostly rice, corn and sugar, will not be able to compete given these high prices, without government subsidies.

The DA said the government has two options to overcome the expected decline in rice production this year: increase output by giving fertilizer and fuel subsidies and import cheap rice from abroad, the same tack resorted to by the Duterte administration under the Rice Tariffication Law.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has another solution in mind, although still a palliative one. Experienced in thinking out of the box, Marcos wants to personally pursue government-to-government (G2G) talks to buy cheaper fertilizers from other countries.

Marcos disclosed his plan to negotiate with China, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, and Russia for the procurement of cheaper fertilizers.

"They want to help, they want to approach us, then let's take advantage of that. Give us fertilizers at a very good price. That's the whole point of G2G," the President said.

Duterte's foreign policy of friendship with all nations which Marcos seems to be adopting too, will serve us in good stead in the procurement of fertilizers and possibly other farm inputs needed for the nation to weather the coming global food crisis.

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Isabela fish farm reels in success with LANDBANK support

LANDBANK assisted the operations of A.R. Santiago Fish Farm, owned by Arnel Santiago (left photo) in San Mateo, Isabela, which now produces 300,000 to 500,000 tilapia fingerlings monthly that are sold regularly to fish pond operators, government agencies, and other buyers in the Cagayan Valley and Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR).

SAN MATEO, Isabela – When Cagayan Valley, one of the country's largest tilapia-producing regions, faced a region-wide shortage of tilapia fingerlings in 1993, business graduate Arnel Santiago decided to establish his own fish hatchery to help boost local production and earn additional income.

With no prior experience in aquaculture but armed with determination to learn about fish farming, Arnel completed trainings on fish pond operations and established A.R. Santiago Fish Farm. He was able to sustain his operations until 2002, when running his business became a challenge due to lack of capital.

It was then that Arnel availed of his first loan from the Land Bank of the Philippines (LANDBANK) to purchase feeds and modern equipment such as water pumps and a backhoe, as well as a 2.4-hectare agricultural land to expand his fish farm.

Through LANDBANK's continuing credit assistance over the years—which has since amounted to P6.4 million—Arnel's fish production increased from an average of 100,000 tilapia fingerlings to 300,000 to 500,000 fingerlings per month.

"Isang taos-pusong pasasalamat sa LANDBANK. Dahil sa tulong nila ay umasenso at napalawak ko ang aking negosyo. Nakatulong rin ako na mapunan ang kakulangan sa produksyon ng tilapia dito sa aming rehiyon," said Arnel.

A.R. Santiago Fish Farm now supplies fingerlings to various fish pond operators and buyers in Cagayan Valley and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR). The farm is also tapped by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource (BFAR) Region II and other local government units to supply fingerlings for their distribution activities to fish farmers.

With his increased income, Arnel was able to purchase a solar irrigation system to power his water pumps during daytime. This has since reduced monthly operational expenses by 30%.

"Consistent with the country's continuing recovery, LANDBANK remains committed to catering to the financial requirements of the fisheries sector. We are assisting fishers and other key players to boost their production and income," said LANDBANK President and CEO Cecilia C. Borromeo.

To support the local fishing industry in Isabela, Arnel offers technical assistance to new fish breeders who want to venture into the tilapia breeding business. The A.R. Santiago Fish Farm is now accredited as a 'Learning Site for Agriculture' by BFAR, the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

Arnel has also reaped various awards for his accomplishments as a fish farmer from the Department of the Agriculture (DA) and the Local Government of San Mateo.

"Gusto kong ibahagi ang aking expertise at technical knowledge sa bagong henerasyon, para masiguro ang tuloy-tuloy na paglago ng aquaculture industry sa ating bansa," Arnel added.

LANDBANK remains to be the biggest lender to the agriculture sector, with a total agri loan portfolio of P257.94 billion and having assisted more than 3.2 million small farmers and fishers nationwide as of 31 May 2022.

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US hikes sugar import quota for PH

THE United States has increased the Philippines' sugar export quota for fiscal year 2023 at 145,235 metric tons (MT), up by over 2 percent from the previous 142,160 MT, the US Trade Representative said in its website.

