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Political will necessary to make food affordable, says PCCI's Barcelon

By ANDREA E. SAN JUAN
@andreasanjuan

POLITICAL will is necessary to resolve the problems that have hampered the agriculture sector and ensure the availability of affordable food, according to Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) President George T. Barcelon.

"The issue on agriculture...a lot of actions *kailangan* may political will," Barcelon told reporters on the sidelines of PCCI's recent membership meeting.

Barcelon made the remark when he was asked if PCCI will endorse a secretary for Agriculture as the agency is concurrently headed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.

He said PCCI has its own shortlist of potential Agriculture secretaries and hinted that some of those who landed on its shortlist are "stakeholders who are in the business who are major exporters."

In the meantime, Barcelon said that as the current head of the Department of Agriculture (DA), Marcos should consider not only the production side of agriculture, but also the trade aspect.

"*Kung wala naman talaga 'yung magsasaka natin, 'yung production nila hanggang doon lang.* But the demand is much bigger so we may have to import," he said.

"But imports must be properly done *dahil alam natin maraming smuggling. Kung may smuggling wala naman nakokolektang buwis.* Government [must address trade issues] so it can collect taxes and at the same time ensure that prices of staple items will not be so high," he added.

As concurrent chief of the DA, Barcelon said the President can fast-track reforms, which would require political will to implement, to enable the country's farm sector to become competitive.

He also said PCCI believes that the government has all the necessary tools to deal with the high prices of commodities.

Meanwhile, Barcelon said he had asked Sabin Aboitiz, who heads the Private Sector Advisory Council (PSAC), to study the impact of logistics issues on food prices.

In particular, the PCCI chief said, "*sabi ko 'yung sa production natin limited na. Hanggang doon lang. Pero 'yung logistics cost natin pwedeng i-areglo natin para it will go down, (kasi) 'yung mga local government maysariling tax eh. Maraming mga binabayad [ang] mga players so everything goes up.*"



RONALD LLAMAS

"Nasayang na pagkakataon."

Ganito natin maaring sumahin ang unang taon ng administrasyon ni President Bongbong Marcos Jr. sa June 30. Pagkatapos makakuha ng 31 million votes noong nakaraang halalan, na ayon sa mga historian ay pangatlo sa pinakamalaking electoral mandate sa Philippine elections, bigo si BBM na i-maximize ang mga opportunities na bunga ng napakalaking suporta ng mamamayan. Sa laki ng electoral mandate ni BBM, marami na dapat siyang nagawa sa unang taon ng kanyang panunungkulan. Pero kabaligtaran ang nangyari. Marami siyang sinayang na pagkakataon.

Una, bigo si BBM na ipakita sa buong mundo na kakaiba ang kanyang pamahalaan sa administrasyon ni former President Rodrigo Duterte sa usapin ng human rights. Imbes na palayain si dating Senator Leila de Lima, patuloy ang kanyang pagkakabilanggo sa ilalim ni BBM. At bagama't dumidistansya si BBM sa anti-drug war ni Duterte, patuloy pa rin ang extrajudicial killings, at wala pa ring nakakamit na katarungan ang mga EJK victim. Sinayang ni BBM ang pag-iikot niya sa buong mundo para kumbinsi-

1 taon ni BBM: Ano ang nangyari sa pangakong 'unity' at P20 per kilo na bigas?

hin ang lahat na iba ang kanyang pamahalaan sa nakaraang administrasyon.

Pangalawa, sinayang ni BBM ang oportunidad na magsulong ng economic development at job creation strategy upang protektahan ang mamamayan sa tumitinding economic crisis, partikular na ang mataas na inflation sa bansa. Imbes na magsulong ng mas maayos na trade at industrial policy, ang mas inatupag ng kanyang mga alyado ay Charter Change, at pagpasa ng Maharlika Investment Fund na wala namang klarong maidudulot na mabuti sa bansa.

Pangatlo, sinayang ni BBM ang pagkakataon na ipakita sa lahat ang kanyang leadership skills sa pagiging Secretary ng Department of Agriculture (DA). Sa ilalim ng kanyang direktang pamamahala, nasangkot ang DA sa kaliwa't kanan na anomalya gaya ng sugar at rice smuggling, hoarding at cartelization. Ayon sa advocates, sa unang pitong buwan lamang ng 2022, nawalan na ang pamahalaan ng P3.84 billion. Bukod dito, mula January hanggang June ng 2022, at least 85 percent ng 2.28 million tons ng imported rice ay undervalued ng hindi bababa sa P5,664 per ton. Mismong si Central Bank Governor Philip Medalla na ang nagsabi na isa malamang sa dahilan ng pagtaas ng presyo ng mga bilihin sa pagkain ay ang mga cartel na nagdodomina sa ating agrikultura. Nasaan na ang pangakong P20 per kilo na bigas?

Pang-apat, isang taon pa lang si BBM bilang pangulo, pero hati-hati na ang kanyang administrasyon sa magkakatangaling paksyon.

Walang unity! Sa isang banda, ang grupo ni House Speaker at Lakas-CMD President Leyte 1st District Rep. Martin Romualdez, at sa kabilang kampo naman, ang tambalang paksyon ni Vice President Sara Duterte at Pampanga Rep. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Malalim ang alitan at halos hindi na maayos ang hidwaan. Kadalasan, ang ganitong klaseng bangayan ay nangyayari kapag patapos na ang termino ng isang pangulo. Na ito ay nangyayari sa unang taon pa lang ng administrasyon ni BBM ay lubhang nakakabahala at sumasalamin sa uri ng kanyang pamumuno sa darating na limang taon.

Ang tanging konsolasyon lamang ni BBM ay sa larangan ng foreign affairs. Kung si Duterte ay lantarang maka-Tsina, si BBM naman ay piniling kilalanin ang ating tagumpay sa Arbi-tral Tribunal ukol sa West Philippine Sea. Tila nakaangkla rin ang foreign affairs policy ni BBM sa defense at economic cooperation sa iba't ibang alyadong bansa, hindi lamang sa Tsina.

Isang taon pagkatapos manalo ni BBM sa halalan at makapagtala ng isa sa pinakamalaking boto sa ating kasaysayan, bigo siya na gamitin ang kanyang malawak na public support para ipakita ang totoong potensiyal ng kanyang pamahalaan. Marami siyang sinayang na oportunidad at pagkakataon. At ang lubhang nakakabahala, sa pagpasok ng pangalawang taon ng kanyang pagkapangulo, ang bangayan ng mga paksyon sa loob ng kanyang administrasyon ang magdidikta sa porma at itsura ng kanyang pamamahala.



