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Shellfish Bulletin No. 16: Series of 2023 (June 27, 2023)

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*Photo:* P25 per kilo rice

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IT'S certainly heartening to know that the Philippines, an agricultural Southeast Asian country, has sufficient supply of rice amid the price surge in the Filipinos' staple food.

In a rice-eating country, like the Philippines where the people, particularly farmers and fishermen, eat three times day, any rice shortage, without doubt, is bad news.

The Department of Agricultural (DA)s headed by President Marcos himself said the rice supply is enough to meet the Filipino's food requirements in the third quarter.

DA Senior Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian said the carry-over stock of 1.8 million tons milled rice and import arrival of 1.8 million metric tons are enough to fill in the demand.

By the end of this month, the stock available will be good for more than two months, in addition to the incoming supply (new harvest) and import arrivals in the coming months.

Note that Sebastian is head of DA's multi-pronged Masagana Rice Industry Program (MRIP).

At the same time, the articulate agriculture executive attributed the current movement in rice prices in the Philippines to the high cost of production locally and globally.

But various sectors, including industry stakeholders, see the prices of the commodity to stabilize with the expected bountiful harvest for the January-June planting season.

We believe that the government, through concerned offices and agencies, has concrete plan of action to address the many problems confronting the rice farmers and consumers.

It is only just and proper for the authorities to avert rice shortage in the country.





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## DA eyes to launch supply-demand database

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

The **Department of Agriculture (DA)** is looking to launch this year a grounded and transparent supply-demand database to aid the agency in policy making and planning in the sector.

DA Undersecretary for policy, planning, and regulations Mercedita Sombilla said her office is creating a dashboard containing demand and supply projections that will be made accessible to the public.

She said the demand and supply dashboard would guide the DA in making decisions.

"I think what we really need is a transparent, well-grounded data and information that would convince stakeholders that what DA is really doing is not really just because we want it done but because it is all based on what is happening," Sombilla said.

The development of the project was initiated by the DA last year in response to President Marcos' call for an assessment of the supply and demand dynamics of agricultural commodities.

"When I first started there about a year ago and the President was asking for supply and demand situation of the commodities, I could not get

any from the policy, planning and regulations office department. The worse is that each of the operating units will give me different data of different periods. I told myself this is a disaster," Sombilla said.

"Now, I made a memorandum instructing all operating units for information data that they collect on their respective crops or commodities to be cleared in my office. It is now my office that has to produce the official demand and supply projections," she said.

The DA office is eyeing to roll out this database in the next quarter. It is working with the Korean gov-

ernment to gather all the necessary information related to agriculture that will be used in decision-making and for data analytics, the undersecretary said.

"I'm hoping by the third quarter I will have already an operating dashboard for supply and demand, for prices, and inputs for the public," Sombilla said.

She pointed out that the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) had experienced delays in reporting data, making it unsuitable for the agency to use as projections for planning purposes.

"If you notice, the statistics agency usually has delayed reporting. Now,

at DA, we have the advantage of having our regional offices that can estimate what is already on the ground," Sombilla said.

By utilizing its regional offices, the DA can get initial information on the areas planted and expected yields that will allow it to make estimates for the succeeding period, especially in instances when natural calamities strike a certain area.

"...we will already more or less know how much is going to be destroyed, how much is not going to be harvested and how much additional imports we should be getting," Sombilla said.



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**Shellfish Bulletin No. 16**  
Series of 2023  
27 June 2023

Shellfishes collected and tested from coastal waters of **Dauis and Tagbilaran City in Bohol**; and **Dumanquilas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur** are still positive for Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP) or toxic red tide that is beyond the regulatory limit.

Do not harvest  
Do not sell  
Do not buy  
Do not eat

Dumanquilas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur

Coastal waters of Dauis and Tagbilaran City in Bohol

All types of shellfish and *Acces sp.* or alamang gathered from the areas shown above are **NOT SAFE** for human consumption. Fish, squids, shrimps, and crabs are safe for human consumption provided that they are fresh and washed thoroughly, and internal organs such as gills and intestines are removed before cooking.

