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Marcos failed to solve agri woes – senator

BY RAYMOND AFRICA

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. has come up short of solid solutions to address problems besetting the agricultural sector a year after he appointed himself as secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), Senate minority leader Aquilino Pimentel III said yesterday.

Pimentel made the assessment as Marcos marks his first year in office on June 30.

"PBBM (President Bongbong Marcos) has not made headway in our problems in the agricultural sector. In sugar matters alone, his administration has had two controversies in less than one year in office," Pimentel said in a Viber message to the media.

In August last year, the Marcos administration's planned sugar importation under Sugar Order No. 4, which directs the importation of 300,000 metric tons of sugar, became controversial after the Sugar Regulatory Board convened and issued a resolution without the approval of Marcos.

Signatories to the questionable order were former Agriculture Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian, former SRA Administrator Hermenigildo Serafica, and former board member Roland Beltran. The three have since quit from their posts.

Again in February this year, Senate deputy minority leader Risa Hontiveros disclosed that the government allowed the entry of 440,000 MT of sugar ahead of the issuance of Sugar Order No. 6, with contracts to import awarded to three allegedly "favored" companies – All Asian Countertrade, Sucden Philippines Inc., and Edison Lee Marketing Corporation.

Hontiveros said the sugar importation was given the green light by DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban, who has said that he acted on the order of Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin.

Bersamin said a sugar order is not a requirement for government to import sugar.

The two messy sugar importations were investigated by the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee.

Pimentel said Marcos has also

failed to stop agricultural smuggling in the country, and was not able to lower the prices of agricultural products, including onion whose prices skyrocketed to more than P700 per kilo last December.

"Smuggling is still rampant. Prices of onions and other basic food items are still very expensive and beyond the means of ordinary citizens. Inflation is still a problem," he said.

Pimentel said Marcos should take the cue and appoint a full-time agriculture secretary who can focus on the job.

"I believe PBBM can be greatly helped by the appointment of a regular secretary of the Department of Agriculture," he said.

In an earlier interview, Marcos said he will remain as DA secretary until after the pressing issues on the agricultural sector have been completely addressed.

Marcos also bared that his Cabinet does not want him to appoint a new secretary for now amid his relentless efforts to make "some very important structural changes" in the DA.

Hontiveros said Marcos failed to come up with measures to alleviate the plight of farmers.

In an interview in Tabaco City, Albay, Hontiveros said help from the national government should be felt by the farmers, at least in terms of selling their produce, so they can earn more.

She said Marcos, as agriculture secretary, should find ways on how farmers can directly sell their crops to marketplaces or supermarkets, without a middleman.

"Middlemen ang nagdidikta ng presyo sa halip na ang magsasaka mismo ang mag-deliver sa palengke o supermart, or 'yung supermart o palengke ang bumili diretso para 'yung kita ay mapunta sa magsasaka at middle men ang nakikihati pa (Middlemen dictate the prices of agricultural products, instead of the farmers. Farmers should be the ones selling their produce directly to markets or supermarkets, or the markets and supermarkets buying directly from the farmers, thus doing away with middlemen)," Hontiveros said.

editorial

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Making the Philippines
an export powerhouse

THE Philippines would have a lot of catching up to do if it intends to become an “export powerhouse” by 2028, based on the government’s latest blueprint. President Marcos recently approved the new Philippine Export Development Plan, which details the strategies and interventions that the government would adopt to increase the shipments of Philippine-made products to other countries (See, “PHL exports boost seen as PBBM signs PEDP 2023-2028,” in the BUSINESSMIRROR, June 7, 2023). Under PEDP, the government wants to more than double the country’s earnings from the export of goods and services to more than \$240 billion from the nearly \$100 billion recorded last year, based on data from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

Preliminary data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) in January indicated that the country recorded earnings of \$78.83 billion from the export of merchandise goods in 2022. However, the country’s import payments last year, which reached \$137.15 billion, again outpaced export earnings. The trade deficit last year reached \$58.31 billion, nearly 40 percent wider than the \$42.22 billion recorded in 2021 and almost double the \$24.59 billion posted in 2020.