EL NIÑO

Stockpiling pushes rice prices up

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) yesterday said the global price of rice is starting to go up as countries begin to stockpile on the supply of the grain.

This developed as Tugon Kabuhayan called for a more coordinated approach in curbing the effects of El Niño on local rice production.

Countries like China and Indonesia are buying up rice from traditional sources Vietnam and Thailand whose production are feared to decline because of El Niño.

Raul Montemayor, FFF convener, said free on board prices from Vietnam and Thailand have increased by five percent compared to their level in January to February.

Montemayor said this is about an additional P2 per kilogram on the landed cost of imported rice in Manila ports with tariff.

"If we will be hit by El Niño and our output will be slashed, we will need more imports, we will be affected by that pressure in international prices. As I said, most probably, this will happen next year although this year there are already slight movements, maybe there is still time to prepare," Montemayor



DA monitoring yesterday showed the price of some rice varieties has increased by up to P2 per kilogram. (Photo by ROLLY SALVADOR)

But based on public markets monitoring by the Department of Agriculture (DA) in the National Capital Region yesterday, the per kilogram (kg) price of imported rice range from P50 to P55 for special variety; P44 to P50 for premium and; P40 to P46 for well milled. No data is available on the price of regular milled.

For local rice, special variety is at P48 to P60 per kg; premium at P42 to P50 per kg; well-milled at P38 to P46 per kg; and regular milled at P35 to P42 per kg.

Compared to the earliest monitoring of the DA for the year, the price of some rice varieties are higher by P2 per kg at most.

DA's monitoring as of January 2, price range of imported rice for special variety is at P46 to P54 per kg; premium at P43 to P48 per kg; well-milled at P40 to P44 per kg; and P37 to P38 per kg for regular milled.

Meanwhile, for local rice, special variety is at P48 to P60 per kg; premium at P40 to P48 per kg; well-milled at P38 to P44 per kg; and regular milled at P35 to P40 per kg.

FFF said when the price of imported rice increases, that of



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STOCKPILING

domestic rice follows suit. While this will benefit farmers in terms of higher income, consumers take a hit.

The group said government should balance the interest of farmers and consumers in this case.

Meanwhile, Norbert Chingcuanco, Tugon Kabuhayan co-convenor, expressed concern rice farmers may be discouraged to plant on fears their crops will be damaged by drought.

"Most people think that El Niño is already here and therefore, no longer wants to plant palay. It is in contrast to what science and history is saying, El Niño will bring more rain before it starts and current forecast is reduction in rainfall will only be felt not until October," Chingcuanco said.

Ann Solis, assistant weather services chief of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, said by the end of the year, around 36 provinces may experience dry spell while two are expected to have drought.

Solis explained dry spell is a period of at least two months with 60 percent reduction in rainfall level or three months with 41 to 60 percent rainfall reduction. Drought occurs when more than 60 percent reduction in rainfall level is experienced for three to five months.

Lemnuel Aragon, professor at the Institute of Environmental Science and Meteorology at the University of the Philippines, said a "legal instrument" that will assign meteorologists in each local government unit (will help the country curb the negative effects of weather phenomenon.

Earlier, the DA warned that at least 46 provinces may experience below normal average rainfall, affecting crops like rice, corn and coconut and various fruit and vegetables due to El Niño.

The DA also recently reactivated its National El Niño Task Force and will enforce its enhanced El Niño Mitigation and Adaptation Plan.



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Farmer's group opposes liberalized sugar imports

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) is opposing the proposal of Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno to allow more sugar imports, saying this will not lower currently high prices of the commodity.

"DoF Secretary Diokno even wants to use the Rice Tariffication Law as model for all agricultural products covered by non-tariff barriers. If that is the case, then we can say goodbye to Philippine sugar soon. Liberalization will be the final nail on the coffin of the country's ailing sugar industry," KMP Chairman Danilo Ramos claimed.

"As if the high volume of sugar

imports is not enough, economic managers are bent on further liberalizing the sugar industry at the expense of consumers and sugar workers," he added.

On Friday, Diokno said that producers and sellers of sugary products would be allowed to import their own sugar requirements to reduce production costs given the government's plan to increase taxes on junk

food and sweetened beverages.

Diokno said producers and sellers of sugary products subjected to tax were expected to object as it would raise the selling prices of their products.

The KMP emphasized that additional imports will not cushion the impact of taxes on sugary beverages.

It said that sugar importation under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. was "embroiled" in too much controversy, citing importation orders from the **Sugar Regulatory Administration**, specifically Sugar Order 4 directing the importation of 300,000 metric tons (MT) of sugar and Sugar Order 6 for 440,000 MT.

"While we are importing sugar in record volume, prices of sugar went up by at least 80 percent under Marcos Jr. The retail price of refined sugar in markets went from P54.50 (per kilo) on June 30, 2021, to P90 in June 2022, and more recently, sugar prices have gone up to P110 per kilo," Ramos said.

The KMP leader added that the majority of farmers and workers in the sugar industry could suffer the same plight as rice farmers who were affected by rice tariffication.

More than 85 percent of the country's sugar planters are small planters, with an average farm size of less than 5 hectares. Most of the country's sugar mills and refineries are in Negros in the Visayas.



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PCA proposes additional P11B budget for 2024

THE Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) is seeking an P11-billion increase in its budget for next year to further strengthen the implementation of its programs and projects.

PCA Administrator Bernie Cruz said during the opening ceremony of PCA's 50th founding anniversary on Monday in Quezon City that they were requesting a budget increase of P11 billion for next year. The PCA's budget for this year is P1.12 billion.

"We are requesting to the Department

of Budget and Management (DBM).

Although they gave us a ceiling of more than P1 billion, we are requesting to give us a chance to reinvest because it can be recuperated," he said.

Cruz added that the PCA deserves the increase in budget as the country's coconut industry is a top dollar earner for the Philippines.

Currently, the budget allocated by the DBM to the coconut authority is P1.12 bil-

lion, and Cruz said that the additional fund could help maintain the country's status as a leading exporter of coconut products.