The Philippines' volume under the tariff-rate quota (TRQ) on imported raw cane sugar for Oct. 1, 2022 through Sept. 30, 2023 is the third largest volume after Dominican Republic's 189, 343 MT and Brazil's 155,993 MT.

The United States Department of Agriculture projects local production of sugar to drop to 2 million MT for crop year 2022-2023 due to lower fertilizer usage because of rising prices.

The agency expects the Philippines to produce a total of 2.05 million MT for crop year 2021-2022.

TRQ allow countries to export specified quantities of a product to the US at a relatively low tariff but subject all imports of the product above a pre-determined threshold to a higher tariff.

The quota is deemed important as the Philippines is only among selected countries given with an annual allocation of sugar export to the US market at a premium.

The announcement came amid the ongoing high price of sugar in the local market which the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) attributed to the scarcity of supply as the agency warned before that the country's raw sugar supply may be depleted by the first week of August while refined sugar supply might only last until the end of the month.

Based on data from the SRA, as of July 10, the country has not shipped any volume of sugar to the US for crop year 2021-2022.

Negros Occidental Rep. Dino Yulo earlier urged the government to speed up the appointment of a new SRA head amid the sugar supply problems.

This is crucial to ensure the welfare of both consumers and local producers, said Yulo, a former SRA board member representing farmers, noting the key issues to be immediately resolved by a new SRA chief: to decide whether the Philippines will still be able to supply its export quota to the US and to determine if there is a need to import additional supply for the year.

SRA currently has an officer-in-charge, Ignacio Santillana, who is a concurrent deputy administrator.

However, Hermenegildo Serafica, SRA administrator during the Duterte administration, reportedly insists on keeping his post saying that President Marcos Jr.'s Memorandum Circular No. 1, which ordered that several government posts be vacated, does not cover SRA. *-Jed Macapagal*

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US to train local staff vs African Swine Fever

THE US and Philippine Agriculture departments said they jointly launched a project to further insulate the Philippine hog industry from African Swine Fever (ASF).

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide training to officials from the Philippine Department of Agriculture to improve veterinary services to ensure safe pork and pork products.

"Since our initial conversation with the Philippine government a few years ago, the opportunity to better understand ASF and the benefits for both countries were always clear," National Pork Producers Council President Terry Wolters said in a statement.

Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines President Rolando E. Tambago said that the project is a "timely initiative that will enhance the industry's competence in disease control."

"The knowledge gained from the project can be cascaded to our Asian neighbors to better equip farmers in their fight against ASF," National Federation of Hog Farmers, Inc. President Chester Warren Y. Tan added.

The USDA funds the Building Safe Agricultural Food Enterprises project, which assists Philippine hog farmers in their repopulation efforts by strengthening biosecurity measures at the farm level.

"Through the Cochran Fellowship Program, USDA has trained many local hog raisers since 2017 in improving their food safety through proper cold chain and handling," it added. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

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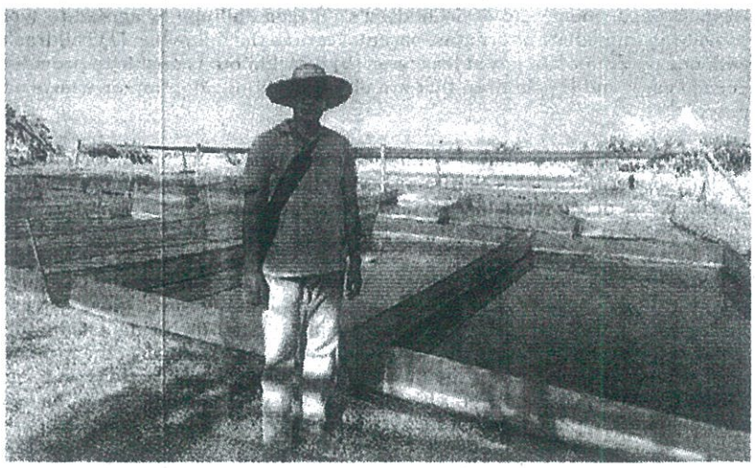