To significantly increase the country’s earnings from merchandise exports, the government will seek to remove constraints to production, develop a “strong innovative export ecosystem,” and strengthen the brand recognition of the Philippines in the global market. PEDP is expected to benefit four industry clusters—industrial machinery and transport; technology, media and telecommunications; health and life sciences cluster; and “modern basic needs of a resilient economy,” such as firms engaged in addressing food and energy security. The blueprint calls for strengthening the capacity of firms, particularly those that are already exporting goods and services.

To encourage more Philippine companies to join the so-called global value chain, the government would have to do more and spend more as this would require giving them the right tools and know-how to compete in the international market. For instance, companies that intend to export food are required to meet safety standards and other guidelines that seek to prevent the entry of transboundary animal diseases. Adhering to these standards can be costly, aside from the fact that companies would have to contend with increasing production costs, including logistics.

The Southeast Asian region is home to a number of export powerhouses, including Indonesia, the world’s biggest exporter of thermal coal, palm oil, refined tin and a major seller of nickel-based steel, copper, rubber and other resources. Vietnam, another neighbor in Southeast Asia, also relies on exports to prop up its GDP, which grew by 8.02 percent—the fastest pace annually since 1997, according to a Reuters report.

President Marcos recently said the export industry is crucial and indispensable to the country’s developmental strategy, as it holds the key to the government’s attaining national development targets. The administration still has five years to do what is necessary to pull up the country’s export figures, and it would do well for policymakers and stakeholders to get their act together and act with a sense of urgency to hit PEDP’s goals.

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STRONG AGRICULTURE SECTOR CAN CONTRIBUTE TO GDP — CONCEPCION



CONCEPCION

THE Philippines' agriculture industry can increase its contribution to the country's overall economic growth target, especially now that the private sector is playing an active role in developing the sector.

The appointment of key officials is also helping raise confidence in the sector's future.

GoNegosyo founder Joey Concepcion said this following President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s statement that the agriculture sector grew by 2.2 percent in the first quarter of 2023, contributing 9.1 percent to the country's gross domestic product or GDP.

"This is good news," said Concepcion. "And once the recommendations of the private sector are considered, agri will become an even bigger contributor to the GDP of the country," he said.

These recommendations are contained in the private sector's Kapatid Angat Lahat sa Agri Program, or KALAP, and cover the challenge of achieving economies of scale, improving farmers' access to credit, and the digitalization of the agriculture industry.

Among KALAP's recommendations is to intensify farm clustering, restructuring agriculture credit facilities to support inclusive business models, and the promotion of farm management information systems into commodity industries.

These recommendations are hoped to integrate small farmers into the value chain of the large agri companies, helping the country's agriculture industry become more productive, profitable, sustainable and globally competitive.

Concepcion said the President's choices for key people in the agriculture sector are helping buoy optimism in the sector's future.

"The President has appointed three key people: National Irrigation Administration head Eddie Guillen, DA Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian, and Department of Agrarian Reform Sec. Conrado Estrella III.

"The private sector, he said, is confident to work with these officials, as they are aligned with the President's aim to expand access to markets and related enterprises by leveraging on private sector investments.

"When he was Mayor of Piddig, Engr. Guillen successfully worked with Universal Leaf Phils. and transformed the tobacco industry so well that we are now a leading exporter," said Concepcion.

Appointing a dedicated official like Usec. Sebastian to head the Rice Industry Development Program proves how committed the President is to our rice farmers, and Sec. Estrella will play one of the most important roles as he will have the task of helping us achieve economies of scale in agriculture by putting order to the various land issues that are getting in the way of consolidating farm lands," he said.

"The President mentioned that the country's economy will not prosper unless our agriculture sector does well. This is so true in every respect as a strong agriculture sector means more jobs, food security and a healthier workforce," said Concepcion.



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PBBM 'di nasolusyunan krisis sa agri - Pimentel

Sa unang taon sa termino ay wala umanong umusad o naresolbang problema si Pangulong Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. sa sektor ng agrikultura.