As part of its founding anniversary celebration, PCA distributed P65 million worth of interventions to different coconut farmers and stakeholders to help develop the country's coconut industry.

The agency awarded the interventions, which include different projects such as medical and scholarship programs,

processing facilities, seed gardens, and services, through the Coconut Farmer and Industry Trust Fund (CFITF).

The PCA is one of the implementing agencies of the CFITF Act, with an annual allotment of 15 percent from the trust fund that shall be utilized for the Coconut Hybridization Program, particularly operations on the ground, through the agency's regional offices and research centers.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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Cost of Vietnam ASF vaccine estimated at about P600/dose

THE vaccine for African Swine Fever (ASF) developed in Vietnam may cost nearly P600 per dose, according to the **Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI)**, leading the hog industry to call for subsidies to head off higher pork prices at retail.

"What I know is (the ASF vaccine) might cost more or less, around P600," BAI Assistant Director Arlene V. Vytiaco told reporters on the sidelines of the Livestock Philippines 2023 conference on Monday.

Ms. Vytiaco said approval by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) may mean the vaccine could be rolled out this year, though only to commercial hog farms.

"*Siguro dapat* for commercial farms *muna* (The vaccine is probably best suited for commercial farms initially)" she said. "*Dahil nag-aagawan nga, ang naibigay lang muna ng Vietnam* is 300,000 doses (Because there is great demand, Vietnam can only allocate us 300,000 doses at first) by the last quarter of the year."

Ms. Vytiaco announced early this month that the safety and efficacy trial has been completed, with the vaccine awaiting the issuance of an FDA certificate of product registration.

The manufacturer is ready to eventually supply 600,000 doses, she added.

Ms. Vytiaco expects the vaccine to come in three types of packaging: five doses and 10 doses for backyard hog raisers and 50 doses for commercial farms.



AMBER KIPP-UNSPLASH

"*So buong 300,000 na maibibigay, walang packaging for backyard raisers kasi lahat ata 50-60 doses* (The initial allocation of 300,000 is not suitable for backyard raisers because the first batches will be 50-60 doses)" she added.

Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines, Inc. National Chairman Nicanor M. Briones said that without vaccine subsidies, the farmgate price of pork may increase P6 per kilogram, liveweight.

"The price of pork may rise by around P9 per kilogram at retail," he told reporters.

Mr. Briones said that the government should declare a state of calamity to facilitate the funding for a vaccine subsidy, particularly for backyard hog raisers.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel V. de Mesa said: "If the conditions are met to declare a state of calamity, then it can be done."

Mr. De Mesa also said that the department is still conducting surveillance to gauge the extent of the outbreak.

As of June 8, seven regions, 13 provinces, 46 municipalities, and 113 barangays had active ASF cases, according to the BAI. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

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ASF vaccine to roll out in Sept

THE African swine fever (ASF) vaccine to be rolled out in September, despite the government does not have the fund yet to subsidize the purchase, Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) Assistant Director Arlene Vytiaco said on Monday.

"Maybe for commercial farms first. What the supplier can get is 600,000, but Vietnam can give first is 300,000 by September," she said.

"The other 300,000 will be allocated by the last quarter of this year," Vytiaco added.

"But it may range from P500 plus to P600 plus," the official said.

Vytiaco added that the successful trial was the third testing conducted after the other two testing activities, where they partnered with the United States and Thailand.

"The pigs that were given the shots are aged four to 10 weeks old," she said.

The BAI official added that acquiring the ASF vaccine is not mandatory.

"It's a first come, first serve basis," Vytiaco said.

Earlier, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said that government does not have the fund yet to subsidize the purchase of ASF vaccines but the department is finding means to aid the ailing hog industry.

DA deputy spokesman Rex Estoperez said that they will look for funds if a quick distribution of the vaccine subsidy is needed.

"We might ask help from the legislators if we need to increase the budget of BAI," he said, referring to the BAI.

In terms of the government subsidy, Estoperez said that they already discussed it with the BAI.

"There are many possibilities on where we are going to get [the fund] to subsidize, what's important is to roll it out and ensure the efficiency of the vaccine," he said.

However, Estoperez pointed out that the previously reported P400 to P600 price of the ASF vaccine is not yet confirmed.

"On that P400 to P600 we cannot confirm because the registration of the FDA [Food and Drug Administration] has not released any price," he said. *Raadee S. Sausa*

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Hog raisers receive 120 pigs from DA

BATANGAS hog raisers have received 120 pigs from the Department of Agriculture (DA) following the African swine fever (ASF) outbreak. Through its Integrated National Swine Production Initiatives for Recovery and Expansion (INSPIRE) Program, the DA has turned over 120 pigs to four cooperatives in Batangas.

The hog raisers were: Buklod ng Cumba Multi-Purpose Cooperative, L7 Livestock Agriculture Cooperative, Sto. Toribio Farmers Agriculture Cooperative, and Malitlit Consumers Cooperative. They each received 30 swine breeder stocks from the DA.

The distributed breeder stocks were born from grandparent pigs that were imported from the US and were donated by the DA-National Livestock Program (NLP) to select farm-cooperators such as EVG Farm and Phillac Farms Inc.

"I am thankful to EVG Farm and Phillac Farms because when we see the pigs that are being cared for by you, you have multiplied, which means that we did not make a mistake in choosing you. Because whatever our goal or aspiration is, you supported it," Paul Limson, director of Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), said.

"So to the recipients, I hope you take care of it and multiply it because if you increase the number of people who will return to pig farmers, we will be able to ensure not only the supply of pork in the area but also the economic activity of the area," he said.

For her part, National Livestock Program (NLP) Director Ruth Miclat-Sonaco conveyed both gratitude and satisfaction to Lipeño beneficiaries for their consistent stellar performance.

"I was the first to be the happiest because this was one of the first steps of the DA so that we can recover, particularly the province of Batangas. The DA, our Regional Field Office, our Bureau of Animal Industry, we will not tire of providing assistance to the city of Lipa when we see this [success]," Sonaco said.

The INSPIRE Program is one of the DA's twin programs against ASF—the other being the Bantay ASF sa Barangay (BABay ASF) Program for intensified disease surveillance and control in the barangay level.

The said program focuses on calibrated hog re-population, establishment of swine farms and facilities, and ensuring easy access to insurance and credit services for hog farmers in order to improve swine production and to ensure the sufficiency of pork and pork products in the country.