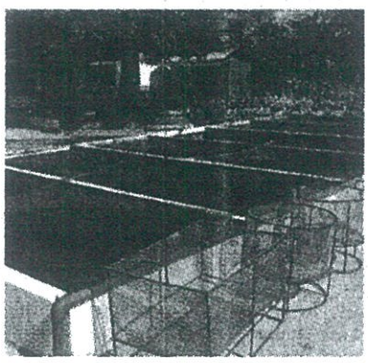

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PIXABAY.COM

Palay prices up 0.1% month on month in May

THE average farmgate price of palay (unmilled rice) rose 0.1% to P17.24 per kilogram in May compared to April, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The year-on-year rise was 1.6%.

"Compared to the previous month's year-on-year growth, higher annual increases in the average farmgate prices of palay during the month were noted in Central Luzon, Western Visayas, and Zamboanga Peninsula," the PSA reported.

"In addition, after exhibiting negative annual (growth) rates in the previous month, Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Visayas, and Davao Region posted positive annual growth during the period," it added.

Western Visayas registered the highest annual increment of 10.2% this month while Mimaropa had the steepest decline at 5.8%.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has announced that President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., who is also Agriculture Secretary, ordered the department to focus on increasing agricultural production and ensuring ample supply to keep prices affordable.

Undersecretary for Consumer and Political Affairs Kristine Y. Evangelista said that the government is focused on stabilizing prices.

"When (Mr. Marcos) told us before that we have to reconstruct the value chain, it's taking into account (our) supply sources and at the same time the demand requirement of consumers, including institutional buyers, industrial users," she added.

The DA is currently assessing its current projects and programs, according to Ms. Evangelista.

With high input and production costs inevitable due to the crisis in Ukraine, she said that there is also a need to review the distribution of subsidies to farmers, fisherfolk, and animal raisers. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

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ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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Rice Tariffication Law, gampanin ng NFA nirerebisa ng DA

MASUSING nire-review ng Department of Agriculture ang Rice Tarrification Law at maging ang gampanin ng National Food Authority upang masiguro ang food security.

Sa ilalim ng RTL, pinapayagan ang liberalized importation ng bigas, ang NFA ay may mandato lang na tiyakin na sapat ang suplay ng buffer stocks ng bigas sa Pilipinas, "30 days worth of the country's total consumption during the lean season, and 15 days otherwise."

Bago ang RTL, ang gampanin ng NFA ay i-regulate ang rice sector at tanging ahensya na pinapayagan na mag-import ng rice shipments sa bansa.

Sa isang panayam, sinabi ni DA Undersecretary Kristine Evangelista na pinag-aaralan ng departamento kung papayagan ang NFA na mag-angkat ng bigas kahit pa sa ilalim ng liberalized trading regime.

"That is something being studied and is for further discussion and recommendation," anito.

Aniya pa, sa ilalim ng RTL, "NFA cannot import."

"We are reviewing RTL and its positive and negative impacts. The role of NFA is also being reviewed," dagdag na pahayag nito.

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U.S., PH launch ASF Project to support hog sector

THE United States and the Philippines launched a new project aimed at strengthening local veterinary services for safe pork and pork products.

Through this project funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) Emerging Markets Program and implemented by the University of Minnesota, Philippine Department of Agriculture (DA) technical officials will receive a two-week training in the United States, equipping them with relevant knowledge to conduct workshops across the Philippines to help combat the spread of African Swine Fever (ASF).

DA officials countersigned a memorandum of understanding to implement the project at the DA office in Quezon City on July 20. Agriculture Commissioner of Minnesota Thom Petersen represented the University of Minnesota at the ceremony.

Left: National Livestock Director Dr. Ruth Sonaco, Bureau of Animal Industry OIC-Director Dr. Reildrin Morales, and Agricultural Training Institute Director Dr. Rosana Mula sign the memorandum of understanding on behalf of DA, in the presence of Agriculture Commissioner of Minnesota Thom Petersen representing the University of Minnesota.
Right: Hog industry stakeholders in the Philippines and in the United States welcome the project's potential contributions to strengthening the local industry's competence on disease control.

