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'Sugar shortage to test Marcos admin's mettle'

Importation flip-flop is 'first major misstep,' says GlobalSource

FROM B1

By Doris Dumlao-Abadilla
@Philbizwatcher

A recent policy flip-flop on sugar importation is the "first major misstep" of the Marcos administration as the sugar crisis continues to test the mettle of the new President in making sound economic policy decisions, according to New York-based think tank Global Source.

In a research note dated Aug. 25, Global Source economists Romeo Bernardo and Marie Christine Tang said President Marcos has chosen good people in his Cabinet, valuing competence and integrity over personal ties.

"Then, he lent credibility to his economic team, opening his first policy speech to Congress with their growth and development goals and importantly for credit markets, the medium-term fiscal consolidation program, and then said all the right things in the rest of the speech," the think tank said.

And to signal that he is "neither populist nor beholden to anyone," Global Source noted that Mr. Marcos had vetoed three bills, including those that benefited business groups that were reputedly major sponsors of his campaign.

"His continuing silence on the popular policies he espoused on the campaign trail, notably P20 rice and an oil price stabilization fund, as well as his and the economic managers' active engagement with the business sector further bolstered beliefs that the economic team has his ear," the research said.

A worker repacks sugar at a Visayas Avenue public market. Economists are watching Malacañang's response to the crisis to divine its approach to future challenges. —GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE

Bold ... or ill-advised

However, Global Source raised concern on how the administration is handling the sugar crisis, particularly the flip-flopping on the importation of sugar. To recall, the President appointed himself Agriculture Secretary in June, which the think tank said was "either a bold move or an ill-advised one."

A government-owned corporation, the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) not only controls domestic supply through imports but decides how much of local production will be allocated to meeting US quotas and domestic consumption needs.

"This central planning system, coupled with the sector's relatively poorer productivity, has translated into comparatively high domestic sugar prices, as much as twice the world market price in the past 10 years," the research said.

Recently, Malacañang recalled an order to import 300,000 metric tons of sugar signed by members of the SRA board, citing the order as "illegal." The President has since then agreed to import sugar at half the original volume and at a later date.

"The question is, is this decision based on sound economics or political accommodations? So far, retail prices of sugar are unchanged despite reports of large supermarkets having been persuaded to sell the product at a discount. Another worrying sign is the suspension of operation in some plants of a large multinational beverage manufacturer reportedly due to lack of sugar," Global Source said.

"We are not quite sure what this seeming first major misstep means, but it is being closely watched as possible canary in the coal mine," it added.

Policy tug of war

The think tank noted that, throughout the country's presidential history, including the first Marcos administration, there have been tugs of war between economic technocrats and the more politically oriented advisers, driven by short term popularity, power consolidation or fund-raising agenda.

"How this administration, and thus our economy, fares over its entire term, amid all the daunting economic challenges, may well depend on who the President listens to," the research said.

In the case of the controversial order to import 300,000 tons of sugar, Leocadio Sebastian, an agriculture undersecretary who was designated ex-officio chair representing the President, signed the order on behalf of Mr. Marcos.

"Many thought that what transpired soon after was tantamount to the President and his Palace team throwing a highly-regarded technocrat under the bus," it said.

Through his spokesperson, the President disavowed knowledge of the importation order, after which his executive secretary told a senate hearing that while he had the importation order drafted, he had expected the undersecretary to get the President's approval first before signing.

Sebastian has since then quit his post. INQ

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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CTALK

CITO BELTRAN

Why 'fish' when you can 'farm'

Last week, officials of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources spoke about their many plans to put up various types of fish shelter, floating fish farms at sea, cold storage plants and better boats for fisherfolk. To people who have only heard about these things recently, it might sound like good ideas to help improve fish catch and help the fisherfolk. But the truth of the matter is that it's nothing new.

From the time of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. to the present time of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. the Philippines has been setting up such projects all over the country. In fact, Filipino experts were ahead of the pack in developing breeding farms for Sabalo or giant salt water bangus in Pangasinan. Back in the late 80's there was the TLRC or Technology Livelihood Resource Center that regularly conducted paid seminars where I enrolled to learn about tilapia raising, lapu-lapu raising in floating fish cages, crab fattening and basic fiberglass know-how.

There is really nothing earth shaking or new. What is quite obvious is that fisheries and aquatic-related programs seem to remain in the incubation period, pilot program or are stunted. One would think that after 40 years, every coastal barangay should already have established fisheries facilities, starting with fresh or salt water tilapia farms where you can use part of the produce as feed when you set up a floating cage/farm for lapu-lapu, apahap or sea bass, or samaral. With the presence of established floating fish cages you would then have a stable and predictable supply of four different fish species which would justify or naturally create a fish buying station. The floating fish cage would consequently be fish shelters much better than the traditional payaws because the fish cages provide incidental feeds passing through the nets. The fact that other countries are already operating tuna and salmon cages even on an experimental basis tells us that the potential is so great.

During my time in Palawan in 1991, we tried our hand at operating a floating cage for lapu-lapu and after many months I learned that you could purchase lapu-lapu fingerling, apahap or sea bass, jack or talakitok and a type of rabbit fish for sea farming in an office along Pasong Tamo Extension. Someone once told me that they are already raising lapu-lapu and other types of marine fish indoors in buildings in Taiwan and were very successful using computers and related technology. Just for the heck of it, I tried to do it "mano-mano" Pinoy style, starting with 50 pieces of fingerlings that I raised in a 2,000-gallon marine tank in my house in Barrio Kapitolyo, Pasig City! I only managed to raise five pieces to more than 3 kilos each and only because I was not strictly doing what needed to be done, but I saw that it could be done if it was done in a better location, with high tech facility and expertise.

Take, for instance, the crab fattening technology. I once visited an honest to goodness high tech crab fattening farm in Zamboanga where they kept several hundred crabs in individual PVC boxes with sprinklers and lighting programed to match or simulate high tides and low tides and fed individually to achieve the fastest and highest food conversion ratio. The facility also had lobsters and because of their efficiency and demand, the crabs were all for export. Essentially, all it took was a program and basic equipment that DOST can make locally.

The fact is, Filipino fisherfolk should not have to go out to open sea to catch fish if the BFAR and DILG were required by law and by the President to establish floating fish farms everywhere possible along the country's coastlines and that these should continually expand or grow in the number of units until a sustainable number is achieved as a component of our food security program. Unless this is done by members of Congress and the executive, such programs will never get priority. Much of the set up and investments are undertaken by private individuals and if there is one operated by government it is because a congressman wanted it or a grant was made available by a foreign government.

* * *

One very well-known and respected multi-industry leader I know personally was asked how can PBBM do things differently in managing senior government executives. The answer was plain and simple: Give every Cabinet member specific quotas or targets; whether it's the GDP, inflation, unemployment, production outputs, revenue collections, etc. Every Cabinet member should have quarterly and year-end targets that are not under-estimated or inflated. With so many problems, solutions and options on the table, the President has to focus on what is essential and closest to the needs of the people as well as the quickest to address and harvest results from. He should therefore gather his team and give each of them their specific quota or target, then ask them to sign on the dotted line of their masterpiece. If they hit their targets, great! If they don't, they should be honorable enough to acknowledge their failure and leave.

This is not harsh because this is how things are done inside private companies and major corporations where they operate with private funds or other people's money. The CEO or the Board will not waste one minute or one peso more before firing you if they determine that you are incapable of achieving goals or desired results. It's nothing personal, it's the bottom line in limiting the potential loss or missed opportunities. Why should the 2 to 3 million Filipino salaried taxpayers not require or demand the same rules and expectations from our government officials and employees?

* * *

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★

MANILA BULLETIN

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Improving farmers' lives is PBBM's priority — DAR chief

Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) Secretary Conrado Estrella III said improving the economic lives of the farmers is one of the priorities of the Marcos administration.

Estrella said true to the Chief Executive's word, President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (PBBM) will sign an Executive Order (EO) imposing a moratorium on payments of amortizations fees and interest loans of agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs), to support the intensified provision of support services and expedite the distribution of all idle government-owned lands.

He said the EO will be signed when Marcos turns 65 on Sept. 13 as part of his commitment during his first State of the Nation Address (SONA).

"I trust the wisdom of the President. The money of the ARBs that will be spent for their debts and other obligations will be used instead for other agricultural ventures. They can use that as additional capital for greater agricultural production," Estrella said during the ▶7

recent agency's PHP15.85-billion budget proposal hearing for the year 2023.

Estrella reiterated Marcos' call for condoning the land amortization fees of the ARBs.

"I have a continuous talk with the members of the House and the Senate, and I think they are going to support this measure as it is expected to benefit the ARBs nationwide," Estrella said.

He also said that with the condonation, the ARBs would be free from their debts and their farmlands, being their personal asset, can be used as collateral or a negotiable instrument that is beneficial especially to those who will only get a small portion of land.

Estrella said Marcos also supports the department's drive to intensify its provision of support services such as the construction of more infrastructure facilities, providing farmers with farm machines, equipment and inputs, and giving them various capacity development training.

"Aside from these, we would also include the children of our ARBs in the coverage of the Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education scholarship under the Commission on Higher Education. We would also provide our farmers with medical assistance through our partnership with the Department of Health," he said.

The DAR also aims to distribute all the remaining 256,121 hectares of idle government-owned lands, under Executive Order 75, series of 2019, to the farmer-beneficiaries of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.

Estrella said that under the Marcos leadership, the DAR, for the next six years, targets to achieve the following:

- 80 percent or 743,800 ARBs empowered with enhanced productivity and family income and become economically independent and active players,
- 85 percent or 7,800 ARB organizations with stable business operations, and
- 80 percent or 1,300 Agrarian Reform Communities with improved business ecosystem and connectivity. (PNA)

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Garlic crop needs to be fortified against pests, agri chamber says

THE domestic garlic crop needs to be made more resilient against pests and diseases to ensure adequate supply, an industry official said.