The INSPIRE Program is spearheaded by the DA-NLP with support from its livestock attached agencies, the DA Regional Field Offices (RFOs), the local government units, and other stakeholders including farmers' cooperatives and associations.

On its official web site, the NLP has reported having distributed 19,486 pigs for its implementation of sentinel protocol, reaching 8,161 beneficiaries nationwide. **Raadee S. Sausa**



RED ONIONS POSSIBLE IN CARAGA REGION

RED onion production in Caraga region is possible with the appropriate technology through High Value Crops Development Program.

"The bountiful harvest of the PAO [Provincial Agriculture Office] Agusan del Sur is our evidence that through proper management, onions will thrive in the region," **Department of Agriculture (DA)-Caraga Regional Executive Director Ricardo Oñate Jr.**, said recently.

"Our efforts and willingness to take on the challenge of the region's no-pronounced dry season have paid off. We also acknowledge the support of the local government for making it possible," he added.

The red onions were cultivated in a modernized urban agriculture facility—a greenhouse under controlled environmental conditions.

An automated fertigation system was used, a process of delivering nutrients to plants along with water to produce a quality crop with higher yields.

Meanwhile, Oñate said that the program has established techno demos in partnership with 11 local government units, five Farmer's Cooperatives and Associations, a public high school, and a local media partner.

These were established in greenhouses and open fields to test their feasibility in various ecosystems.

The program is currently gathering data on the harvested red onions to identify the best management practices as well as determine the cost-benefit ratio of producing red onions in the various areas of the Caraga region.

In January, the government will be carrying out the program aimed at helping onion farmers increase their yield to stabilize the supply and bring down the commodity's price.

"We'll do this by increasing the area that is being planted to onions, number one," President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said.

"And secondly, we will help by—the DA will help by providing inputs. So the first part of that is, we are going to the seed producers so that they will produce good seed that we can give to the farmers at some point. That is what they use as inputs. And all that what they need," the President said.

The DA has deferred the extension of the P250 suggested retail price (SRP) due to the forecasted lower price range of onions following the harvest season. The DA said onion prices may decline to P100 to P150 per kilo with the entry of more than 5,000 metric tons of imported onions. **Raadee S. Sausa**



PCA confirms copra price slump; 500,000 farmers affected

By BELLA CARIASO

Additional budget

The Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) yesterday confirmed the drop in farm gate prices of copra, with at least 500,000 farmers affected by the slump in prices.

The farm gate prices of copra ranged between P21 and P24 per kilo, according to PCA deputy administrator Roel Rosales.

"The phenomenon in the drop in the farm gate price of copra was due to the soft demand until now in the international market because of the effect of the pandemic, the Ukraine-Russian war," Rosales said at a press conference yesterday.

He added that a large volume of imported vegetable oil is also available in the market.

"The retail price of palm oil in the market is cheaper compared to coconut oil, that is why many patronize it. The coconut oil is really geared as an export product. That is why coconut prices are affected by the movement of major players. That would explain why the farm gate price of copra is decreasing," Rosales said. The farm gate price of copra is expected to improve with the onset of the "-ber" months, according to the PCA official. "We anticipate that as soon as the '-ber' months start, the demand for the oil will increase," he said.

Meanwhile, the PCA is seeking to raise its allocation by P11 billion from the coco levy fund next year to revitalize the coconut industry.

"We are asking for an additional P11 billion for reinvestment. We asked the Department of Budget of Management for a higher allocation, but we were given a ceiling of P1 billion," PCA administrator Bernie Cruz said at the same briefing.

The PCA, as one of the implementing agencies of Republic Act 11524 or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act (CFITF), receives an annual allotment of 15 percent or P5 billion to carry out the Coconut Hybridization Program.

The CFITF is managed by a management committee composed of authorized representatives from the Departments of Finance, Budget and Management, and Justice.

Cruz said implementing agencies of the P75-billion CFITF are facing challenges in hiring people or commissioning a study to improve the coconut industry because the coco levy fund does not cover the administrative costs.

He added the agencies also face the dilemma of using the coco levy fund to cover the administrative costs since this will be flagged by the Commission on Audit.

"That's why we're asking for a higher

budget so that we can give the farmers their long-awaited funds that will help them faster," the PCA chief said.

If its request is granted, the PCA will use the additional funds to put up seed gardens per coconut-producing province.

"We are asking for additional funds to establish seed gardens or seed farms per coconut-producing areas to address logistical problems because these seed gardens will be able to provide the seeds needed by that province," Cruz said.

For example, coconut seeds coming from Bicol can only be planted within the province to contain the disease plaguing the area.

"Once the seed gardens are established, farmers will source their seeds. If the farmers will be able to replace the old trees, their produce will double," Cruz said.

The PCA intends to use the additional fund to invest in new varieties of coconut that will replace old trees to raise productivity.

"We also import copra from Indonesia, Papua New Guinea as our production dwindles because our trees are already old. We are asking for additional funds so that we can replace the trees with better variety," Cruz said.

"The current average is 44 nuts per tree per year. If we can double that to 80 to 100 nuts per tree annually, which is the average in India and Indonesia, farmers can double their income and maximize their operations," he said.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed the country produced 14.93 million metric tons of coconut last year, up by 1.45 percent from 14.71 million MT a year ago.

Rosales noted that the funding would also support the PCA's coconut salt fertilization program.

"Coconut trees are salt-loving, that is why we are proposing the salt fertilization program, where we can also help the local salt industry while reinvigorating the coconut industry. Under the program, at least two kilos of salt will be provided for each coconut tree each year for three years. It will surely increase the production," he said.

Under Executive Order 172 or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP) issued by former president Rodrigo Duterte on June 2 last year, at least P5 billion each will be released from the coco levy fund to support the coconut industry, according to Cruz.

RA 11524 directed the transfer of an initial P75-billion coconut levy fund to be used for coconut farmers and the development of the industry.

Cruz said at least P65 million has been awarded to coconut farmers and organizations as part of the implementation of the CFIDP.

- With Danessa Rivera

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Rice farmers want NFA regulatory powers back

By RAMON EFREN LAZARO

Farmer leaders in San Miguel, Bulacan are clamoring for the return of the regulatory functions of the **National Food Authority (NFA)** to prevent possible rice price hikes in the coming weeks.