In his remarks, FAS Administrator Daniel Whitley noted that the project builds on the work of the U.S. Department of Defense's Defense Threat Reduction Agency and USDA-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service on combatting transboundary animal diseases.Also witnessing the launch were leaders from the U.S. and Philippine hog sectors. "Since our initial conversation with the Philippine government a few years ago, the opportunity to better understand ASF and the benefits for both countries were always clear," said National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) President Terry Wolters, the author of the project proposal.

Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines President Rolando Tambago welcomed the project as a "timely initiative that will enhance the industry's competence on disease control," while National Federation of Hog Farmers, Inc. President Chester Tan remarked that the knowledge gained from the project "can be cascaded to our Asian neighbors to better equip farmers in their fight against ASF."

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Why food inflation needs an urgent response

COMMENTARY

CHARINA JAVIER AND GIDEON LASCO

Since the pandemic started, prices of food have consistently risen due to disruptions in the food supply chain, transportation costs, and, occasionally, due to extreme weather disturbances that affect crop harvests and delivery. This is further aggravated recently by the increases in fuel and conflict between Russia and Ukraine, both of which are major grain exporters. Thus, it is no wonder that the most urgent issue that Filipinos want the new administration to address—at least according to the recent Pulse Asia Survey—is inflation.

Families in developing countries spend up to half of their budgets on food, so food price increases have wide negative impact. This is true even before the pandemic: In 2018, the average Filipino household spent about 42.6 percent of its income on food alone. The Philippine Statistics Authority data shows, moreover, that poor households spend about 58 percent of their income on food—making it unsurprising that many Filipinos are looking forward to President Marcos Jr. fulfilling his campaign promise of making the price of rice at P20 per kilo (the practicality of which is a topic for another column).

If securing food is challenging in itself, securing healthy and nutritious foods is even more so. According to the World Bank, nutritious food prices increase faster than other consumer prices. This explains why food-insecure households turn to energy-dense, mostly carbohydrate-rich foods that make them feel fuller to "prevent hunger" (*pantawid gutom*). Alas, the trend in the per capita consumption of fruits has been a steady decline since 1978 at 104 grams to only 34 grams in 2018-2019 based on the Food Consumption Survey of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST)-Food and Nutrition Research Institute. In addition, even the price of cheaper sources of protein such as eggs and fish has been steadily increasing recently, thus making the Sustainable Development Goal of eradicating hunger—and malnutrition—even more difficult.

There is widespread acknowledgment that multisectoral approaches are needed to address the consumer side—which includes nutrition education, skills, and access—and the supply side of providing healthy foods. As the nutrition month theme for this year, "New Normal na Nutrisyon, Sama-samang Gawan ng Solusyon!" aptly calls for strengthened nutrition interventions and solidarity toward nutrition improvement as the country shifts toward living with the COVID-19 virus. It builds on the fact that good nutrition is key to building immunity and supporting recovery.

On the consumer side, there is a need to promote low-cost nutritious foods and recipes, as well as promote foods that are locally available and underutilized, such as root crops, green leafy vegetables, seaweeds, and other edible wild foods. In our own research conducted in Siargao Island during the pandemic and published in Acta Medica Philippina (Lasco, et al., 2022), we found that there is extensive indigenous knowledge on *duma* (i.e., root crops), but they are vanishing in the face of overdependence on rice—for which they would even sell their *duma*. More anthropological and sociological studies on food preferences are required if we are to address the nutrition crisis.

The pandemic has also shown the importance of having home and community gardens that are immediate sources of nutritious foods, thus, this should be maintained and further encouraged. There is also a need to learn ways to do food preservation at the household level, so that when there are food items that are in season, these can be bought in bulk and prolong their availability.

On the supply side, the issue of controlling food prices in the context of nutrition, the goal should be to make dietary diversity more affordable for all. This should not only be to lower the price of rice alone, but to make nutrient-rich foods more affordable alongside considering the state of our local farmers and fisherfolk as they are also among the most food insecure sector. There is also a need to support food innovations that will help in value adding of food and other agricultural products for local, and maybe even export, market.

The double and triple burden of malnutrition is looming as food and nutrient adequacy is becoming more difficult to achieve. We need to work double or triple time if we are to avert more stunted children and other long-lasting consequences of our worsening nutrition crisis.