"We need to conduct continued research and development for improved technology specially on the garlic planting materials which through the years, according to experts, deteriorated in yield per hectare due to asexual propagation or clones of one another that became vulnerable to viral infections, pests and diseases," Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc. President Danilo V. Fausto said in a Viber message.

"We need to have good planting materials that are free from viral and other infections that can quickly multiply in large numbers on a sustained basis. Just like in other crops the proven way to do this is through plant tissue culture to improve our yield," he added.

In tissue culture, disease-free garlic planting materials can be mass produced in laboratories for eventual field planting, according to Mr. Fausto.

"Our current yield per hectare is around 2.5 tons to 4 tons compared to other countries that produce 10 to 15 tons per hectare such as China. We believe that making available good and disease-free garlic planting materials can match this yield if given attention by the government," he added.

For 2022, the Department of Agriculture projects a garlic supply of 82,950 metric tons.

Based on the latest data from the DA, the retail price of imported garlic is at P120 per kilogram. There is no available data for local garlic.

Former Agriculture Undersecretary Fermin D. Adriano said that the Philippines imports more than 90% of its garlic requirements, mostly from China and India.

He said that the industry also lacks post-harvest facilities like dryers, storage and transport.

"China and India produce very cheap garlic. India has been offering technical assistance and joint ventures with potential local investors but none has taken the offer. Farms are too small because of prolonged implementation of agrarian reform. We need farm consolidation," he added. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

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Carabao meat being positioned as potential beef substitute

THE Philippine Carabao Center (PCC) is projecting a ready market for carabao (water buffalo) meat, calling the commodity a viable substitute for beef in terms of taste and yields.

"As for the economic viability of carabao's meat... through collaboration and available technologies, there is a ready market for the product and the economic potential of this venture is very promising," PCC Business Development and Commercialization Head Zadieshar G. Sanchez said in a statement issued by the Department of Agriculture (DA), the PCC's parent agency.

"According to our ongoing study... opportunities for this commodity are many. To fully realize this potential, more carabao fattening farms need to be raised," he added.

PCC former Executive Director Arnel N. del Barrio, who delivered a presentation on the market potential of carabao meat at the Livestock Philippine Expo, said: "If male buffaloes are not fit for breeding, then they are qualified to be fattened and marketed for good quality meat."

According to a study by the PCC, buffalo meat is comparable to beef in terms of carcass yields, processing traits, and perceived taste.

The DA said it is also continuing to develop breeding technology to ensure a supply of fattened animals to meet potential demand. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

Daily Tribune
WITHOUT FEAR ◊ WITHOUT FAVOR

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Swine raisers get boost

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO, Pampanga – At least 50 swine raisers from Bagac town, Bataan province have received sentinel piglets as part of the African swine fever recovery program of the Department of Agriculture.

The DA Regional Field Office III under the Livestock Program – in coordination with the Municipal Agriculture Office – distributed Thursday the 150 sentinel pigs to 50 hog raisers under the Integrated National Swine Production Initiatives for Recovery and Expansion.

According to Agripina Tuazon, Agriculturist II of the DA's Livestock Program, each of the affected backyard raisers received three piglets and nine bags of feeds, adding that the hog raisers likewise received disinfectants, vitamins, and antibiotics for piglets.

"This is part of the program INSPIRE which aims to uplift again the piggery sector and to help ASF-hit hog raisers to restart their livelihood," Tuazon said. PNA

Daily Tribune
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Release farmers' subsidies, Imee urges

BY JOM GARNER
@tribunephl_jom

Senator Imee Marcos has urged the Department of Agriculture to speed up the release of over P9 billion in government subsidies, particularly for rice farmers who are now preparing for the wet planting season this September to October. **Turn to page A6**

From page 1

"Don't put farmers' funds in a time deposit since they're not meant to earn interest. Speed up the release, right now," said Imee, eldest sister of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the concurrent head of the DA.

She reported that rice farmers, who have reached out to Marcos's office, have complained that the P5,000 worth of cash aid allotted for some 1.6 million farmers was slow in coming, months after the Department of Budget and Management first announced its availability.

The Land Bank of the Philippines said the delay was allegedly due to the DA's problem with its ID system.

If the DA lacks the capacity to update its RSBSA (Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture), then it should call on municipal agriculturists who ought to have a list of farmers' cooperatives in their areas of responsibility," said Imee, chair of the Senate Committee on Cooperatives.

About P18.9 billion in rice tariffs were collected by the government last year, allowing the allotment of close to P9 billion in additional farmer subsidies besides the P10 billion mandated under the Rice Tariffication Law.

Imee warned of low farm yields and even food shortages if farmers are unable to use their subsidies to buy fertilizers and other farm inputs.

"The DA is creating bigger problems for itself if it delays the release of farmer subsidies. Farm yields for the country's staple crops cannot be maintained, much less increased, if farmers can't afford fertilizers and quit their livelihood," she explained.

She said that a farmer tilling one hectare to rice can save 25 percent to 33 percent on fertilizer costs with the P5,000 subsidy.

Farmers use from six to eight bags of fertilizer per hectare and will be spending P15,000 to P20,000 at today's prices of urea fertilizer.

The tight global supply of fertilizer has sent local farmers reeling from prices that have tripled since 2020, from about P800 per 50-kilogram bag of urea to P2,300 to P2,500 this year.

Daily Tribune
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Abucay intensifies fight vs poultry houseflies

BY MAR SUPNAD

ABUCAY, Bataan – Bent on solving the proliferation of houseflies allegedly coming from poultries, Mayor Robin Tagle assured residents that they will adopt an ordinance to control the spread of the houseflies in barangays.

Tagle's move comes after complaints were lodged by residents of Abucay in Upper Mabatang and other barangay folk where a number of poultries were set up.

"The houseflies were shooed away from the poultries after the operators sprayed them with chemicals inside their poultries. As a result, these houseflies just transferred to our houses," lamented an irked housewife.

The mayor – along with representatives from the Department of Agriculture, Rural Health Unit, Provincial Vet Office – conducted an ocular inspection at various poultries but they were only able to see for themselves minimal presence of houseflies.

Malaya
Business Insight

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Hasten distribution of P8B farmers cash subsidy, Imee tells DA

BY RAYMOND AFRICA

SEN. Imee Marcos yesterday urged the Department of Agriculture (DA) to speed up the distribution of the P8 billion cash subsidy to around 1.6 million farmers.

The senator's brother, President Marcos Jr., is the concurrent head of the DA.

Sen. Marcos made the call after several rice farmers supposedly reached out to her office and complained about the slow distribution of the P5,000 cash aid per farmer, which became available in July as announced by the Department of Budget and Management.

Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman had said that a Notice of Cash Allocation amounting to P8,053,474,140 has been approved for the distribution of P5,000 cash subsidy to 1,563,781 eligible rice farmers for the period covering the third and fourth quarter of the year.

The release of the NCA is in line with the implementation of the Rice Farmers' Financial Assistance program which is intended to provide support to rice farmers affected by the Rice Tariffication Law.

The Land Bank of the Philippines has previously said the delay in the release of funds was due mainly to the DA's problems with its identification system.

Marcos said that if the DA lacked the capability to update its Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA), it should have tapped the help of municipal agriculturists, who, she said have the list of farmers' cooperatives, for easy and faster identification of eligible rice farmers.

She said that the RSBSA's list of individual farmers given access to fertilizer and seed subsidies should not exclude, but continue to support, those whose livelihood has grown to process their own crops into value-added products.

Based on DA records, Marcos said some P18.9 billion in rice tariffs were collected by the government in 2021, which allows the allotment of around P9 billion in additional farmer subsidies, aside from the P10 billion mandated under the Rice Tariffication Law.

She warned of low farm yields and food shortage if farmers are unable to use their cash subsidies to buy fertilizers and other farm inputs.

"The DA is creating bigger problems for itself if it delays the release of farmer subsidies. Farm yields for the country's staple crops cannot be maintained, much less increased, if farmers can't afford fertilizers and quit their livelihood," she said.

Marcos said the P5,000 cash subsidy will mean savings of 25 percent to 30 percent on fertilizer costs for tilling one hectare of land to rice.

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Bamboo, seaweed producers seek ₱2.2-B gov't budget

By BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT

Local bamboo and seaweed producers are asking the government for ₱2.2 billion budget allocation to achieve the full economic potential of these products, especially in the exports market.

In a press conference by the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc. (PCAFI), the Philippine Bamboo Foundation said they would ask the government to allocate ₱2 billion out of the ₱2.7 billion previously allotted to the industry.

The Seaweed Industry Association of the Philippines also urged the government to return to their ₱200-million annual budget allocation way back in 2012 from the current ₱40 million.

Both groups said providing more budget will go a long way in helping the two local industries.

In the case of the seaweed industry, Jimbo Pedrosa III, chairman of Seaweed Industry Association of the Philippines, said the Philippines is the world's second largest producer of carrageenan, made of seaweed used in different applications from food to cosmetics and medicines.

Pedrosa said the Philippines is second only to China as seaweeds producer but global buyers prefer the Philippine produce because of the quality, especially for carrageenan.

In 2018, the industry exported $191 million with budgetary support of ₱138 million. Exports went up to $221. 316 million in 2019 with higher government funding of ₱198 million. Exports went down to $175.6 million 2020 as the funding was drastically cut to ₱59.2 million. Last year, exports reached $209.6 million with a budget allocation of ₱43 million.

The current global seaweed industry is worth $6 billion and consumption is forecasted to increase by 30 to 50 percent. The Asia Pacific is the biggest market, absorbing approximately 60 percent of supplies of seaweed and hydrocolloids. Growth centers include South and Southeast Asia, Middle East, Central and South America, and Eastern Europe.