Sa katunayan niya'y, sa loob ng isang taon, dalawang beses na nagkaroon ng kontrobersya sa isyu ng sugar smuggling.

"PBBM has not made any headway in our problems in the agricultural sector. In sugar matters alone, his administration has had two controversies in less one year in office," sabi ni Sen. Koko Pimentel sa isang statement.

Bukod sa talamak ang

smuggling ng produktong agrikultura, hindi rin maresolba ang mataas na presyo ng sibuyas at iba pang food item na hindi na makayang bilhin ng ordinaryong mamamayan.

Aniya, maresolba ang lahat ng problemang ito kung magtatalaga ang

Pangulo ng permanenteng kalihim ng Department of Agriculture (DA).

"I believe PBBM can be greatly helped by the appointment of a regular Secretary of the Department of Agriculture," saad pa ni Pimentel. **(Dindo Matining)**

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Cheap rice. People queue to buy rice priced at P25 a kilo being sold at the Kadiwa store of the Department of Agriculture in Quezon City, with each customer allowed to buy just five kilos.

PHOTO BY ROLLY SALVADOR



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DA revokes poultry ban from Belgium

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has lifted the temporary ban of poultry products from Belgium.

The lifting of the ban via DA Memorandum Order 44 series of 2023 was signed by Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban last Friday after Belgium provided evidence that it has contained its bird flu incidence.

The issuance allows the importation of domestic and wild birds and their products including poultry meat, day old chicks, eggs and semen originating from Belgium.

Imports, however, must comply with existing importation rules of the DA.

The DA issued the temporary ban of imported poultry products from Belgium last February after the Animal and Plant Health Policy by Federal Public Service - Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment in Brussels notified the World Organization for Animal Health on January 26, that there was an outbreak of H5N1 High Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Wervik, West-Vlaanderen affecting domestic birds.

Based on data from the Bureau of Animal Industry, Belgium supplied the Philippines last year with a total of 10.68 million kg. of chicken, equivalent to 2.6 percent of the 411.07 million kg. total chicken imports in 2022. - *Jed Macapagal*



Sugar producers buck DOF plan on liberalization

By DANESSA RIVERA

Sugar producers are bucking the plan of Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno to further liberalize the sugar industry by allowing industrial users to import their own requirements to mitigate price increases amid the push to tax sugary food and beverages.

In a statement yesterday, the United Sugar Producers Federation (UNIFED) made an appeal to President Marcos to

ignore calls to allow industrial users to directly import their sugar needs as a concession to plans of increasing taxes on sweetened beverages.

UNIFED president Manuel Lamata said they are "totally against the move of Diokno to liberalize importation in favor of a few industrial users."

"He (Diokno) wants to further enrich these industrial users, even knowing that this move will kill the more than five million Filipinos who are

dependent on the sugar industry," he said.

Meanwhile, National Federation of Sugarcane Planters (NFSP) NFSP president Enrique Rojas also strongly opposed the direct sugar importation by beverage manufacturers as this will "destroy livelihood of thousands of marginal sugarcane farmers, will not result to lower prices of sweetened beverages and will simply further enrich these companies."

"Allowing manufacturers of sweetened beverages to directly import sugar will wreak havoc on the long-established government regulations over the sugar industry, and it will further destabilize the livelihood of thousands of marginal sugarcane farmers," Rojas said in another statement.

The DOF is looking to expand the base for sugar products by increasing the tax rate under the TRAIN Law to P12 per liter regardless of the type

of sweetener used.

As a compromise to the higher tax, Diokno wants to allow manufacturers to bring in their own sugar supply using the Rice Tariffication Law as model for all agricultural products covered by non-tariff barriers.

Currently, importers can only import sugar if the **Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA)** issues an order allowing them to do so.

UNIFED said it is hoping that the President will not endorse this plan, which was never even done in consultation with the sugar industry.