Charina Javier is a nutritionist and science research specialist at the DOST-Food and Nutrition Research Institute. Gideon Lasco is a physician, medical anthropologist, and Philippine Daily Inquirer columnist.

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BOC seizes smuggled onions worth ₱12M

By Bernadette D. Nicolas @BNicolasBM

THE Bureau of Customs (BOC) seized P12 million worth of smuggled onions at the Mindanao Container Terminal Port in Misamis Oriental.

Four containers of smuggled red and white onions were busted by the Bureau of Customs-Port of Cagayan de Oro on July 19, marking the port's second seizure of smuggled goods in less than 2 weeks.

The shipments, which arrived last July 12 from China and consigned to "Primex Export and Import Producer," were declared to be "spring roll patti [sic]."

District Collector Elvira Cruz immediately issued on July 13 a "Pre-Lodgment Control Order," or PLCO, against the subject shipment.

A "Warrant of Seizure and Detention," or WSD, will be issued against the shipment for violation of Section 1400 of Republic Act 10863 or the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act.

Cruz is hoping the seizure "will serve as a stern warning to unscrupulous individuals who will deprive the government of lawful revenues to stop their smuggling activities."

Earlier this month, five containers of smuggled red onions, white onions and carrots estimated to be worth P15 million were also seized by the BOC-Port of Cagayan de Oro and the Intelligence Group at the Mindanao Container Terminal Port.

The shipments consigned to Primex Export and Import Producer, which arrived from China on July 2 were declared as "autolysed [sic] yeast in powder form."

Out of the P8.37 billion seized smuggled goods from January to June this year, P284.02 million were agricultural products.

Last year, the BOC seized some P28.4-billion worth of smuggled goods, of which P1.23 billion were agricultural products.

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Senate bill on zero hunger refiled

A SENATOR has refiled a bill that mandates the government to ensure zero hunger in the Philippines within 10 years after the effectivity of the law amid threats of a global food crisis.

Under Senate Bill 30, otherwise known as the Right to Adequate Food Act, the incidence of hunger in the country should be a quarter less than the level recorded at the time of its passage within 2.5 years. It should be reduced by another 25% after five years; another 25% after 7.5 years; until it reaches 0% after 10 years.

Under the bill, hunger refers to a condition in which people do not get enough to eat that provides the necessary nutrients for a fully productive, active and healthy living due to the unavailability and inaccessibility of food.

"The global food supply shortage that affects us today is beyond our control because it is dictated by global market forces," Senator Ramon B. Revilla, Jr. said in a statement on Thursday. "But if we increase the local production of agricultural goods, we will become more self-reliant and maintain affordable food prices."

In June, former Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar warned about the impending food crisis brought about by the global food supply shortage, which is expected to become more evident by end-2022.

Should the bill pass into law, the state must ensure that land devoted to food production is increased to 50% of all prime agricultural land in every region within 10 years.

The proposed measure also requires the government to create a framework that will eliminate hunger in an organized strategic manner. A Commission on the Right to Adequate Food will also be established.

Violators of the law may be imprisoned for a maximum of six years and fined with up to P500,000.

In the 2020 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World Report, the Philippines had the highest number of food-insecure people in the Southeast Asian region from 2017 to 2019 with 59 million Filipinos suffering from moderate to severe lack of consistent access to food. Moreover, 15.4 million were considered to be undernourished.

— **Alyssa Nicole O. Tan**

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US agri exports to PHL to reach record-level $3.8 billion this year

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

THE United States Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Services (USDA-FAS) is keen that American agricultural exports to the Philippines this year would reach a record level of over $3.8 billion, its administrator said.

USDA-FAS Administrator Daniel Whitley said he is "especially" optimistic for US agricultural exports to the Philippines this year for two reasons: value of goods have been high and demand for American agricultural goods have not waned.

"I am always optimistic but I'm especially optimistic for this year for a couple of reasons. First, obviously we talked about value, prices have been somewhat high. Second, demand has not really fallen off so we do think that those projections would hold true," Whitley told reporters recently.