During a recent industry consultation, industry players were apprised of shortage in raw dried seaweed (RDS) triggering a 200 percent in prices to ₱170 to ₱200 per kilo. "That is a good problem," he said.

The global market, however, has been impacted by climate change and the pandemic due to supply chain issues.

▶B-3

Bamboo, seaweed... B-1◀

The industry expects exports growth potential of $500 million with timely government intervention.

Based on their presentation, the industry needs to counter a disinformation campaign in the US about the safety of carrageenan and to delist the product as acceptable ingredient for US organic products. Such possible delisting could imperil the 52 percent Philippines market share or equivalent to $40 million in the US carrageenan market.

There is also a need to promote seaweed farming in coastal areas and budget allocation of from the local government unit internal revenue allocation.

The industry also calls for the establishment of institutional support, seaweed laboratories, and technical training to maximize yields and uses.

On the bamboo industry, Edgardo C. Manda, president of the Philippine Bamboo Foundation, said the requested P2 billion budget should be divided among 13 regions for planting materials and to develop commercial bamboo plantations.

Data from the Kilusang 5K (Kawayan: Kalikasan. Kabuhayan. Kaunlaran. Kinabukasan.) also showed that the Philippines is the fifth largest bamboo and rattan product exporter in the world having grown 62 bamboo specie, including 21 endemic.

Declared by the Department of Agriculture as a high value crop in 2020, the industry generated P233 million worth of investments in that same year.

The industry cited bamboos myriad uses, profitability, renewable, fast growing, lots technologies available, and environment-friendly.

As of Dec. 2019, there were total of 2,519 bamboo enterprises in the country as raw material suppliers for bamboo huts and cottages, bamboo mats, handicraft and furniture.

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Sen. Imee to DA: Fasttrack release of farmer subsidies

By HANNAH L. TORREGOZA

Senator Imee Marcos on Sunday, Sept. 4, called on the Department of Agriculture (DA) to speed up the release of almost P9-billion worth of government subsidies particularly for rice farmers who are now preparing for the wet planting season.

Marcos said rice farmers who have reached out to her office complained that the P5,000 cash assistance allocated for some 1.6 million farmers was slow in coming. ▶7

Sen. Imee to DA: Fasttrack release of farmer subsidies 1◀

This, even after the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) has announced the availability of the subsidy.

Marcos said the DA should not put farmers' funds in time deposit since they are not meant to earn any interest.

"Huwag nang i-time deposit ang pondo para sa mga magsasaka at hindi naman yan para tumubo ng interest sa bangko. Paspasan na ang pag-release niyan (Don't put farmers' subsidy funds in a time deposit since it isn't meant to earn bank interest. Expedite the release, right now)," Marcos said.

The DA's problem with its identification system was allegedly the problem why the funds could not be released, according to the LandBank of the Philippines.

But if the DA lacks the capability to update its Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA), Marcos said the agency should call on municipal agriculturists who have the list of farmers' cooperatives in their areas of responsibility.

She said the RSBSA's list of individual farmers given access to fertilizer and seed subsidies should not exclude but continue to support those whose livelihood has grown into value-added products.

The senator warned there could be low farm yields and even food shortages if farmers are unable to use their subsidies to buy fertilizers and other farm inputs.

"The DA is creating bigger problems for itself if it delays the release of farmer subsidies," Marcos warned.

"Farm yields for the country's staple crops cannot be maintained, much less increased, if farmers can't afford fertilizers and quit their livelihood," she pointed out.

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Imee calls out DA for slow release of P9b gov't subsidy to farmers

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

SENATOR Imee Marcos On Sunday warned of low farm yields and even food shortages if farmers are unable to use the P9 billion government subsidies as she urged the Department of Agriculture (DA) to hasten its release.

The amount, Marcos said, would be used by farmers to buy fertilizers and other farm inputs.

Marcos said the subsidies should be distributed to the rice farmers who are now preparing for the wet planting season this September to October.

"The DA is creating bigger problems for itself if it delays the release of farmer subsidies. Farm yields for the country's staple crops cannot be maintained, much less increased, if farmers can't afford fertilizers and quit their livelihood," she said.

Rice farmers sought help from Marcos's office and complained that the

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Imee...

From A1

P5,000 worth of cash aid allotted to some 1.6 million farmers was slow in coming, months after the Department of Budget and Management first announced its availability.

"Don't put farmers' funds in a time deposit since they're not meant to earn interest. Speed up the release, right now," said Marcos.

The Land Bank of the Philippines said the delay was allegedly due to the DA's problem with its ID system.

"If the DA lacks the capacity to update its RSBSA (Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture), then it should call on municipal agriculturists who ought to have a list of farmers' cooperatives in their areas of responsibility," the chairman of the Senate committee on cooperatives said.

Marcos added that the RSBSA's list of individual farmers given access to fertilizer and seed subsidies should not exclude but continue to support those whose livelihood has grown to process their crops into value-added products.

About P18.9 billion in rice tariffs were collected by the government last year, allowing the allotment of close to P9 billion in additional farmer subsidies besides the P10 billion mandated under the Rice Tariffication Law.

Marcos said that a farmer tilling one hectare to rice can save 25 percent to 33 percent on fertilizer costs with the P5,000 subsidy.

Farmers use from six to eight bags of fertilizer per hectare and will be spending P15,000 to P20,000 at today's prices of urea fertilizer.

The tight global supply of fertilizer has sent local farmers reeling from prices that have tripled since 2020, from about P800 per 50-kilogram bag of urea to P2,300 to P2,500 this year.

On Thursday, Senator Cynthia Villar rebuked officials of the DA and challenged them to resign if they cannot do their jobs and threatened to file charges against them if they did not suspend the implementation of a memorandum that goes against the spirit of the Rice Tariffication Law.

Acknowledging that the farmers belong to the country's poorest sector, Villar said the government should help them to increase their production that would eventually augment their earnings.

During the organizational hearing of the Senate agriculture and food committee, Villar cited the need for their collaborative efforts to improve the lives of Filipino farmers through financial assistance provided to them by the government.

Villar said there was a huge budget allocated to projects for the farmers and stakeholders in the agriculture industry, but they found out that these funds have remained undisbursed and unobligated.

Those who got tongue lashing from Villar during the Committee's organizational meeting were Dr. Junel Soriano, OIC director of the Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM); Dionisio Alvindia, Director IV, Philippine Center for Postharvest, Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) and Benjamin Madrigal, Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) administrator.

Villar also demanded from the three a commitment that they will resign should they fail to do their jobs.

During the hearing, Villar mentioned Memo No. 34, issued during the time of Agriculture Secretary William Dar, creating an advisory council for the implementation of the farm mechanization program. This was supposed to be done by the PhilMech.

The Rice Tariffication Law created a P10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), P5 billion of which would be allotted to farm mechanization, P3 billion to seedlings, and P1 billion to expanded rice credit assistance.

"Don't implement this memo. You have two memos that you implemented through Secretary Dar. The Memo 34 which created an advisory council to implement the mechanization program of the RCEF, that is against the law. I will tell you I will file a case against you if you don't stop this advisory committee," Villar, who heads the committee, said.

The senator also flared up when she learned that the P1.1 billion budget for the procurement of composting facilities has not yet been spent.

She noted that one composting machine will produce one ton of organic fertilizer every month.

"That would be 12 tons a year. They will no longer buy fertilizer. They can recoup the cost of the composting facility in one year," said Villar.

Being vice chairperson of the Senate finance committee, Villar said she asked that P1.1 billion from the P4.4 billion allocated for the national rice program be moved to purchase of a composting facility for sustainability.

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Sugar isn't sweet

LIKE IT IS
PETER WALLACE

The sugar debacle is an early example of why the President should put an agriculture secretary in place with some urgency. He just doesn't have time to think through and address all the details handling agriculture requires, as this sugar episode shows.

I'm by no means an expert on the intricacies of the problems in sugar. Given its decades-old problems, I wonder if anyone is. But let me give you my thoughts on it. Let me try and reduce what are obviously complex issues to what I see as its fundamentals.

On sugar, the problems that have arisen and the situation there have been argued from innumerable sides. Do we have a shortage or not? Should we pay way higher prices than others do to protect our farmers? Are unscrupulous people hoarding and/or smuggling sugar, should we import sugar, should the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) continue in its role, do we need anyone in charge? Should the government subsidize sugar producers? Is political pressure due to self-interest a factor?

Look at a few facts. Sugar demand is around 2.4 million metric tons (MT) annually. Local production is some 1.8 million MT. Coca-Cola has closed several plants due to lack of sugar. That, it seems to me, pretty clearly answers the first question: we have a serious shortage. Current sugar prices in the supermarket are P115/kg. In Thailand, consumers pay the equivalent of P34/kg. Farm-gate price that the farmer gets is P13/kg. Mills get P59.4/kg, the rest, some P42/kg goes to middlemen. That tells us where in the second question the problems lie, it's after the farm gate. It's not the small farmers we are protecting. It's the millers, traders, distributors, retailers who would get hurt by cheaper imports. As to the third question, in recent raids, some 20,050 MT of suspected (not proven yet) hoarded or smuggled sugar was found. That's a minuscule 3.7 percent of the shortage. Even if doubled or tripled, it's a concern, but hardly a solution to the problem of a 600,000 MT shortage. It's a problem that would be resolved by the ultimate solution I suggest later.

As to imports, in my simple mind, I'd apply an import duty sufficient to protect local producers—if they were producing efficiently. And allow anyone to import any volume they'd think can make them profit. Why do we need to approve only certain people to import, a sure avenue to corruption? Why can't anyone who has the capability to do it just do it? The SRA can go, let a tariff provide the protection. Having regulators control a market has been shown innumerable times to be a failure. I acknowledge that there can be occasions when control is desirable, but it should be a last resort. It's almost always best to let the market decide how a product or service is provided. Opening up the market has been proven to lead to success: Water, power, oil, have thrived from removal of control. The tariffication of rice shows the benefit of less control. There can be a maximum annual amount allowed (600,000 MT it would seem) whilst the problems of the industry are resolved. But without import competition, there's little incentive for local farmers, millers, and traders to improve, as decades of unproductive production have shown.