"We know President Marcos' heart is with and for the farmers as he has told us so, and we are calling for his intervention on this matter," Lamata said, adding that the plan to raise taxes and liberalize the sugar industry is clearly "anti-farmer," given its ill effects on sugar farmers.

Earlier, the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) bucked the proposal to further liberalize the domestic sugar industry, saying more imports will not lower the current high prices nor cushion the impact of taxes on sugary beverages.

"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 in June 30, 2021, to P90 June 2022 and, more recently, sugar prices have gone up to P110 per kilo," KMP chairman Danilo Ramos said.

The peasant group said majority of sugar farmers and workers in the sugar industry stand to suffer the same plight of rice farmers affected by rice tariffication once full liberalization of the sugar industry takes effect. — With Gilbert Bayoran, Romina Cabrera



Agri sector can boost economy – Concepcion

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

GO Negosyo founder Jose Ma. "Joey" Concepcion 3rd on Tuesday expressed optimism that the agriculture sector "will become an even bigger contributor" to the country's economy with the private sector's help.

He made the statement after President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said that the agriculture sector grew by 2.2 percent in the first quarter of 2023, contributing 9.1 percent to the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

Concepcion said the country's agriculture industry could increase its contribution, especially now that the private sector is playing an active role in developing the sector.

He also cited the appointment of key officials, which, he said, helps raise confidence in the agriculture sector's future.

"This is good news. And once the recommendations of the private sector are considered, agri will become an even bigger contributor to the GDP of the country," Concepcion

said.

These recommendations, he said, are contained in the private sector's Kapatid Angat Lahat sa Agri Program (Kalap), and cover the challenges of achieving economies of scale, improving farmers' access to credit and the digitalization of the agriculture industry.

"Among Kalap's recommendations are to intensify farm clustering, restructuring agriculture credit facilities to support inclusive business models, and [promoting] farm management information systems into commodity industries," Concepcion said.

"These recommendations are hoped to integrate small farmers into the value chain of the large agri companies, helping the country's ag-

riculture industry become more productive, profitable, sustainable and globally competitive," he added.

Concepcion said that the President's choices for key people in the agriculture sector helped buoy optimism in the sector's future.

He cited National Irrigation Administration head Eddie Guillen, Agriculture Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian and Agrarian Reform Secretary Conrado Estrella 3rd.

The private sector is confident in working with these officials as they are aligned with the President's aim to expand access to markets and related enterprises by leveraging on private sector investments, Concepcion said.

He said that Guillen, when he was mayor of Piddig, "successfully worked with Universal Leaf Phils. and transformed the tobacco industry so well that we are now a leading exporter."

"Appointing a dedicated official like [Undersecretary] Sebastian to head the Rice Industry Development Program proves how committed the President is to our rice farmers, and [Secretary] Estrella

will play one of the most important roles as he will have the task of helping us achieve economies of scale in agriculture by putting order to the various land issues that are getting in the way of consolidating farm lands," Concepcion said.

"The President mentioned that the country's economy will not prosper unless our agriculture sector does well. This is so true in every respect as a strong agriculture sector means more jobs, food security and a healthier workforce," he added.

In his speech during the 125th founding anniversary of the Department of Agriculture, the President said the agency would continue to come up with interventions to develop agri-fishery practices, improve the competitiveness of agri-fishery products, and boost the income of Filipino farmers and fisherfolk.

"Let us continue to engage in collaborative dialogue with experts, researchers, [and] rural workers to solve the roots of the lingering problems," Marcos said.



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DA sees more agri tie-ups with Russian companies

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) and Russian companies are expected to forge partnerships that could benefit the country's agriculture industry.

The DA took part in the business mission of Russian companies organized by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation and Agro-export Center recently.

"Philippine agriculture exports to Russia have grown by 26 percent from 2018 to 2021," DA Undersecretary Agnes Catherine Miranda said.

Emerging agricultural products of the Philippines, including pili, calamari, carrageenan, and coconut abaca.

Miranda also mentioned that there are excellent capital investment opportunities in cold storage and processing facilities for fresh and value-added farm products throughout the islands.