"I do think inflationary pressures on food and agriculture prices will allow the Philippines to open up the markets even further. Our products are safe and we think, without any unfair trade barriers, we can increase our exports. I think we will hit the target [$3.5 billion], I really do," Whitley added.

The Philippines is the US's eighth-largest market for agricultural exports, averaging $3.1 billion annually in the past five years, according to the USDA.

In a recent Global Agricultural Information Network report, the USDA-FAS in Manila projected that US agricultural exports to the Philippines this year would grow by 8 percent to a record-high of $3,834 billion from last year's $3.55 billion.

"Despite shipping challenges, the United States remains the largest exporter of food and beverages. Post forecasts US food and beverage exports to grow 8 percent in 2022 with strong opportunities for milk, cheese, meat, poultry, baked products, fruits, vegetables, wine, and pet food," the USDA-FAS Manila said. ***(Related story:https://businessmirror.com.ph/2022/07/11/us-agency-phl-fb-sales-could-rise-6-to-26b-in-22/)***

Whitley noted that the US has been setting record export value of agriculture products to the Philippines for the past two years, indicating the "reliability" of the US suppliers even in times of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"This was during Covid and this was during supply chain disruptions. We're excited to hear they value reliability and we're excited to offer that characteristic from our agriculture industry," he said.

"The number one word we heard is reliability. In this time of uncertainty and unprecedented inflation hitting all sectors of the economy but especially the agriculture sector, we know our trading partners are looking for reliable suppliers and American agriculture has proven to be a reliable supplier during unprecedented circumstances," he added.

Whitley was in the Philippines, leading a US delegation for a four-day trade mission that sought to expand export prospects of US agriculture products to the Philippines. Together with Whitley was a delegation of representatives from 29 US agribusinesses and farm organizations as well as state agriculture officials.

"The Philippines is an excellent market for US farm and food products, and we look forward to introducing a diverse group of companies and organizations to new export opportunities there," Whitley said in a statement last week before the July 18 to 21 trade mission.

"US brands sell very well in the Philippines, where consumers regard our products as safe, reliable and of good quality. The United States has enjoyed a long and prosperous trading relationship with the Philippines and this mission is an ideal opportunity to further expand our exports there," Whitley added.

The USDA said participants during the four-day trade mission would "engage directly with potential buyers, receive in-depth market briefs from FAS and industry trade experts, and participate in site visits."

Some of the agribusinesses and organizations that present during the trade mission are California Blueberry Commission, California Milk Advisory Board, Flying Horse Services Inc., Food Export Association of the Midwest USA, Food Export USA, Groceries USA, National Pork Board, US Grains Council, and US Livestock Genetics Export Inc., among others.

Aside from the 29 agribusinesses and organizations, the USDA said representatives from various US state agencies, particularly those involved in agriculture and food, were also part of the trade mission to the Philippines.

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Corn drops, wheat firms

SINGAPORE- Chicago corn futures lost more ground on Thursday as forecasts for rains in dry parts of the US Midwest raised hopes of a bumper crop.

Wheat edged up as the market awaited Egyptian wheat purchase negotiations as well as talks on a possible deal to resume sea grain shipments from war-torn Ukraine.

The most-active corn contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) fell 0.7 percent to $5.85-3/4 a bushel, and soybeans lost 0.3 percent to $13.28 a bushel.

Wheat gained marginally to $8.19-3/4 a bushel.

Corn fell as the market focused on weather forecasts for the United States, where rains expected next week were seen easing some of the stress on crops from a hot spell that has scorched the southern Plains and extended into the southern Midwest.

July is the key weather month for the development of the US corn crop, while August is more important for soybeans.

The US Energy Information Administration said weekly production of corn-based ethanol rose last week to 1.030 million barrels per day, the first increase in five weeks, and stockpiles fell slightly.

In the wheat market, traders awaited results of potential wheat purchases by Egypt, the top global importer of the food grain. An estimated 15 trading companies are believed to be taking part in direct negotiations with Egypt's state grains buyer GASC on the purchase of an undisclosed volume of wheat, traders said in initial assessments. – ***Reuters***

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$3.8B US target for food exports achievable

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) forecast of $3.8-billion exports of food and beverage to the Philippines this year is achievable especially that prices of goods have increased while demand has not diminished, according to Daniel Whitley, administrator of the agency's 's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS),

The USDA in a report dated July 6 year made this forecast, representing an 8 percent increase from last year's $3.55 billion.