Use the duty to answer the sixth question, provide it, or a large portion of it to producers to help make them more efficient, so as to be able to compete against imports. Priority should go to the consumer. In a country where the majority are poor, they should not be subsidizing the inefficiency of others. As to the last query, I think we all know the answer. It's yes. A significant factor in sugar's failure.

Wouldn't the simplest thing to do is to just copy Thailand in everything it does to grow, harvest, mill, distribute sugar as efficiently as it apparently does?

The sugar experience in Australia highlights one thing that works: large, managed plantations. Sugar is grown in volume, not on negligible plots. Harvesting is done by huge machines traversing land at speed. Not by a hundred humans with bolos. Yes, a hundred lose a menial, low-paying job. But consumers get cheaper sugar locally grown, not imported.

You might want to, but you can't stop the march of progress. We need to become self-secured in the production of food, all food. Not through protection, but through efficient, cost-competitive production and distribution.

Now I could be wrong, but I do know that something that has failed for decades doesn't need tweaking around the edges, it needs a monstrous shake-up. A serious rethink. Open import, by anyone, protected only by a tariff could be one of the solutions.

Email: wallace_likeitis@wbf.ph

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MOSTLY PORK, CHICKEN

MEAT IMPORTS UP 7.2% AT END-JULY

By Jordeene B. Lagare
@jordeenelagare

The Philippines brought in more meat imports as of July, mainly driven by pork and chicken shipments.

Around 734.9 million kilograms of meat entered the country from January to July this year, up by 7.2 percent from the 685.7 million kg recorded a year prior, data from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) showed.

With an uptrend in the last four months, pork remained the main driver of meat imports.

Increasing shipments

Pork shipments, mostly pork cuts and offals, climbed by 19.4 percent to 397.9 million kg, representing more than half of the total volume.

The majority of pork was sourced from Spain, followed by Canada and Brazil.

The United States Department of Agriculture previously raised its pork import forecast to 400,000 metric tons from 375,000 MT previously as the government retained lower tariffs for imported pork until end-December.

EO No. 171

Executive Order (EO) No. 171 was issued by former President Rodrigo Duterte to lower food prices and stabilize the supply of basic commodities amid supply constraints aggravated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

It extended the most favored nation tariff rates for pork imports at 15 percent for in-quota volume and 25 percent for out-quota volume until Dec. 31.

The USDA report noted the minimum access volume for pork was retained at 54,210 MT.

In Metro Manila, pork ham (*kasim*) was being sold for P300 per kg as of Friday, lower than P320 per kg a year ago, based on the Department of Agriculture's (DA) price monitoring. Pork liempo retailed for P360 per kg from P360 per kg.

Chicken imports were a close second at 212.4 million kg, down by 3.8 percent, with deboned chicken accounting for about two-thirds of the total.

Brazil was still the primary source of imported chicken, while the United States and Canada came next.

The prevailing price of whole chicken in the metro stood at P180 per kg, higher than P150 per kg last year, according to the DA.

The volume of imported beef, mainly beef cuts, dropped by 2.2 percent to 96.1 million kg. The shipments were mostly from Brazil. INQ

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TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Farmer subsidies not for time deposit – Imee

By PAOLO ROMERO

The Department of Agriculture (DA) should speed up the release of almost P9 billion in government subsidies for rice farmers, who are now preparing for the wet planting season starting this month until October, Sen. Imee Marcos said yesterday.

Rice farmers reaching out to Marcos' office have complained that the P5,000 worth of cash aid allotted for 1.6 million farmers was slow in coming, months after the Department of Budget and Management first announced its availability.

"Don't put farmers' funds in time deposit since they're not meant to earn interest. Speed up the release, right now," Marcos said in Filipino.

The Land Bank of the Philippines said the delay was mainly due to the DA's problem with its ID system.

But Marcos, who chairs the Senate committee on cooperatives, said that if the DA lacks the capacity to update its Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA), then it should call on municipal agriculturists who ought to have a list of farmers' cooperatives in their areas of responsibility.

She added that the RSBSA list of individual farmers, who were given access to fertilizer and seed subsidies, should not exclude but continue, instead, to support those whose livelihood has grown into processing crops for value-added products.

About P18.9 billion in rice tariffs were collected by the government last year, thus allowing the allotment of close to P9 billion in additional farmer subsidies. This is aside from the P10 billion mandated under the Rice Tariffication Law.

Marcos warned of low farm yields and even food shortages if farmers are unable to use their subsidies to buy fertilizers and other farm inputs.

"The DA is creating bigger problems for itself if it delays the release of farmer subsidies. Farm yields for the country's staple crops cannot be maintained, much less increased, if farmers can't afford fertilizers and quit their livelihood," she pointed out.

She said a farmer tilling one hectare of land to rice can save 25 percent to 33 percent on fertilizer costs with the P5,000 subsidy.

Farmers use about six to eight bags of fertilizer per hectare and will be spending P15,000 to P20,000 at today's prices of urea fertilizer.

The tight global supply of fertilizer has sent local farmers reeling from prices that have tripled since 2020, from about P800 per 50-kilogram bag of urea to P2,300 to P2,500 this year.

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'Product shortages may dampen business prospects for food sector'

By Andrea E. San Juan

THE Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) said it is hoping that the shortage of a number of agricultural products will ease by October.

PCCI President George T. Barcelon said the shortage might affect the food sector which sources raw materials from the local farm sector.

"One issue that has been brought to our attention is the shortage of agricultural products like onions," he said during a televised interview on Friday. "(What we're seeing) is that the supply of agricultural products is at critical level."

Last week, in a presentation before lawmakers, agriculture officials presented the Department of Agriculture's (DA) outlook on the country's onion and garlic supply and demand situation for this year.

The DA's presentation showed that the Philippines would suffer a 16-day shortage of garlic by the end of the year as total supply, including imports, is projected to have a shortfall of about 63,850 metric tons (MT).

Agriculture Undersecretary-designate and Spokesperson Kristine Y. Evangelista told lawmakers last Tuesday that the country is not sufficient in garlic since "we are really dependent on importation."

As for onion, agriculture officials confirmed during the House Committee on Agriculture and Food hearing that the country is suffering from a shortage of white onions.

Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) Assistant Director Ariel J. Bayot said the country's combined white onion supply of locally-produced and imported volume would only last for about 8 to 9 months from January.

Sugar is also in short supply in the Philippines. Coca-Cola Beverages Philippines Inc. had confirmed to the BusinessMirror that its bottling operations had been hit by the shortage of premium bottler's grade refined sugar.

Sugar Regulatory Administration chief David John Thaddeus Alba assured Coca-Cola that it is fast-tracking the importation of additional bottler's grade refined sugar. The SRA chief confirmed to the BusinessMirror that Coca-Cola's supply of bottler's grade refined sugar for its plants has been depleted, which resulted in the shutdown of some of its plants.

Three weeks ago, major bottling firms such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi and ARC issued a joint statement saying they are experiencing a shortage of premium bottler's grade refined sugar.

The sugar shortage has later on resulted in a domino effect, affecting sari-sari stores and carinderias, which have been relying on earnings from soft drinks, which account for a chunk of their sales.

Philippine Association of Stores and Carinderia Owners (PASCO) members told the BusinessMirror that their average daily soft drink sales declined to P600, from about P1,500 as deliveries dwindled.

PASCO President Cristina A. Constantino said in a statement last month that some wholesalers had informed them that the current supply situation could last for more than three months.

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Marcos to DA officials: Fast-track release of cash aid for planters

By Butch Fernandez @butchfBM

OFFICIALS of the Department of Agriculture (DA) were prodded by Senator Imee Marcos to promptly act on restive farmers' lament over the delayed release of their subsidy from the government which was purportedly parked in time deposit.

Marcos said the P9-billion subsidy for farmers was also intended for the upcoming wet season rice cropping which starts this month.

"Farmer subsidies are not for time deposit but for prompt release (to farmers)," she said, lamenting the mounting complaints from restive farmers, prodding DA officials to "speed up the release of almost P9 billion in government subsidies particularly for rice farmers who are now preparing for the wet planting season."

She said affected rice farmers had to reach out to her office to complain that the cash aid of P5,000 allotted for some 1.6 million farmers was "slow in coming, months after the Department of Budget and Management first announced its availability."

*"Huwag nang i-*time deposit *ang pondo para sa mga magsasaka at hindi naman 'yan para tumubo ng interes sa bangko. Paspasan na ang pag-*release *niyan, ngayon din."*

The Land Bank of the Philippines had said the delay in the release of the cash aid was allegedly due to the DA's problems with its ID system.

"If the DA lacks the capacity to update its RSBSA [Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture], then it should call on municipal agriculturists who ought to have a list of farmers' cooperatives in their areas of responsibility," said Marcos, who chairs the Senate Committee on Cooperatives.

Moreover, she noted that the RSBSA's list of individual farmers given access to fertilizer and seed subsidies should not exclude but continue to support those whose livelihood has grown to process their crops into value-added products.

She added that "about P18.9 billion in rice tariffs were collected by the government last year," allowing the allotment of close to P9 billion in additional farmer subsidies besides the P10 billion mandated under the Rice Tariffication Law.

At the same time, Marcos warned of low farm yields and even food shortages if farmers are unable to use their subsidies to buy fertilizers and other farm inputs.

"The DA is creating bigger problems for itself if it delays the release of farmer subsidies. Farm yields for the country's staple crops cannot be maintained, much less increased, if farmers can't afford fertilizers and they quit their livelihood."