Moreover, Bureau of Animal Industry Director Paul Limson presented the Philippine guidelines for ensuring food and animal health safety during accreditation procedures for exporting meat and meat products to the country.

Top agriculture exports to Russia are desiccated coconuts, carrageenan, banana chips, coconut milk and Cavendish banana. *Raadee S. Sausa*



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Ban on poultry imports from Belgium lifted

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it lifted a ban on poultry meat and products from Belgium, after that country was declared free from H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI).

Senior Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban lifted the ban via a memorandum order dated June 23. The order covers shipments of domestic and wild birds and their products, including poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs and semen.

"Based on the evaluation of the Department of Agriculture, the risk of contamination from importing live poultry, poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs and semen is negligible," according to the order.

The DA basis for lifting bans relies on official self-declaration reports sent to the World Organization for Animal Health and supporting documents submitted by Belgium's Federal Agency for Safety of the Food Chain.

The ban was imposed on Feb. 8 after the Belgian national laboratory confirmed an HPAI outbreak in Wervik, in the province of West Flanders.

All of the 14 outbreaks have been reported to have ended, according to the order.

"All import transactions of the above commodities shall be in accordance with existing rules and regulations of the Department of Agriculture," according to the order.

Jerome D. Ong, vice-president of the Philippine Association of Meat Processors, Inc. said the order allows the entry of "more safe raw materials" which will "help us ensure uninterrupted supply and stable prices of processed meats."

Jesus C. Cham, president emeritus of the Meat Importers and Traders Association, said any expansion of the list of approved source countries will help improve supply. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

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Labor, agri key items for PH under IPEF

THE United States remains supportive of the Philippines' bid to reauthorize the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) as well as a critical minerals agreement but pushes for a number of areas in its next round of negotiations of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF).

Sarah Bianchi, deputy US Trade Representative, identified a broad range of sectors that it is pursuing with the Philippines under IPEF, from labor to agriculture, to good regulatory practices.

With a free trade agreement in the back burner, the US utilizes the Trade and Investment Facilitation Agreement (TIFA) in strengthening its relationship with

the Philippines.

"Our focus really is on IPEF and the Philippines is a big part of that. We have TIFA and we'll probably do a meeting here on that next year," Bianchi told reporters yesterday.

The Philippines has also been pushing for the inclusion of garments and shoes in the GSP, once allowed to reauthorize.

"I am hopeful. We are certainly supportive on the reauthorization of GSP. We are trying to send a really strong message that (US) Congress needs to get this accomplished. It's really an important program," Bianchi said.

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LABOR

The Philippines has earlier expressed interest to pursue a critical minerals agreement with the US similar to what it has signed with Japan.

Bianchi said the US is looking forward to a partnership with the Philippines on critical minerals

though no deal is on the table yet.

"We are very focused on critical minerals given President Biden's ambitious goals on electric vehicles, but also beyond that. A lot of the energy transformation will require critical minerals and I have every reason to expect that

the Philippines will be on the frontline of that transition. That's a great opportunity in this country. We look forward to partnering... there isn't anything on the table right now in terms of doing something like we did in Japan, but the partnership between the

United States and the Philippines is very strong," Bianchi added.

Bianchi said the Philippines is a strong partner in the IPEF which is aimed to be completed before the end of the year.

The next round of negotiations is set next month in July. - Irma Isip



66 areas likely to bear brunt of El Niño

By ELLALYN DE VERA RUIZ

Several provinces may experience dry conditions, dry spells, or drought by the fourth quarter of 2023 due to the looming El Niño climate phenomenon, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said on Tuesday, June 27.

According to PAGASA's climate outlook, dry conditions may prevail in 28 provinces, while dry spell may affect 36 areas by the end of the year.

It defines a dry condition as two consecutive months of "below-normal" rainfall, and a dry spell as three successive months of below-normal rainfall or two consecutive months of "way below-normal" rainfall.

Two provinces may experience drought—a prolonged dry condition characterized by five consecutive months of "below-normal" rainfall or three consecutive months of "way below-normal" rainfall.