Simeon Sioson, chairman of the 4SM Multi-Purpose Cooperative and former chairman of the Federation of Central Luzon Farmers' Cooperatives, said the NFA should also be given the power to import rice that can be sold to the public at P27 and P32

a kilo, like it used to do before the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law that clipped the agency's regulatory functions.

Sioson urged lawmakers to restore the agency's function to import cheap rice that should

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Rice From Page 1

be made immediately to have a better buffer stock during the lean months of June, July, August and September so consumers can avail themselves of cheap NFA rice.

Raul Montemayor, national manager of the Federation of Free Farmers, told **The STAR** that the rice harvest season is already over and that a majority of farmers have no more palay grains to sell.

"They sold at a high price last harvest season so they recovered some of their expenses," Montemayor said in Filipino, adding that this is the reason why local rice prices have risen.

Prices rising

Prices of local commercial rice are starting to rise as palay rice harvest season is almost over.

Wholesale rice traders in Inter-city Industrial Estate and Golden City Business Park in Bocaue, Bulacan, two of the major rice trading centers in Luzon, confided to **The STAR** that average palay prices nowadays are pegged at an average of P26 to P27 per kilo.

They explained that processing palay to rice at an average recovery rate of 60 percent at P26 per kilo translates to a wholesale production cost of P1,993.33 per 50-kilo sack or P39.87 per kilo. At P27, this translates to a wholesale produc-

tion cost of P2,070 per 50-kilo sack or P41.40.

With an average wholesale profit margin of P1 per kilo for the sub-retailer and P2 for retailers, average consumer price reaches P43.87 to P45.40 per kilo.

On the other hand, Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura president Rosendo So explained that 10 days ago, palay prices at the farm-gate were pegged at P23 per kilo, reaching P39.36 when it reaches the rice miller, before climbing to P42.36 to P43.36 per kilo at the retailer level.

No effect yet

An official of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) on Monday said the lower rainfall phenomenon of El Niño is not yet in effect, and that rice farmers would have enough rainfall for the July to September planting season.

"There will be near to normal rain from July to September 2023," PAGASA assistant weather services chief Analyn Solis said at a Tugon Kabuhayan media forum.

She added that the chances of feeling the effects of El Niño are getting higher, but the lower rainfall pattern in the coming months has not been established yet.

Meanwhile, former BFAR chief lawyer Asis Perez urged rice farmers to keep planting palay in the

months of July, August and September as he stressed that El Niño's dry weather phenomenon will still occur in October.

He said rice farmers must have clear information about the start of El Niño in October and they still have three months to plant.

However, miscommunication is discouraging farmers to plant due to fears of the impact of El Niño on the crops.

"Most people think that El Niño is here, therefore, let's not plant rice. In contrast to what science and history are saying, El Niño will bring more rain before it starts. But the forecast is by October, there will be less rainfall, but not entirely no rain," Tugon Kabuhayan co-convenor Norbert Chingcuanco said.

Some rice farmers have already stopped planting rice due to concerns that the weather phenomenon would start in July.

"Farmers relying on rain decided not to plant rice. Because of El Niño, there are a number of areas here in Quezon that did not plant this season," Federation of Farmers in Tiaong, Quezon president Danilo Guevarra said.

For his part, Pambansang Samahan ng Kilusan ng mga Magsasaka legal and policy advocacy officer Rene Cerilla said clear and proper information will empower farmers in proper planning. —With Danessa Rivera, Michelle Zoleta



'Phl to import more pork to address shortage'

By BELLA CARIASO

The country needs to resort to more importation of pork to address the shortage of supply amid the outbreak of African swine fever (ASF) in many parts of the country, particularly in the

Visayas, a ranking official of the Department of Agriculture (DA) said yesterday.

At a press conference, Agriculture Assistant Secretary for operations Arnel de Mesa assured the public that the DA is coordinating with the private sector to manage

the volume of pork products to be sourced from other countries.

"In terms of supply, because of the ASF, we really need to import pork products until the end of the year," De Mesa said.

Based on latest data from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI),

total pork importation reached 229,201 kilos from January to May.

"The DA continues to manage the importation together with the private sector so that we will know the volume that we need to import and the total local production," De

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Phl From Page 1

Mesa said.

According to De Mesa, the DA expects this year's pork imports to be lower than last year's.

At the same time, De Mesa said a declaration of state of calamity can be done only under certain conditions, amid the spread of ASF.

"The declaration of course will depend on the national government," De Mesa added.

AGAP party-list Rep. Nicanor Briones has pushed for the declaration of state of calamity in the entire country to allow the allocation of funds for the importation of ASF vaccine as the disease is now affecting areas in the Visayas after causing devastation in Luzon.

"We were able to control the cases in Visayas. The cases have already decreased compared to before," De Mesa

added.

He said livestock and poultry production grew by 4.1 percent in 2022 compared to 2021 as hog raisers in Luzon were able to repopulate after being hit by ASF.

"Based on our data, we were able to recover. The livestock and poultry production grew by 4.1 percent in 2022," De Mesa pointed out.

For her part, BAI assistant director Arlene Vytiaco said that based on laboratory tests, ASF caused the death of piglets in Antique.

"Antique is one of the provinces affected by the ASF. We have laboratory tests. There was already confirmation based on the laboratory tests," she added.

Vytiaco said that the BAI continues to conduct surveillance to control the outbreak of ASF in the Visayas.

Based on monitoring of the DA, retail prices of pork ham ranged between P280 and P390 per kilo; pork *liempo*, between P340 and P390 per kilo.



AGENCY WANTS TO PUT UP SEED FARMS

BIGGER BUDGET SOUGHT FOR COCONUT INDUSTRY

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

The **Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA)** is seeking an additional budget of P11 billion for next year not only to bolster local production but also the income of coconut farmers nationwide.

In a briefing held on Monday, PCA administrator Bernie Cruz said the additional funds would be used to establish seed gardens or seed farms in coconut-producing areas. The Department of Budget and Management set a budget ceiling of only a little more than P1 billion for the agency.

"We are asking for more funds to put up a seed garden or seed farm in every coconut-producing area so that the logistical problem will no longer be an obstacle. The seed gardens to be established in every province will provide the seeds we need," Cruz said.

The PCA noted that government agencies implementing the P75-billion coco levy fund were experiencing challenges in securing more budget to, for instance, employ people or commission a study to look into the industry.