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Pork purchases boost 7-month meat imports

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

BLOOMBERG NEWS

THE country's meat imports in January to July rose by 7 percent year-on-year to over 734,000 metric tons (MT) mainly due to higher purchases of pork products from abroad, latest government data showed.

Data from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) indicated that total meat imports during the 7-month period reached 734,925.442 MT, 49,288 MT higher than the 685,696.997 MT recorded a year ago.

BAI data showed that pork imports, which reached almost 400,000 MT, accounted for 54 percent of the total volume of imported meat products in January to July. The country's pork imports during the reference period rose by 19.39 percent to 397,878.415 MT from 333,251.831 MT.

The country's imports of pork cuts and bellies, which have been enjoying lower tariff rates since last year, expanded by nearly 31 percent year-on-year to 216,745.222 MT. The country depended on imports to plug the shortfall in domestic pork supply as African swine fever disrupted local hog production.

BAI data showed that chicken meat imports, the Philippines's second most imported meat product, declined by 3.8 percent on an annual basis behind a 30-percent drop in the purchases of chicken leg quarters from abroad.

The country's total chicken meat imports during the 7-month period reached 212,380,936 MT compared to last year's 220,813.224 MT. The country's imports of chicken leg quarters fell by 22,918.213 MT to 51,778.947 MT from 74,697.160 MT last year.

Meanwhile, BAI data showed that imports of mechanically deboned meat (MDM) of chicken, which accounted for over 60 percent of total chicken meat imports, reached 130,422.964 MT. The volume was 13.95 percent higher than the 114,452.280 MT recorded a year ago.

The country's beef imports declined 2.2 percent year-on-year to 96,080.867 MT while buffalo meat imports fell by 12.89 percent to 27,859.510 MT from 31,983.598 MT.

Supply projections

IN a related development, the Department of Agriculture (DA) recently projected that the country's local pork supply would be able to meet only 79 percent of total demand. The DA said it expects local production to hit 1.34 million MT (MMT), which is 382,627 MT short of estimated demand of 1.785 MMT.

However, even with imports, the DA said the country's pork sufficiency would reach only 95 percent. This means that the country would experience a shortfall of 96,842 MT by the end of the year or equivalent to 20 days of pork consumption.

The DA projected that total imports of pork cuts and bellies this year would hit 285,784 MT, almost 5 percent higher than last year's 272,634.023 MT.

The agency also said the Philippines would have sufficient chicken meat supply, with or without imports. The DA estimated that local output would reach 1.654 MMT, slightly higher than the total domestic demand of 1.636 MMT. The country's chicken meat imports (choice cuts and leg quarters) could reach 179,367 MT.

The DA said the Philippines would be 101 percent self-sufficient in chicken meat. With imports, chicken sufficiency could reach 110 percent.

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No shortage in salt yet, but govt must help dying sector

By Andrea San Juan

A SALT shortage is possible if the needs of the salt industry won't be addressed by the government, according to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

During a radio show on Saturday, DTI-Consumer Protection Group (CPG) Undersecretary Ruth B. Castelo said manufacturers have confirmed that there's no actual shortage in salt.

However, Castelo said, "But there is potential shortage kung hindi sila maaasistehan ng government [if they won't get help from the government]."

Castelo said that the salt industry needs to be developed and it should coordinate with the appropriate agencies as the industry also has its fair share of concerns, especially related to local production.

In fact, the Trade undersecretary cited agricultural lands for salt production being converted into commercial and residential areas as among the concerns of the industry.

"First among their concerns, agricultural land used salt production is being converted; they're becoming commercial, residential, for subdivisions or buildings, or condominiums. But there are many farmers involved in the salt industry so we really have to help them so they can maintain the industry," said Castelo.

The Trade undersecretary said that while the Philippines, an archipelagic country, has 37,000 kilometers of shoreline and while Vietnam only has about 3,000 km of shoreline, Vietnam is able to export salt.

Ironically, with the long shoreline figure in the Philippines, "we are able to produce only 7 percent of the total requirement of the country," said Castelo.

The Department of Agriculture

percent, or 550,000 metric tons of the salt supply in the country is being imported, and only 7 percent is locally produced, despite the country's more than 36,000 kilometers of shoreline.

Still, the Trade official said she is hopeful since Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual "is into industry development," and that with such thrust for industry development, the DTI is fully equipped to address the issues and concerns of industries.

In a separate televised interview, Castelo said that the country currently has 32 salt manufacturers and eight companies that repack salt.

As for the price increase in salt, Castelo noted that it won't affect dried salted fish such as Tuyo and Daing since "the prices that we increased are the ones that you buy in supermarkets or grocery stores" or the ones for household consumption.

Castelo added that the dried salted fish has a different source of salt since producers are using industrial salt or rock salt.

Earlier, Castelo said DTI approved the price increase for salt in the Suggested Retail Price (SRP) Bulletin published on August 12 because some manufacturers have

past four to six years. This—and not the alleged shortage in salt—is why local manufacturers of salt increased their prices, Castelo noted.

BusinessMirror reported last week that Senate Majority Leader Joel Villanueva filed Senate Resolution No. 100 to look into how the government can revive the salt production industry to create jobs and spur economic development.

The senator expressed alarm over the recent DA statement that the Philippines cannot produce enough salt for its own needs because of government neglect over the past 15 years. He added that this is "quite shameful" for an archipelagic country with more than 36,000 kilometers of shoreline.

The Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. had recently said the country currently imports 93 percent of its salt from Australia and China. This, Villanueva noted, is a stark contrast from 1990 when the country was only importing 15 percent of its requirements.

Villanueva said the government must immediately address major hurdles to developing the country's salt production industry, such as the lack of proper storage facilities, and of equipment such as water pumps and boats for hauling and

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RELEASE CASH AID FOR FARMERS – IMEE

SEN. Maria Imelda Josefa "Imee" Marcos has urged the Department of Agriculture (DA) not to put government subsidies for farmers in time deposit and immediately distribute the P9 billion allocated for rice tillers.

The senator appealed to the DA to speed up the release of the fund as rice farmers prepare for the planting season in September and October.

The government collected about P18.9 billion in rice tariffs in 2021, allowing the allotment of close to P9 billion in additional farmer subsidies besides the P10 billion mandated under the Rice Tariffication Law.

She said that rice farmers have complained that the P5,000 cash aid allotted for some 1.6 million farmers was slow in coming, months after the Department of Budget and Management first announced its availability.

"Don't put farmers' funds in time deposit since they're not meant to earn interest. Speed up the release, right now," Marcos said in a statement on Sunday.

The Land Bank of the Philippines said the delay was due to the DA's problem with its ID (identification) system.

"If the DA lacks the capacity to update its RSBSA (Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture), then it should call on municipal agriculturists who ought to have a list of farmers' cooperatives in their areas of responsibility," the senator said.

Marcos warned of low farm yields and even food shortage if farmers are unable to use their subsidies to buy fertilizers and other farm inputs.

"The DA is creating bigger problems for itself if it delays the release of farmer subsidies," said the chairman of the Senate Committee on Cooperatives. "Farm yields for the country's staple crops cannot be maintained, much less increased, if farmers can't afford fertilizers and quit their livelihood."

Marcos said that a farmer tilling one hectare can save 25 percent to 33 percent on fertilizer costs with the P5,000 subsidy.

She said farmers use six to eight bags of fertilizer per hectare and spend P15,000 to P20,000 at today's prices of urea fertilizer.

"The tight global supply of fertilizer has sent local farmers reeling from prices that have tripled since 2020, from about P800 per 50-kilogram bag of urea to P2,300 to P2,500 this year," she said.

BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO

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Villanueva thanked for backing salt industry revival

KABAYAN Party-list Rep. Ron Salo has thanked Sen. Joel Villanueva for the latter's support for the revitalization of the salt industry.

"Senator Villanueva recognizes the need to revive our salt industry, and we salute him as our co-champion in this cause," Salo said.

On July 14, 2022, Salo filed House Bill (HB) No. 1976, which seeks to revitalize the local salt industry and to prevent the country's full dependence on imported salt by way of a comprehensive development plan for the local salt industry which includes the grant of incentives to salt farmers and exporters.

The Senate Majority Leader said that it is "shameful" for the Philippines to be importing 93 percent of its salt requirements annually despite being an archipelagic country.

"It is indeed shameful for our country to be import-dependent on salt, an industry which should be thriving in an archipelagic country with more than 36,000 kilometers of shorelines," Salo affirmed. "It is such a waste of the country's natural resources and comparative advantage."

The solon further stressed that the 93% imported salt represents millions, if not billions, of lost potential revenues and employment opportunities for our salt farmers and producers.

Salt is a basic food commodity and a key raw material for agro-industries and chemical industries, he said.

"We have been in dialogue with different industry stakeholders since the 17th Congress when we first filed a bill in support of the salt industry," Salo revealed.

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VILLANUEVA

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"Since then," he continued, "we have seen a groundswell of support from both the private and government sectors, particularly the Department of Agriculture and Department of Trade and Industry."

"And now that Senator Villanueva is with us, we hope to gather more support in Congress to finally pass a law for our salt farmers and producers," Salo said.

"Senator Villanueva and I share the same sentiments," Salo said. "Indeed, we can still become a net exporter of salt only if the government undertakes immediate steps to address the sad state of our salt industry and take the lead in revitalizing it."

Salo is optimistic that the proposed law will not only revitalize the local salt industry but will also increase the income for salt farmers and salt producers, allowing the country to achieve salt self-sufficiency and become a net exporter of salt.

"Thus, we await Senator Villanueva's counterpart Senate measure, and I look forward to working with him as co-champions in the advocacy for the revival of the Philippine salt industry," Salo concluded.