Dry conditions

Based on PAGASA's forecast, the provinces that may experience dry conditions are the following:

- Luzon: Abra, Batanes, Cagayan
- Visayas: Negros Occidental,

Negros Oriental, Bohol, Cebu, Siquijor

- Mindanao: Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, Bukidnon, Camiguin, Lanao del Norte, Misamis Occidental, Misamis Oriental, Davao de Oro, Davao del Sur, Davao Occidental, Davao Oriental, South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Basilan, Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, Tawi-tawi

Dry spell

Meanwhile, the following areas are likely to be affected by a dry spell:

- Luzon: Abra, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, Apayao, Mountain Province, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales, Metro Manila, Batangas, Laguna, Rizal, Quezon, Marikina, Occidental Mindoro, Oriental Mindoro, Romblon, Palawan, Spratly Islands, Camarines Sur, Catanduanes
- Visayas: Antique, Guimaras, Iloilo, Leyte

Drought

PAGASA said Southern Leyte and Camarines Norte may experience drought by the end of December.

El Niño advisory

On Tuesday, PAGASA said an "El Niño condition" is already present in the tropical Pacific and will last through the first quarter of 2024.

The El Niño or warm phase is characterized by unusually warmer-than-average sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific.

However, it explained that there are still some parameters that need to be satisfied before it can declare the start of El Niño in the country.

PAGASA said that it will issue its first El Niño advisory "as appropriate."

According to PAGASA, El Niño increases the likelihood of below-normal rainfall conditions, which could have negative effects, such as dry spells and droughts, in some parts of the country between the fourth quarter of 2023 and the first quarter of 2024.

However, it noted that the western parts of the country may still receive "above-normal" rainfall during the southwest monsoon or "habagat" season from May to September, before the predicted impact of El Niño from October to December.

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UNIFED nixes DOF proposal for direct sugar importation

AFEDERATION of sugar producers has appealed to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to set aside calls to allow industrial users to directly import their sugar needs as a concession to plans of increasing taxes on sugar sweetened beverages.

United Sugar Producers Federation (UNIFED) President Manuel Lamata said they are "totally against the move to liberalize importation in favor of a few industrial users."

"He [Department of Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno] wants to further enrich these industrial users even knowing that this move will kill the more than 5 million Filipinos who are dependent on the sugar industry," Lamata said.

He added Diokno is reportedly bent only on raising taxes without thinking of its effects on the sugar farmers. "Is Diokno prepared to give livelihood to these five million industry stakeholders?" Lamata added.

"The Finance Secretary is ill-advised," Lamata argued, adding that beyond the goal of raising taxes, "Diokno should also think of the consumers or the general public who will also be affected as these industrial users will pass on the additional taxes to their consumers."

UNIFED is hoping that the President will not favor this plan, which was proposed sans consultation with the sugar industry.

"We know President Marcos' heart is with and for the farmers as he has told us so, and we are calling for his intervention on this matter," Lamata said.

"Diokno is clearly anti-farmer," he added.

Earlier, a consumer advocacy group echoed the opposition of sugar millers on Diokno's recommendation to levy additional taxes on high-sodium food products and sugary drinks.

The group calling itself "Bantay Palengke" (market guardians) issued a statement over the weekend expressing opposition to the recommendation for new taxes.

According to the group, "any additional tax is an additional price burden."

"We know for a fact that many poor Filipinos rely on cheap instant noodles and canned goods due to our current economic situation," the statement quoted its convener Lester Codog as saying.

"How will they manage their meager budget if we will add another P10 on every 100 grams of affordable products that can help them ease hunger?" Codog said.

A report on June 21 by state-run news outfit Philippine News Agency quoted Diokno

as saying the Department of Finance (DOF) and the Department of Health (DOH) "are jointly pursuing a junk food and sweetened beverage tax as a proactive measure to tackle diabetes, obesity and non-communicable diseases related to poor diet."