Cruz said the utilization of the coco levy fund does not cover the administrative cost of carrying out the plan to revitalize the industry.

"All government agencies involved in the coconut industry road map are encountering problems because they also have to utilize their General Appropriations Act funds for their respective projects," he said.

Under the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Act, the PCA is allotted 15 percent or P5 billion annually from the coco levy fund intended for various undertakings aimed at the development of the coconut value chain.

"But if we use our own budget for the coconut industry road map, we will be flagged by the COA (Commission on Audit)," Cruz said, adding: "We are seeking additional funds because wherever you go, you will see that we need to replace our coconut trees with better varieties."

Coconut seeds come from Zamboanga and Bicol although the PCA said those from the latter could only be used within the province in order to contain

a disease currently plaguing the industry there.

Once the old coconut trees are replaced, the PCA said it would double the average yield of a coconut tree to 80 to 100 nuts a year from the current average of 44 nuts a year.

In 2022, the country produced 14.93 million metric tons (MT) of coconut, up by 1.45 percent from 14.71 million MT a year ago, according to data from the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Cruz said the higher budget would also double the income of domestic farmers even if the farm-gate price, or the selling price between farmers and traders, remained the same.

The farm-gate price of copra averaged P22.88 per kilogram as of June 9 against P37.54 per kg in the same period a year ago, data from the PCA showed.

According to PCA deputy administrator Roel Rosales, the declining price of copra is being experienced across the country. He explained that the farther the processing center or oil mill was, the lower the prevailing price would be. **INQ**

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DA working closely with FDA on ASF vax certification

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) yesterday said it is closely coordinating with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on the issuance of Certificate of Product Registration (CPR) on African swine fever (ASF) vaccines from Vietnam.

In an interview at the launch of the Livestock Philippines 2023 in Quezon City on Monday, DA Assistant Secretary for Operations Arnel de Mesa said their recommendation to certify the vaccine is now with the FDA.

"We're working closely with FDA regarding the (ASF) vaccine as they are mandated to

do so," he said.

De Mesa said they are also studying the proposal to subsidize private hog growers in availing the vaccine once it is available in the country.

"We are studying the proposal especially small backyard or small pig growers. We want to help them. It is a proposal to have a discount. We're looking at that possibility," he said.

De Mesa said they are also looking to possibly get back the function to certify vaccines for animals.

"We are also working to the future that maybe such authority can be returned to the Bureau

of Animal Industry (BAI) if there are vaccines or other concerns related to animals," he added.

On the other hand, BAI assistant director Arlene Vytiaco clarified that only six to 10 weeks old pigs are the ones that will be given the vaccines once it is available locally.

She made the clarification when asked how they will balance the allocated 600,000 doses of vaccines from Vietnam against the 6 million hogs in the country.

"The vaccines are for pigs 6 to 10 weeks old," Vytiaco said.

"The 600,000 doses are only for this year. For next and the

next three years, we will be provided with 1 million per year," she added.

Under the testing policy, Vytiaco said the required number of farms where it has been tested is only three with at least 100 pigs per farm.

"It has been tested in the country of origin. We are testing it for local condition," she added.

The BAI earlier endorsed to FDA to certify a Vietnam-made ASF vaccine for its immediate distribution in the country after its trial recorded positive results on pigs by producing antibodies. PNA



Farmers score import plan

KILUSANG Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) criticized the proposal of the Department of Finance (DOF) to further liberalize the domestic sugar industry.

The group said allowing more sugar imports will not lower the current high prices nor cushion the impact of taxes on sugary beverages especially if the government will pattern its decision with the Rice Tariffication Law.

"As if the high volume of sugar imports is not enough, economic managers are bent on further liberalizing the sugar industry at the expense of consumers and sugar workers. DOF Secretary (Benjamin) Diokno even wants to use the Rice Tariffication Law as model for all agricultural products covered by non-tariff barriers. If that is the case, then we can say goodbye to Philippine sugar soon. Liberalization will be the final nail on the coffin of the country's ailing sugar industry," said Danilo Ramos, KMP chairperson, in a statement yesterday.

The group added while the government has been importing sugar in "record volume," prices have gone up by at least 80 percent under the current administration.

"The retail price of refined sugar in markets went from P54.50 in June 30, 2021 to P90 in June 2022 and more recently, sugar

prices have gone up to P110 per kilo," Ramos said.

KMP also warned majority of sugar farmers and workers will "suffer the same plight of rice farmers affected by rice tariffication once full liberalization of the sugar industry takes effect" especially that more than 85 percent of the country's sugar planters are small planters with an average farm size of less than 5 hectares of sugar farmers.

The DOF said it is looking at allowing the importation of sugar as a "compromise" to producers and sellers to be impacted by the planned rate increase and the elimination of exemptions on the sweetened beverage tax.

The DOF and the Department of Health are jointly pursuing a junk food and sweetened beverage tax.

The Philippine Sugar Millers Association urged the DOF to implement more efficient tax collection policies instead of raising the tax rate starting next year.

The DOF intends to increase the sweetened beverage tax rate under the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion Law to P12 per liter, regardless of the type of sweetener used.

This tax rate will be indexed

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annually by four percent, and exemptions will be eliminated to broaden the tax base.

Based on Department of Agriculture's monitoring of public markets in the National Capital Region yesterday, prevailing retail price of sugar ranges from P86 to P110 per kg for

refined sugar and P80 to P90 per kg for both washed and brown sugar.

Meanwhile, Sugar Regulatory Administration millsite monitoring showed composite price of raw sugar as of June 11 was 3,050 per 50 kg bag.
-Jed Macapagal



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Trade scheme to boost PH agri export

THE British Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (BCCP) expects the Developing Countries Trading Scheme (DCTS) launched last June 19 would boost Philippine agriculture exports to the United Kingdom while increasing investments from UK in renewable energy, digitalization and food and beverage.

Chris Nelson, BCCP chairman, told a television interview the DCTS reduced tariffs on an additional 150 items under the DCTS.

Nelson cited the concession obtained by the Philippines on tuna

whose tariff will be waived from the current 20 percent.

"We anticipate that will be a boost along with other agricultural products," Nelson said, adding bilateral trade between the UK and the Philippines last year reached a record of 2.4 billion pounds.

He also said the Philippine roadshow to London last week will open up opportunities for investments in wind and tidal, food and beverage and digitalization.