Ryan Ponce Pacpaco

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Collaboration needed against near-term fish stock collapse

THE Department of Agriculture-National Fisheries Research and Development Institute, together with experts from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam, called on lawmakers to come up with a fishing collaboration policy to sustain skipjack tuna stocks in the South China Sea.

This came as they launched the first-ever Common Fisheries Resource Analysis, showing that there are potential risks of sudden stock collapse, as juvenile skipjack tuna is fished regionally.

Dr. Mudjekeewis Santos, DA-NFRDI Scientist IV, clarified that experts do not want to give an alarmist call, but a sense of urgency must be present.

"This initiative, the scientists from countries bordering the South China Sea have discussed, analyzed, assessed, the status of skipjack, there's a problem among the juvenile, the small ones, and it's a way of recommendation to our policymakers, or else, if status quo and free for all, lacking in cooperation, eventually it will be gone," he said.

Santos noted that skipjack tuna are domestically available for these five countries, but these are also exported.

Skipjack tuna is identified as a highly migratory fish, under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, underscoring a greater need for stock monitoring and regulation in the region.

The DA-NFRDI said besides risks of overfishing or continuous fishing of juvenile skipjack tuna, climate change is also a threat.

"When we looked at the effects of climate change, the decline might be drastic, and the abundance of skipjack may be lost. As far as I know, the worst-case scenario would be a 60 to 70 percent decline. I don't want to sound alarmist, but we hope the projections are wrong" he said.

Santos added that they are also hoping to conduct studies that would identify if there's a need to bring down fishing units, implement closing seasons for fishing, or identification of more marine protected areas.

Following the study, experts insisted that the matter is neither a territorial nor a political concern.

"We put aside whatever issues we have because fishes don't know any boundaries, they're being impacted, there are indications that they're declining, and our very future in terms of food supply, and security is at stake, parang ano 'yan (it's like) don't look up, it's the same, we are telling this, and hopefully they would listen," he said.

Abante TONITE
MABILIS SA BALITA

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₱8B AGRI AYUDA BINURO SA LANDBANK

Kinakalampag na ni Senador Imee Marcos ang Department of Agriculture (DA) para bilisan ang pamimigay ng P8 bilyong ayuda ng gobyerno para sa mga magsasaka ng palay.

Ibinunyag ng senador sa kanyang pahayag nitong Linggo na may mga magsasaka na dumulog sa kanyang tanggapan para ireklamo ang atrasado umanong P5,000 ayuda sa kanila bagama't noon pang Hulyo 31 ito inanunsyo ng Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

Nagbabala si Marcos sa DA na hindi dapat tinitengga ang ayuda sa halip ay bilisan na ang pamumudmod nito sa mga magsasaka ng palay.

"Huwag nang i-time deposit ang pondo para sa mga magsasaka at hindi naman 'yan para tumubo ng interes sa bangko," sabi ni Marcos.

Sa paliwanag naman umano ng Land Bank of the Philippines, ang pagkaantala ng ayuda ay sanhi ng aberya sa ID system ng DA.

Tungkol sa bagay na ito, ipinunto ni Marcos na dapat magpatulong na ang DA sa mga lokal na ahensya para ma-update ang kanilang registry system.

"If the DA lacks the capacity to update its RSBSA (Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture), then it should call on municipal agriculturists who ought to have a list of farmers' cooperatives in their areas of responsibility," giit ni Marcos.

Babala pa nito na malaking problema ang kakaharapin ng DA kapag hindi pa rin inilabas ng ahensya ang tulong pinansyal na inilaan para sa mga magsasaka.

"The DA is creating bigger problems for itself if it delays the release of farmer subsidies. Farm yields for the country's staple crops cannot be maintained, much less increased, if farmers can't afford fertilizers and quit their livelihood," ayon kay Marcos.

The Manila Times®

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Japan gives P337M to Filipino farmers, fisherfolk

THE government of Japan has donated P337.5 million to support new initiatives by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the World Food Program (WFP) for farmers and fisherfolk affected by Typhoon Odette in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

"We have collaborated with WFP and FAO on a number of initiatives aimed at improving resilience and achieving peace and development in Mindanao. It is critical to have stable living conditions, food security and nutrition for all in order to achieve peace. This latest project by WFP, I believe, will add greater meaning to achieving peace and progress, not only in the BARMM but also throughout Mindanao," said Japanese Ambassador Koshikawa Kazuhiko at the signing ceremony held at the Department of Foreign Affairs Office on August 31.

"Also, our partnership with FAO will help farmers and fisherfolk severely affected by Typhoon Rai restore their livelihoods and build their resilience against future climate-related shocks. Through such endeavors, I sincerely hope that this genuine concern from the Japanese people reaches thousands of severely affected Filipinos," the Ambassador added.

The ceremony was also attended by WFP Philippines Representative and Country Director, Brenda Barton, and FAO Representative ad interim in the Philippines, Sheila Wertz-Kanounnikoff.

P225 million will go to WFP to support a two-year project that aims to improve the livelihoods, food security and nutrition of smallholder farmers and fisherfolk and strengthen their inclusion in the agricultural value chain through improved market linkages, enhanced agricultural productivity and Social and Behavior Change Communication activities.Some 7,500 farmers and fisherfolk households in BARMM, including decommissioned combatants and indigenous people, will benefit from the WFP project.

They will be participating in activities such as construction of roads, establishing storage facilities and communal irrigation systems, agro-forestry planting and establishment of nurseries — all designed to enhance their productivity sustainably.

Moreover, WFP will introduce the farmers to the use of Farm2Go, a WFP-owned digital platform which will digitally connect farmers to markets, allowing them to sell their produce at competitive prices.

P112.5 million of the contribution will used by FAO to implement a humanitarian initiative that will support the restoration of the livelihoods and the enhancement of the resilience of 20,000 small-scale coconut farmers and fishers affected by Typhoon Odette in Regions 7, 8 and 13.

Through this partnership, which complements government response efforts to the disaster, FAO will provide farmers and fishers with agricultural and fishery inputs and complement these with capacity-building on climate-resilient agriculture technologies and the use of climate information and early warning systems.

The inputs and training will enable farmers to establish alternative and additional livelihoods and sources of income to avoid dependence on food aid, thereby enhancing their long-term food and nutrition security.

"We are truly grateful for this contribution by the government and the people of Japan to help Filipinos whose livelihoods and lives were greatly affected by the Typhoon Rai disaster, to get back on their feet and lead productive lives," said FAO's Wertz-Kanounnikoff.

Japanese Ambassador Koshikawa Kazuhiko signed and exchanged notes for this project with FAO Representative Sheila Wertz-Kanounnikoff. PHOTO FROM JAPAN EMBASSY

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A broader look at today's business

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'Focus on food supply, agri to tame inflation'

By Jovee Marie N. dela Cruz
@joveemarie

AN economist-lawmaker has said that the public can expect a rollback or net reduction in prices every month for the rest of the year for oil prices but asked the government to focus on anti-inflation efforts, particularly on food supply and agriculture productivity.

House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Joey Sarte Salceda made a statement over the weekend as "the supply deficit of global oil is narrowing and supply is increasing at a faster rate than demand."

Salceda, however, urged the government "to focus its efforts on agriculture, because there will still be some second-round effects on food prices, as agricultural input prices are still high although declining."

"The Filipino people, who are net buyers of oil from the world market, can expect some slight to moderate relief on oil prices as global oil supply-demand imbalance appears to be easing. July oil supply deficit narrowed to around 600,000 stock tank barrels, the lowest for the whole of 2022. Oil supply in July also grew by 0.28 percent but demand grew by just 0.07 percent," he said.

With the US Federal Reserve maintaining its policy of gradual rate hikes and with domestic pressure among US leaders to increase oil supply, as well as global adjustment to a stalemate in Ukraine, Salceda said he expects net price reductions on oil prices every month for the rest of 2022.

"Oil futures data appears to say so, as well," he added.

Salceda, a former investment analyst for global banks, says that he expects to see "something similar to the recovery post-Global Financial Crisis, when oil prices peaked in April 2011, before settling down by September the same year."

The lawmaker added global crude prices could go below $80 for the first time by October this year. He said prices from there will play between $80 and $95 "until global tensions ease permanently."

"So, we can begin changing our mindset from oil prices to food prices, which is experiencing non-oil threats, such as climate," the lawmaker said.

Crucial month

SALCEDA said that the government can instead focus on lower food prices during "a crucial month of September."

"September will be very critical. Planting season for rice starts. Some milling of sugar is already happening. And corn domestic supply is supposed to begin narrowing this month, as planting takes place next month," he explained.

Salceda urged the government to focus on fertilizer, financial assistance and irrigation maintenance this month for rice, to ensure that a bumper crop.

The lawmaker said he talked to Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban who, Salceda added, "is quite confident that a strong domestic harvest for rice this season will help us tide the effects of more expensive rice imports."

"So that's what we need to work on: a strong rice crop this planting season. Free fertilizers distributed in a timely manner and financial assistance to buy even more fertilizers and inputs, will be crucial."

Salceda said Panganiban assured him "these efforts are moving."

"What we do in September 2022 will affect food prices in May 2023. So, we better get these next 30 days right," the lawmaker added.

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MVP calls for energy, food security amid soaring prices

By RICHMOND MERCURIO

It is high time for the Philippines to become food and energy independent amid increasing headwinds from rising food and fuel costs, according to business titan Manuel V. Pangilinan.

"Unfortunately, we're now importing most of our food items. I can't understand why. We have to correct that because independence is necessary now in terms of food, energy, fuel. If we can do that, I think that's very, very important," Pangilinan said.

Pangilinan, who chairs conglomerate Metro Pacific Investments Corp. (MPIC), said his group is keen on investing heavily in agriculture.

"As you know, Indofood is also big agriculture company in Indonesia. If they can do it there, I don't see why we cannot do it here. We just have to choose the right crops that the Philippines can excel in, like coconuts, for example, and our fruits, especially dried fruits," Pangilinan said.