Health issues

ACCORDING to the report, the DOF plans to impose a P10 per 100 grams or P10 per 100 milliliters tax on pre-packaged foods lacking nutritional value.

Diokno also proposed to impose a P10-tax per 100 grams or P10 per 100 milliliters of prepackaged food products that either have high salt or high sugar content.

But the group "Bantay Palengke" said while the health issues resulting from the consumption of junk food are unarguable, these, however, tide over many Filipinos from hunger.

According to Codog, "there are other ways to approach this problem without adding another burden to our people."

"As for the need for revenue, we suggest that the government address the inefficiency in our tax collection first and plug the leaks in revenue collection," he added.

"Bantay Palengke" is also looking to propose ways for the government to subsidize healthy food, such as fruits and vegetables so poor people will be able to afford more nutritious food.

"This could be a win-win situation for both our farmers and consumers, for the management of food prices and for health," the group's statement read. "It should be clarified, however, that the subsidies should come first before we consider any new tax on the poor's staple food."

Sugar millers

MEANWHILE, Diokno's proposal to increase next year the sweetened beverage tax to P12 regardless of the type of sweetener used has met opposition from the Philippine Sugar Millers Association (PSMA).

"Instead of focusing on increasing tax rates, [the] DOF should prioritize the enforcement of existing laws to ensure compliance and fairness," PSMA Executive Director Jesus Barrera was quoted in a statement the group issued on June 23.

The additional revenue can be realized from the thorough enforcement of existing tax laws, Barrera said. **Raadee S. Sausa**



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PHL coconut exporters generate \$6.90M in initial sales from Bangkok trade show

COCONUT exporters booked \$6.90 million worth of initial sales from the five-day THAIFEX-Anuga Asia 2023 trade exhibition in Bangkok in late May, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said.

The DTI said in a statement on Tuesday that nine Philippine coconut exporters participated in the trade show — AG Pacific Nutri-ceuticals Corp., Ahya Coco Organic Food Manufacturing Corp., Amazing Foods Corp., Amparitas Food Products Manufacturing, Cocop-lus Aquarian Development Corp., Dignity Products & Services, Inc., Pasciolco Agri Ventures, Wellness Care International Corp., and Vegetari Vegetarian Products.

Two industry associations also exhibited at the trade show — the Virgin Co-

conut Oil Producers and Traders Association of the Philippines, Inc. and United Coconut Association of the Philippines, Inc.

Trade Assistant Secretary Glenn G. Peñaranda said the trade show has “served as a gateway to expanding horizons and enhancing the nation’s standing as a dependable and premium source of coconut products.”

The trade show delegation was organized by the DTI’s Export Marketing Bureau and the International Trade Center, in coordination with the Philippine Trade and Investment Center-Bangkok and Philippine Food Processors and Exporters Organization, Inc. The participants exhibited at the Coconut Philippines Pavilion. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochoa**



FREPIK



Corn, soybeans fall as dry weather woes ease; wheat down 1.1%

SINGAPORE- Chicago soybean futures slid nearly 1 percent on Tuesday, while corn lost ground as expectations of much-needed rains in parts of the US Midwest eased concerns over dry weather which has threatened yields.

Wheat fell for a third consecutive session.

"There is some relief for corn and soybean crops with rains over the weekend in the US Midwest," said one Singapore-based grains trader. "More rains is expected next week which should help crops recover."

The most-active corn contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) lost 0.2 percent to \$5.87-1/4 a bushel. Wheat fell 1.1 percent to \$7.30-1/2 a bushel and soybeans gave up 0.9 percent to \$13.11-1/4 a bushel.

The condition of US corn and soybean crops deteriorated to the worst in decades, US government data showed on Monday, as major producing areas missed out on

much-needed rains.

The weekly crop progress report from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) showed that good-to-excellent ratings for corn stood at 50 percent as of June 25, below the average of 11 estimates given by analysts in a Reuters poll that had predicted 52 percent.

Just 51 percent of soybeans were in good-to-excellent condition, in line with analyst expectations. The ratings for both corn and soybeans were the lowest for this time of the year since 1988, the year of a historic crop-wasting drought.