"I'm always optimistic but I'm especially optimistic this year for a couple of reasons. One, when we talk about value, prices have been somewhat high while demand has not really fallen off so we do think that those projections will hold true," Whitley said.

"I do think that the inflationary pressures on food and agri prices will allow the Philippines to open up the markets even further. We think our products are safe and we think without unfair trade barriers, we can increase our exports. The $3.8 billion projections sound about right to me and from all the data I've reviewed, I think we'll hit that target," he added.

Based on USDA report, the US expects to sell the Philippines additional milk, cheese, meat, poultry, baked products, fruits, vegetables, wine and pet food products as the

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$3.8B

country also ranked as the seventh-largest US agricultural export market last year.

The same report also said other major factors in the upbeat projections for US agricultural exports to the Philippines include the continued household spending and purchasing by manufacturers that will propel the local food processing sector as well as the easing of mobility restrictions and enhanced online services that will boost retail sales particularly from convenience stores, grocery stores, hypermarkets and warehouse clubs.

The report also sees the local food service sector to further recover this year driven by the reopening of the economy and the resumption of face-to-face school classes and on-site work.

The USDA also said the recent national elections boosted the economy and improved consumer confidence and household spending.

The report even cited optimism over the expansion of food and beverage retailers in residential areas and provinces; the preference of upper-class and the growing middle-class consumers for imported food brands offering more product value and healthier options; and the boost in sales of food products via e-commerce.

Despite this, the USDA acknowledges majority of the population is still engaged in thriftier spending, resorting to low-cost products especially that prices are expected to continue to rise due to elevated input costs and higher inflation.

Other challenges cited by the USDA include global shipping issues such as congested ports and limited availability of containers; the Russia-Ukraine war disrupting the supply of wheat and oil products affecting grocery items such as bread, noodles, pasta, biscuits, pastries, and snack foods; as well as rising fuel prices, among others.

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Cocoa hits near one-month high on bargain hunting; sugar falls

NEW YORK/LONDON — London cocoa prices on ICE rose to their highest in nearly a month on Wednesday as chocolate makers took advantage of recent price falls to restock, even as they expect demand to tail off going forward thanks to poor global growth.

COCOA: September London cocoa settled £13 or 0.7% higher at £1,747 per ton, having earlier hit £1,755, its highest since late June.

Dealers said cocoa and chocolate demand has been better than expected and that even though it is seen tailing off going forward, concerns are creeping in about the next crop in West Africa.

The crop in the world's top producing region has been developing well but this is unlikely to be maintained going forward as less fertiliser was applied, they said.

Barry Callebaut said its sales volumes grew 7.9% in the nine months to end-May. It noted, however, the global chocolate confectionery market grew only 1.4% during that period.

September New York cocoa rose $21 or 0.9% to $2,368 a ton.

SUGAR: October raw sugar fell 0.17 cent or 0.9% at 18.67 cents per pound (lb), extending the previous session's 2.9% decline.

Dealers said it is difficult to see sugar prices rising in the short term after Brazilian oil giant Petrobras cut gasoline prices, a move that tends to prompt Brazil's mills to ramp up sugar output at the expense of ethanol, a cane-based biofuel.

They said the ethanol price in Brazil is currently below the equivalent of sugar at 17 cents in New York.

Archer Consulting said Brazilian mills increased hedging on ICE in June, signaling an intention to produce more sugar.

October white sugar fell $3.70 or 0.7% at $535.90 a ton.

COFFEE: September arabica coffee rose 1.65 cent or 0.8% at $2.1815 per lb with the market consolidating after climbing nearly 8% on Monday.

Brazil's Cooxupe, the world's largest coffee co-op, said harvest in the area where it operates reached 42% of the fields, near the level seen at this time last year as farmers increased the pace recently.

September robusta coffee was stable at $1,998 a ton. — ***Reuters***