"We're very optimistic...we're looking forward to seeing DCTS further boost that along with...

investments from the UK," Nelson added.

But Nelson said British businesses want to see further liberalization of the economy.

He did not cite specific sectors but said the passage of the amendments to the Retail Trade Liberalization Act, the Foreign Investments Act and the Public Service Act is sending positive signals.

Nelson added for the Philippines to become an investment hub, government should also improve further the ease of doing business in the country. - *Irma Isip*



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EDITORIAL :

Protecting our soil is also protecting our future

In the national conversation, soil often goes unnoticed, overshadowed by more pressing issues concerning agriculture or land management. The significance of soil escapes our attention unless we engage in urban farming or indoor gardening. However, beneath our feet lies the source of life itself. Without soil, where would our plants and trees find their footing? Without plants and trees, where would we find the life-giving oxygen we breathe? It is unfortunate that we fail to recognize the value of soil until it's already gone.

While it may not have garnered widespread attention or virality online, the country held its first National Soil Health Summit on June 21, 2023, with the President leading the call to address the growing problems of "degradation, acidification, and pollution of Philippine soil."

"Our soil is under threat. To continue to neglect this vital agricultural component will lead to an even worse crisis in the future," said Marcos during the summit's opening. "While the Philippines is blessed with rich and fertile lands, our country is facing grave and urgent issues in providing quality and sufficient food."

Citing data from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the President highlighted that "around 75 percent of the country's total cropland is vulnerable to erosion in various degrees, with agriculture losing about 457 million tons of soil annually." He added that the conversion of lands for settlements and the loss of about 47 hectares of forest cover every year contribute to soil degradation.

"Making matters worse is the improper use of fertilizers and pesticides that pollute and acidify our soil," Marcos said, noting that on top of the 2.2 million hectares that suffer from "insufficient levels of soil fertility," around 11 to 13 million hectares are considered "degraded."

The Chief Executive took the opportunity to unveil the government's five-point priority agenda for soil and water management, which includes sustainable land management and empowering the Bureau of Soil and Water Management.

"We are conducting a soil and land resources mapping and evaluation process that includes soil-based and land-based level assessments, soil sample analyses and digital map preparations under the Philippine Soil Land Resources Information program," he said.

Furthermore, he reported that the government is also exploring water security measures through climate-resilient rainwater technologies, and conducting cloud seeding operations for agriculture.

"All these (are being done) to improve water conditions in production areas, in critical watersheds, and in our reservoirs. These are all part of the collective efforts to mitigate the effects of the El Niño phenomenon."

Over the years, the government has faced criticisms for policies that may appear detrimental or short-sighted. Academics and private sector experts have been critical and vocal in their assessments. This time, however, is not the time for blame or criticism. Recognizing that the government alone cannot address all the challenges when it comes to soil management, the President called upon the private sector and the academe to work and collaborate with the government in tackling the issue of soil health.

By joining forces, pooling expertise, and starting at the grassroots level, we can find the optimal solutions to challenges that have plagued our country for generations. The present moment is an opportune time for such collaboration, and if we seek to start at the very foundation, then there is no need to search beyond the soil beneath our feet.



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El Niño also expected to affect PHL rice suppliers Vietnam, Thailand

RICE inventories will be under pressure next year because the El Niño dry spell will also hit the Philippines' major rice suppliers, Thailand and Vietnam, a farming industry association said.

"Next year, we will have low stocks going into the lean months... because Thailand and Vietnam will also be hit by (El Niño). The international price may also increase," according to Raul Q. Montemayor, national manager of the Federation of Free Farmers.

Speaking at a virtual forum, Mr. Montemayor said El Niño's impact will be felt by the dry season crop in the first half of 2024, when Philippine rice can count on limited irrigation water.

"Also, the carryover stock from 2023 may be lower than normal," he said.

As of January 1, the Philippine rice inventory was 1.77 million metric tons, down 5.1% from a year earlier, according

to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Mr. Montemayor said the "most intense" El Niño episode took place between 1997 and 1998, which caused a 24% drop in the production of palay (unmilled rice).

He said PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), the government weather service, is reviewing previous occurrences to gauge the potential impact of El Niño this year.

PAGASA Assistant Weather Services Chief Ana Liza S. Solis said that some areas in the country may experience a 22-50% reduction in rainfall starting October.

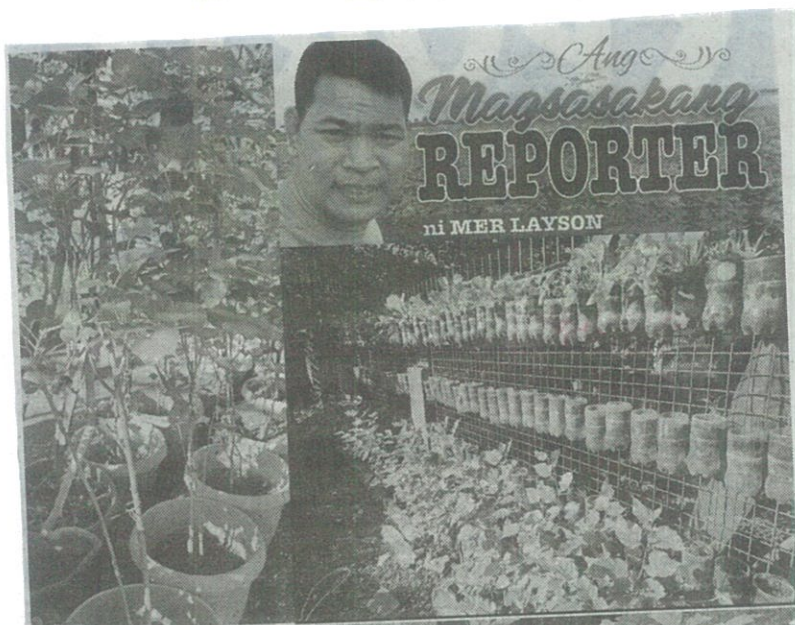
"There are 36 provinces with the potential for a dry spell by the end of December, while two provinces have the potential for drought by end of December," she said, citing the agency's initial assessment. —

Sheldeen Joy Talavera

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Malaking pakinabang
sa mga kabataan...
**VACANT LOT
SA MALABON,
TINANIMAN
NG GULAY NG
AKLAT
FOUNDATION**



Ang iba't ibang tanim ng AKLAT FOUNDATION

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Feliciano, Chairman at Executive Director ng AKLAT Foundation, nagsimula ang kanilang grupo noong Pebrero 2005.