MPIC has recently diversified its investment portfolio to include the agriculture sector in a bid to reduce the country's dependence on food imports amid ongoing global supply chain disruptions and high inflation.

On the energy front, Pangilinan said the country should start exploring its own oil and gas resources, especially in the West Philippine Sea.

"The sooner we realize and admit the reality of fuel and because we do not have energy independence, with the decline of the Malampaya reserves, we are now becoming apart from food, very, very dependent on imported fuel. So I think we should try to address that," he said.

"I think we have some resources that are available to us. Oil and gas resources, particularly gas, in the West Philippine Sea. I think we should get on with that work," said Pangilinan, who also chairs PXP Energy Corp.

PXP is keen on continuing exploration in its service contract areas in the West Philippine Sea to determine if there is gas in the area.

The Department of Energy last April had put on hold activities in prospects in the West Philippine Sea pending clearance from the Security, Justice and Peace Coordinating Cluster.

"I've always maintained like in the case of mining, why pay for somebody else's gold and silver and copper if you can do it yourself, right? Don't tell me that we Filipinos cannot regulate our businesses by ourselves if the Indonesians can, if the Canadians can, if the Australians can, the South Africans can. You're telling me Filipinos cannot do that? I think that's insulting," Pangilinan said.

Credit rating agency Moody's Investors Service in a report last July said the Philippines is considered among countries in Asia-Pacific that are highly vulnerable to volatile food and energy prices as disruptions in supply continues with the Russia-Ukraine war.

Pangilinan said the war has had an extensive impact on global economies, including the Philippines. "So it's been, for management, a very, very tough situation and we're seeing that happen, particularly in the second half of this year. We are seeing headwinds, because consumer wallets are getting affected already," he said.

Pangilinan-led companies have investments in various sectors such as energy and power, telecommunications, toll roads, mining, water, real estate, hospitals, light rail, agribusiness and media.

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How... how... the carabao!

DEMAND AND SUPPLY

BOO CHANCO

The humble carabao, the Filipino farmer's beast of burden, can lift the farmer's financial burdens too. Aside from helping the farmer plow his rice field, the carabao can also give the farmer other lucrative income opportunities.

I came across a 12-year-old press release of the Asian Development Bank on Google about the bank supporting a cooperative of farmers going into the carabao milk business. The ADB story talks of a group of almost 700 farmers supplying carabao milk.

A farmer said he earns enough in a month, rain or shine, from the 10 to 11 liters of milk a day from his two carabaos that he would earn from his one-hectare rice field in a year.

"I don't have any losses in dairy farming. Even if there is a typhoon, I can still milk my carabao," the farmer said. He no longer incurs high-interest debt just to get by, and if he needs to borrow money for an emergency, he can pay it back right away with his income from carabao milk.

I took an interest in carabao milk after I came across a local Greek style yogurt brand in the supermarket made from carabao milk. Earlier, I also bought Avocado Magnolia ice cream made from carabao milk.

Three things make me happy buying the carabao milk products: the products taste good, with half the amount of cholesterol in cow's milk, and I help our farmers who need all the help they can get. Such products are also more reasonably priced than imported yogurt and ice cream from Australia, Europe or the US.

I checked with San Miguel. They also use carabao milk in flavors other than avocado for their Magnolia ice cream. They get their supply from 10 cooperatives from Nueva Ecija and four individual farmers from Bataan and Pampanga. They work with the farmers to assure the highest hygienic milk processing practices.

Apparently, Ramon S. Ang was serious when he once told us San Miguel is developing programs that will integrate farmers into their supply chain. This has made the SMC subsidiaries alert for opportunities like that provided by carabao milk.

And that's not all. San Miguel is also looking at using their new packaging solution to prolong the shelf life of carabao milk. This is a big help for the government's nationwide milk feeding program.

San Miguel's milk packaging allows carabao milk to be sterilized and stored in aluminum cans without using preservatives. SMC's "retort technology" packaging extends the shelf life of carabao milk from seven days to six months.

SMC's packaging unit, San Miguel Yamamura Packaging Corp. (SMYPC), signed an agreement with the Philippine Carabao Center (PCC) to pack an initial four million cans of sterilized carabao's milk, to be distributed in Regions 1 to 3 and parts of the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR).

SMYPC will act as a third-party toll packer to package carabao milk supplied by local farmer's cooperatives in Nueva Ecija for the nationwide school-based feeding program under the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

The entry of San Miguel's packaging will boost demand. Aside from the extended shelf-life, the sterilized canned milk can easily be transported, stored under ambient temperature, and delivered in bulk rather than on a daily basis.

With the technology, more school children will be able to drink nutritious carabao's milk, particularly those who reside in far-flung, mountainous and hard-to-reach areas, and those with no electricity or limited storage facilities.

The DepEd and DSWD's feeding program, mandated by Republic Act 11037 or the "Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act", aims to address the nutritional needs of undernourished children to combat hunger and malnutrition. It serves the undernourished children in public daycare kindergarten and elementary schools from kindergarten up to Grade 6.

With the funding provided by the DepEd and DSWD, PCC will consolidate carabao milk from local dairy farmer cooperatives in Nueva Ecija and deliver these to the SMYPC facility in San Fernando, Pampanga for sterilization and packaging.

From the SMC plant in Pampanga, the sterilized carabao milk will then be delivered to schools division offices (SDOs) for distribution to the undernourished children. There is also a plan to launch vending machines that dispense carabao dairy products instead of soft drinks.

I think it is also time for the large supermarkets to give the carabao farmers enough shelf space in their stores. I find it frustrating that the Greek style yogurt from DVF dairy farm in Nueva Ecija is not always available in SM and Robinsons supermarkets. Consistency in availability will help develop a loyal following for such products.

Think of what that farmer told ADB: he makes the same amount of money in one month selling milk from his two carabaos that he would make in a year planting rice in his one-hectare farm.

Drinking carabao milk is healthy for consumers and helps our farmers get out of poverty. So, it's now hurray hurray for the carabao!

Salt

One comment I received reacting to last Friday's column on the salt shortage:

"Boo, there's another problem with respect to iodization. Food manufacturers can't label their products 'organic' if they use iodized salt, which is mandatory to use under Philippine laws.

"This is why Mama Sita and others have been railing against the ASIN Act because they can't export organic food to other countries."

No wonder I didn't find some of the usual packaged Pinoy food products in the Asian supermarkets in Los Angeles during my last visit. One stupid law is costing our food processing industry export sales volume.

There is urgency in repealing or amending the ASIN law to get rid of the unintended consequences to the native salt industry and our food processing industry.

On the lighter side... there was this Twitter post that captures Pinoy humor in our increasingly hopeless food shortage situations:

From Leonard Postrado's tweet: "Imagine *niyo, paano pag ininvade tayo ng aswang*. Short *na sa bawang*, short *pa tayo sa asin*."

I guess that's where Darna comes into the picture just in time.

Boo Chanco's email address is *bchanco@gmail.com*. Follow him on Twitter *@boochanco*

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Japan donates P337.5M for typhoon-affected farmers, fishermen in BARMM

By Cristina Lee-Pisco

THE Japanese government donated US$ 6 million (P337.5 million) to support new initiatives by the Food Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Program (WFP) for farmers and fisherfolk affected by typhoon Rai (Odette) in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

The ceremonial exchange of notes between the Japanese government, the WFP and the FAO was hosted by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) recently.

Approximately 4,000 small-scale coconut farming and fishing households in Regions VII, VIII and XIII, and 7,500 smallholder fisher and farmer families in BARMM were the target recipients of the project.

Some US$ 4 million (P225 million) will go to WFP to support a two-year project that aims to improve the livelihoods, food security and nutrition of smallholder farmers and fisherfolk and strengthen their inclusion in the agricultural value chain through improved market linkages, and enhanced agricultural productivity.

WFP will introduce the farmers to the use of Farm2Go, a WFP-owned digital platform to digitally connect farmers to markets, allowing them to sell their produce at competitive prices.

A total of US$ 2 million (P112.5 million) of the contribution will be used by FAO to implement a humanitarian initiative that will support the restoration of the livelihoods and the enhancement of the resilience of 20,000 small-scale coconut farmers and fishers affected by "Odette" in Regions VII, VIII and XIII.

"Many Japanese people feel the suffering and pain of Filipinos as their own since we are both disaster-prone nations. We strongly hope that this sense of solidarity from the Japanese people will reach many Filipinos on the ground," said Koshikawa Kazuhiko, Ambassador of Japan to the Philippines.

"The benefits of both projects nourish the country's long-term socio-economic well-being and shield the most vulnerable from economic shocks that follow on the heels of both natural and man-made disasters," said Noemi Diaz, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Office of the United Nations and International Organizations (UNIO), representing Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo.

"Food is a pathway to peace. The linkage between conflict and hunger is undisputed. With the devastating effects of the global food, fuel and fertilizer crisis, which is pushing millions of people across the world to the edges of hunger and desperation, we see Japan once again step forward to help the UN and governments buffer the impact," remarked WFP Country Representative Brenda Barton.

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World food prices continue to decline

PARIS (AFP) – World food prices have fallen for a fifth consecutive month, partly thanks to the resumption of exports from Ukraine's Black Sea ports, a UN agency said on Friday.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) food price index, which tracks the monthly change in international prices of a basket of food commodities, has been falling steadily since hitting an all-time high in March following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

There was a moderate decline of 1.9 percent in August.

Vegetable oils have fallen below their level a year ago, after a 3.3-percent drop.

The FAO cereals index fell by 1.4 percent, driven by a 5.1-percent drop in international wheat prices.

It came off the back of "improved production prospects in North America and Russia as well as the resumption of exports from the Black Sea ports in Ukraine for the first time in over five months of interruption," the FAO said.