In the wheat market, focus is on supplies from the Black Sea region after concerns about political stability in major exporter Russia eased and prices fell from multi-month highs.

An end to the Black Sea grains deal would hit the Horn of Africa hard, aid officials said on Monday, warning that another hike in food prices would add to the tens of

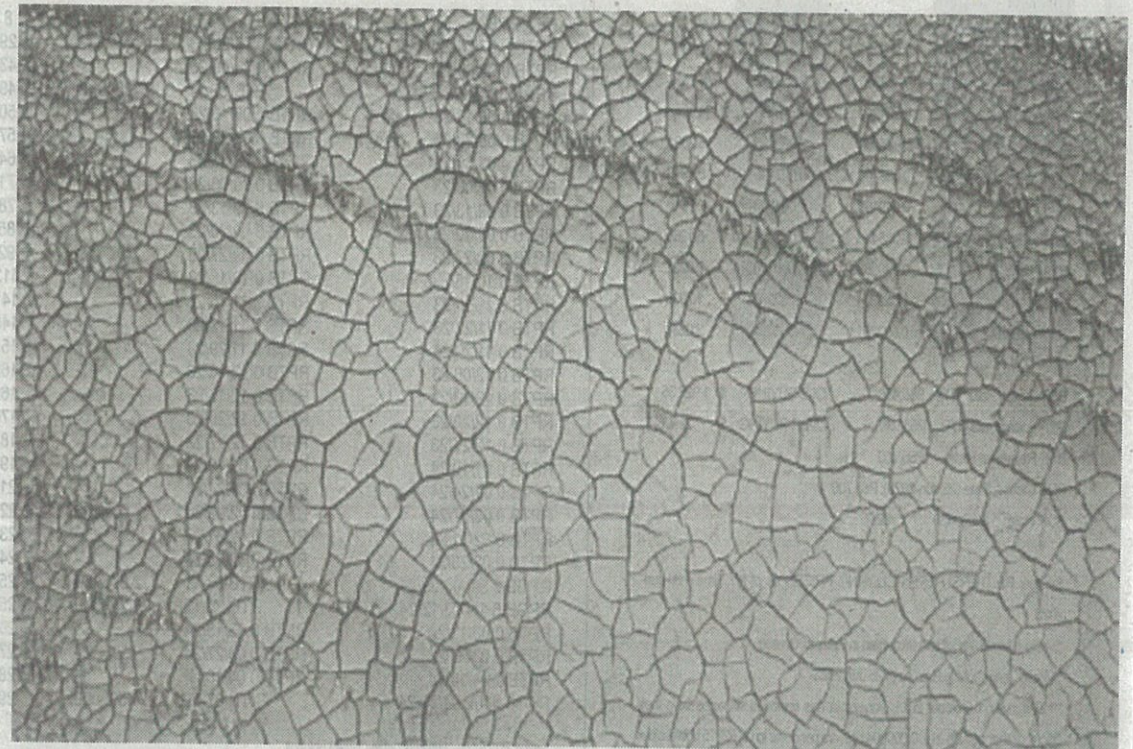
millions of people facing hunger.

Moscow has been threatening to walk away from the deal known as the Black Sea grain initiative - brokered by the United Nations and Turkey in July last year - if obstacles to its own grain and fertilizer shipments are not removed. A Ukrainian envoy has said he was 99.9 percent certain Russia would quit when it comes up for renewal on July 18.

Ukraine's grain exports for the 2022/23 July-June season stood at 48.4 million tons as of June 26, four days before the end of the marketing year, agriculture ministry data showed on Monday.

Russian wheat export prices rose for the second week in a row last week along with global markets, while the pace of exports also accelerated, analysts said.

Commodity funds were net buyers of CBOT corn, soybean, soymeal and soyoil futures contracts on Monday, and net sellers of wheat, traders said. -Reuters



A corn field in Les-Rues-des-Vignes near Cambrai as the risk of drought continues across France. (Reuters Photo)