"Our primary advocacy is to provide scholarship to poor but deserving students from Malabon City and livelihood training to displaced workers, PWDs, solo parents and among others" Ani Feliciano.

Sinabi pa ni Feliciano, ang AKLAT Foundation ay nagsimulang mag-venture sa urban agriculture noong Marso, 2020 sa tulong at suporta ng Department of Agriculture - Bureau of Plants Industry (DA-BPI).

Ani Feliciano, noong kasagsagan ng Covid-19 pandemic ay nagtanim sila ng iba't ibang uri green leafy vegetables at fruit bearing tree.

Lahat ng ani mula sa AKLAT Foundation ay ipinamimigay sa mga less fortunate na residente sa kanilang lugar lalo na sa mga empleyado na apektado ng pandemya at sungg sa Malabon.

Nang mag-normalized ang sitwasyon ay nagpatuloy sa pagtanim ng gulay ang mga opisyal at miyembro ng AKLAT Foundation.

Nais ng grupo na hikayatin ang lahat na magsimulang magtanim



Hawak ng Magsasakang Reporter at ni Marlon Feliciano ang malalaki at bilog na bunga ng upo na tanim ng AKLAT Foundation.

ng gulay at prutas para may makain.

Bukod sa ipinamimigay na aning gulay at prutas ng AKLAT Foundation ay nagsasagawa na rin sila ng libreng seminar para sa lahat ng nais matutong magtanim ng sariling pagkain.

Karamihan sa mga tinuturuan at nagpupunta ng personal sa AKLAT Foundation ay mga kabataang mag-aaral.

Bukod sa libreng training ay namimigay din ang AKLAT Foundation ng mga punla ng iba't ibang halaman para mahikayat ang iba na magtanim ng kanilang sariling pagkain.

"Nagbibigay kami ng mga kaalaman sa mga kabataan sa pamamagitan ng pagsasagawa ng iba't ibang educational activities on planting at pagkatapos ay nagbibigay kami ng punla para

sa mga nais na magpatuloy ng pagtanim" sabi pa ni Feliciano.

May tanim na kaibang variety ng upo ang AKLAT Foundation dahil bilog ang mga bunga at halos kasing laki ng kalabasa.

Bukod sa upo ay maraming tanim na iba't ibang variety ng lettuce, petchay, mustasa, talong, okra, kamatis, alugbati, mulberry, saging at marami pang iba sa loob ng AKLAT Foundation.

Sa mga nagnanais na magsadya sa lugar ay i-text lang ninyo si Marlon Feliciano sa kanyang number na 09225322652.

Samantala, sa mga nagnanais naman po na mapalalim pa ang kaalaman kaugnay ng natural at organic farming, pa-noorin po ninyo ang mga video tutorial ko sa a-

king Youtube Channel na ANG MAGSASAKANG REPORTER tungkol sa step by step na pagtanim, pag-aalaga at sikreto ng pagkakaroon ng magandang tanim na halaman.

Para sa iba pang tips at sikreto sa pagtanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman ay maari po kayong manood at makinig ng aking TV at Radio program na Masaganang Buhay tuwing Linggo, alas-7:00 hanggang alas-8:00 umaga sa OnePH Signal TV, Channel 1 ng TV-5. Mapapakinggan din po sa Radyo Singko 92.3 News FM.

Maaari rin kayong manood at mag-subscribe sa aking Youtube Channel na ANG MAGSASAKANG REPORTER para sa iba pang kaalaman at impormasyon sa pagtanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman sa pamamagitan ng organikong pamamaraan.

Tuwing araw ng Martes ay regular ninyong mababasa ang aking kolum dito sa **Pilipino Star Ngayon (PSN)** ng Star Group of Publications.

Sa mga tanong at komento ay maaari ninyo akong i-text, huwag po tawag, sa 09178675197. STAY SAFE, HAPPY FARMING, GOD BLESS US ALL.



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Corn futures drop to one-week low on US rains; wheat gains on tight supplies

SINGAPORE — Chicago corn futures slid for a third consecutive session on Monday to their lowest in one week, as forecasts for beneficial rain in the US Midwest weighed on prices.

Wheat rose around 1% with tightening global supplies supporting prices.

The most-active corn contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) Cvt1 fell 0.3% to \$5.86-1/4 a bushel, as of 0351 GMT, having dropped to its lowest since June 16 at \$5.75-1/2 a bushel earlier in the session.

Wheat added 0.9% to \$7.53 a bushel while soybeans were largely unchanged at 13.10-1/4 a bushel.

The latest weather projections pointed to significant rain in parts

of the Midwest this week, which analysts said could bolster the condition of crops before key growth stages this summer.

Lower demand for US agricultural products provided headwinds to prices.

The US Department of Agriculture on Friday said weekly export sales of corn totaled just 83,100 metric tons, near the low end of market estimates that ranged from zero to 800,000 metric tons.

Wheat export sales were reported at 123,900 metric tons and soybean export sales at 626,300 metric tons. That compares with trade expectations of 100,000 to 400,000 metric tons for wheat and 100,000 to 900,000 metric tons for soybeans.

India may cut wheat import duty if required, broadcaster ET Now reported on Friday citing the head of the state-run Food Corp. of India.

The wheat harvest in 2023 is at least 10% lower than the government's estimate, a leading trade body told Reuters, marking the second year of low production which could complicate New Delhi's effort to keep a lid on the staple's prices.

The return of rain to northern Europe should help wheat crops after a hot, dry end to spring and may avert dire yield losses seen in drought-hit Spain.

Big speculators trimmed their net short position in CBOT corn futures in the week to June 20, regulatory data released on Friday showed. — **Reuters**

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Corn drops to 1-week low on US rains, wheat rises 1%

SINGAPORE- Chicago corn futures slid for a third consecutive session on Monday to their lowest in one week, as forecasts for beneficial rain in the US Midwest weighed on prices.

Wheat rose around 1 percent with tightening global supplies supporting prices.

"Certainly, stress on the corn crop has moderated with some rain, less heat, and less direct sunlight," commodities research firm Hightower said in a report.

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- Reuters