Global wheat prices were still 10.6 percent above their values in August last year, the FAO said.

Exports from Ukraine – one of the world's biggest suppliers of wheat, corn and sunflower oil before the war – had ground to a trickle due to a Russian blockade of the Black Sea.

The shipments resumed in early August under a deal brokered by the UN and Turkey.

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VIKI MOHAMAD-UNSPLASH

World food price index falls for fifth month in August

PARIS — The United Nations food agency's world price index fell for a fifth month in a row in August, further from all-time highs hit earlier this year, as a resumption of grain exports from Ukrainian ports contributed to improved supply prospects.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said on Friday that its price index, which tracks the most globally traded food commodities, averaged 138.0 points last month versus a revised 140.7 for July.

The July figure was previously put at 140.9.

The index has fallen from a record of 159.7 in March, hit after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The August reading was, however, 7.9% higher than a year earlier.

FAO's cereal price index fell 1.4% month on month in August, with the reopening of Ukrainian Black Sea ports under a diplomatic deal as well as favorable wheat harvest prospects in North America and Russia weighing on prices, the agency said.

But the maize price index rose 1.5% last month as hot, dry weather reduced the outlook for production in Europe and the US, it said. The vegetable oil, sugar, dairy and meat price indices all fell, partly reflecting improved supplies.

In separate cereal supply and demand estimates, FAO lowered its forecast for global cereal production in 2022 to 2.774 billion tons from a previous projection of 2.792 billion in early July. That is 1.4% below estimated output for 2021.

The cut to its prediction for 2022 cereal production was due to the weather-reduced corn prospects in the northern hemisphere, with European Union yields notably seen falling 16% below their five-year average, FAO said.

World cereal use in 2022/23 is expected to surpass production at 2.792 million tons, leading to a projected 2.1% fall in global stocks compared with 2021/22 to 845 million tons. That would represent a stocks-to-use ratio of 29.5%, down from 30.9% in 2021/22 but still relatively high historically, FAO said. — ***Reuters***

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Wheat, corn, soybeans up

CHICAGO- US wheat, corn and soybean futures rose on Friday on a short-covering bounce ahead of a three-day US holiday weekend, led by strength in crude oil and other commodities as fears waned about aggressive interest rate hikes from the Federal Reserve.

A rally in world stocks fizzled, but the dollar cooled after data that showed the US labor market is starting to loosen. US markets will be closed on Monday for the federal Labor Day holiday.

Chicago Board of Trade December wheat settled up 16-3/4 cents at $8.11 per bushel, but stayed inside Thursday's trading range. CBOT December corn ended up 7-3/4 cents at $6.65-3/4 a bushel and November soybeans rose 25-3/4 cents to finish at $14.20-1/2 a bushel.

"Broader markets are driving CBOT ags higher ... I think we are just seeing kind of a technical rebound after trading lower earlier this week," said Terry Reilly, senior commodity analyst with Futures International in Chicago.

Traders were also starting to adjust positions ahead of the US Department of Agriculture's monthly supply/demand reports on Sept. 12. Some private analysts have revised their US 2022 corn yield estimates lower in recent days, fueling expectations that the USDA might do the same in its upcoming reports. - ***Reuters***

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A man buying vegetables and fruits in Cali, Colombia. *(Reuters Photo)*

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Empty peanut shells are the latest casualty of China's drought

PEANUT farmers in China are left with empty shells as extreme weather wreaks havoc on harvests in the world's most populous nation.

Nutless pods are a consequence of alternating drought and excessive rains during key planting and growth periods. That's bad news for China, the world's biggest grower, after farmers already shrunk the planting acreage. The empty shells are one factor that could result in peanut output tumbling as much as 30 percent this season, according to analysts.

"I've never encountered anything like this in previous years," said Song, a peanut trader in Shandong province, where a delayed harvest has just begun.

The plight of farmers can be seen in a video of peanut fields ravaged by drought that made its rounds on social media. Posted by "Brother Peanut" in Shandong three months ago, when parts of China were already struggling with inadequate rainfall, it shows a large spread of land that used to be planted with peanuts, now mostly barren and dotted with an abnormally small crop.

Peanuts have become the latest casualty as extreme weather roils Chinese agricultural markets during the crucial harvest period. Sichuan suffered its worst drought in 60 years as searing temperatures baked central and southwestern provinces, while flooding inundated the northeast.

Other crops have seen similar damage across the globe this summer, exacerbating the food inflation that's been gripping the world. Scorching heat shriveled the corn crop in the United States, leaving some stalks with no ears at all. Sunflowers are withering in Europe, the land of van Gogh, thanks to a once-in-a-generation drought.

The humble peanut, the fourth-largest oilseed crop in the world, is generally resistant to drought. But the legume needs calcium to grow. If the ground is too severely dry or flooded, it will cause a loss of calcium, making it difficult for the plant's roots to absorb enough. The result: a shell with no nut.

"High temperature and drought, or too much moisture in the soil, can both lead to empty peanuts," said Jiang Ying, an analyst with Huatai Futures, who estimates a 20 percent-30 percent fall in China's overall peanut output this season.

Food security

ANY considerable drop of peanut production in China, which produces a third of the global output, could push up global oilseed prices further. It would also thwart Beijing's drive for self-reliance in oilseeds, part of an overarching food security push, after Covid-19 pandemic and soured relations with major trading partners threatened steady supplies from the overseas market.

Beijing has said it will spare no effort to improve oilseed capacity, aiming to produce more than 19 million tons of peanuts by 2025, according to the government's five-year plan.

Now, that goal looks very much up in the air.

Even before the bad weather, the stage was set for a poor crop. Low prices of peanuts had pushed many farmers to switch to other crops such as corn and vegetable, seeking better profits and easier work.

Shrinking acreage

THOSE who decided to stick with peanuts found the land was too dry to seed when drought hit in April and May. Under the double whammy, the planting acreage of peanuts plunged by more than 30 percent in some main production areas.

After the crop was finally planted, excessive rains hit some areas in Shandong and the northeast, flooding peanut fields right before harvest. In Henan, where drought has been the dominating problem, pest disease rose along with the extreme weather, also hurting output, according to Wang Xiaoyang, senior analyst with Sinolink Futures. ***Bloomberg News***

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Zayed Sustainability Prize 2023 demonstrates global reach and impact

FOLLOWING a successful 4-month submissions phase, the Zayed Sustainability Prize, the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) pioneering global award for recognizing excellence in sustainability, has officially closed entries for its 2023 awards cycle.

Over 4,500 applications were received across the five Prize categories of Health, Food, Energy, Water, and Global High Schools, from a record 152 countries, demonstrating the Prize's growing global reach and impact.

The Zayed Sustainability Prize winners will be announced at the 2023 Zayed Sustainability Prize Awards Ceremony that will be held on January 16, 2023, as part of Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week.

The Prize witnessed a 13 percent increase in submissions compared to last year from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), nonprofit organizations, and high schools. Total submissions from SMEs increased across all categories, underscoring a rising trend that SMEs are putting sustainability at the top of their agenda.

His Excellency Dr. Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, UAE Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology and Director General of the Prize, said: "For the last 14 years, the Zayed Sustainability Prize has incentivized practical solutions to global challenges that deliver tangible impact at a community level around the world. Inspired by the commitment to sustainable development and the humanitarian legacy of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the Prize has improved the lives of 370 million people in 151 countries to date. This year, we have seen applications from a record number of countries across every category from health, food, energy, water, and global high schools. I'm excited to see what creative solutions this year's applicants will bring to the table, particularly as the UAE prepares to host COP 28 next year. "

"Given that we want to leverage COP 28 as a platform for inclusivity and practical outcomes, I am confident that the Prize can help to deliver social and economic progress from across the private sector, the small business community, and an increasingly active and engaged younger generation."

This year's submissions were more diverse than ever before, revealing climate-change's impact on every country across every continent and reflecting a growing awareness that urgent climate action is critical to meet global net zero carbon goals by mid-century.

More submissions received this year came from developing nations in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, East Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and North Africa, which is an important indication of the growing participation of developing countries in the fight against climate change.

The top submitting countries included Kenya, India, China, Egypt, Brazil and the United States. By receiving submissions from a wide range of geographies, the Prize is better equipped to deliver on its mission of driving impactful, innovative, and inspiring sustainable and humanitarian development around the world.

The Food (1,426) and Health (946) categories attracted the greatest number of submissions, followed by Energy (736) and Water (601), while the Global High Schools category received 829 submissions.

In the Food category, which received nearly 20 percent increase in submissions compared to last year, many entries presented solutions aimed at achieving sustainable food production to address rising food insecurity and malnutrition in a world threatened by climate change.

In the Health category, several entries address the weaknesses of the health-care systems exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and offer solutions that provide more resilient, inclusive, accessible, and sustainable health-care services to people most in need.

In the Energy category, the Prize received numerous entries focused on improving sustainable energy access in vulnerable communities, supporting United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 7, affordable and clean energy for all, and driving the low-carbon energy transition.

Finally, in the Water category, a number of entries offered solutions aimed at addressing the clean water production, climate change, and water resource management challenges faced around the world, particularly in developing nations.

The number of submissions received from high schools grew by 55 percent compared to last year, which is especially encouraging and a testament to young people's growing awareness of the challenges and risks presented by the climate crisis and of the opportunity to lead on sustainable development. Entries in the Global High Schools category proposed waste management solutions, clean energy systems, and food systems like hydroponics and aquaponics, reflecting the students' innovative thinking and careful consideration of projects most suited for their local communities.

Following the close of submissions, the Prize now enters the evaluation stage. All entries will now be shortlisted by an independent research and analysis consultancy. A Selection Committee comprised of globally renowned industry experts will then assess the qualified entries and shortlist the candidates. The third and final tier of the evaluation process is the Jury, which will convene in October to unanimously elect the winners in each category.