The following areas continue to be **FREE** from toxic red tide: coastal waters of Cavite, Las Piñas, Parañaque, Navotas, Bulacan, and Bataan (Mariveles, Limay, Orion, Pilar, Balanga, Hermosa, Orani, Abucay, and Samal) in Manila Bay; mariculture areas in Infanta, coastal waters of Bolinao, Anda, Alaminos, Sual, and Wawa, Bani in Pangasinan; mariculture areas in Rosario, and Sto. Tomas in La Union; coastal waters of Pampanga; Masinloc Bay in Zambales; Pagbilao Bay, Pagbilao, and coastal waters of Welay, Padre Burgos in Quezon; Honda, and Puerto Princesa Bays, Puerto Princesa City, and coastal waters of Inner Malampaya Sound, Taytay in Palawan; coastal waters of Milagros and Mandaon in Masbate; Sorsogon Bay, and Juag Lagoon, Matnog in Sorsogon; coastal waters of Gigantes Islands, Carles, and Borongan, San Dionisio in Iloilo; coastal waters of Roxas City, Panay, President Roxas, and Pilar in Capiz; Sapian Bay (Ivisan and Sapian in Capiz; Mambucalao and Camandi, Batan in Aklan); coastal waters of Altavas, Batan, and New Washington in Batan Bay, Aldan; coastal waters of E.B. Magalona, Talisay City, Silay City, Bacolod City, Hinigaran, and Victorias City in Negros Occidental; Tambobo, and Silt Bays, Siaton; and Bais Bay, Bais City in Negros Oriental; coastal waters of Daram, and Zumarraga, Combututay, Irong-Irong, Maqueda, and Villareal Bays in Samar; coastal waters of Guiuan in Eastern Samar; coastal waters of Leyte, Calubian, Ormoc, Sogod, Carigara Bay, and Cancabato Bay, Tacloban City in Leyte; coastal waters of Biliran Island; Tantanang Bay in Zamboanga Sibugay; Murcielagos Bay in Zamboanga del Norte and (Sapang Dalaga, and Ballangao) in Misamis Occidental; Pangulit Bay, Tangub City, and coastal waters of Ozamiz City in Misamis Occidental; coastal waters of Baroy in Lanao del Norte; Taguines Lagoon, Benoni, Mahinog in Camiguin; Balite, and Pujada Bays, Mati City in Davao Oriental; Malalag Bay in Davao Occidental and Davao del Sur; coastal waters of Nasipit in Agusan del Norte; Litalit Bay in Surigao del Norte; and coastal waters of Hinatuan, Cortes, and Bislig Bay in Surigao del Sur. Moreover, San Pedro Bay in Samar; and Lianga Bay in Surigao del Sur are now free of the toxic red tide.

**ISIDRO M. VELAYO, JR., MDM**  
Officer-in-Charge

P.S. June 29, 2023



# MANILA BULLETIN

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**₱25 PER KILO RICE** — Residents line up at the Kadiwa Center at the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** head office on Elliptical Road in Quezon City to purchase rice sold for ₱25 per kilo on Tuesday, June 27, 2023. (Mark Balmores)





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## PHL pork imports expected to fall this year as poultry shipments rise

THE Philippines is expected to import less pork this year amid a broader global downtrend in trade, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

In a report, the FAO projected the global trade of pork to dip to 11.4 million metric tons (MT) in 2023 from the 11.5 million MT estimated last year.

The FAO said the supply of exportable quantities in producing countries has declined as supply levels rise in East Asia.

"The latest forecasts point to reduced pig meat imports by the US, Japan, Mexico, Vietnam and the Philippines, with likely higher imports by the UK, China, Canada, Uruguay and the Republic of Korea," the FAO said.

The FAO projected Philippine pork imports this year at 489,000 MT, down 2.02%. Philippine pork production is expected to increase 3.62% to 1.26 million MT, upgraded from an earlier estimate of 1.22 million MT.

"Similarly, domestic production recoveries could lead to subdued imports by Vietnam and the Philippines, even though the continuation until 31 December 2023 of the reduced import tariff in the latter may encourage more imports."

Hog production rose 5.1% to 437.99 thousand MT, on a live-weight basis, in the first quarter, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

The Bureau of Animal Industry tallied pork imports of 114.8

million kilos, accounting for 43.2% of all meat imports.

The executive order (EO) setting the current tariff rates for imported pork is set to expire by the end of 2023, which would bring about a reversion to the previous tariff rates of 30% within the minimum access volume quota and 40% for shipments in excess of the quota.

At present, the pork tariff rate is 15% for in-quota imports, and 25% for out-of-quota following EOs issued by presidents Rodrigo R. Duterte and Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.

Meanwhile, the FAO forecast global poultry meat trade to rise 1% to 16.4 million MT this year, driven by expanded shipments

to Asia, Central America, and the Caribbean.

"Significant increases in poultry meat imports are expected for China, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the European Union and South Africa, as well as in the Philippines, Canada and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, due to growing internal demand amid tight domestic supplies, high prices, more active food services sales and relative affordability," it said.

The FAO did not provide a specific projection for the Philippines.

First-quarter poultry production in the Philippines rose 3.3% to 470.21 thousand MT while imports amounted to 102.7 million kilos. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**



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## Palay average farmgate price up 9.1% in April

THE average farmgate price of palay or unmilled rice rose 9.1% year on year to P18.79 per kilogram in April, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

"All regions continued to record positive annual increments in the average farmgate price of palay in April 2023," the PSA said in its report.

The highest farmgate price of palay was recorded in Northern Mindanao at P20.77. The lowest was the Eastern Visayas price of P16.09.

"The highest year-on-year increase was registered in Northern Mindanao at 14.6%, while the lowest annual increment was noted in Cordillera Administrative Region at 3.7%," the PSA said.

The average farmgate price in the Ilocos Region rose 7.7% year on year to P20.40 per kilo.

The Central Luzon farmgate price during the period grew 11% to P20.02.

The farmgate price rose 8.3% to P19.53 in the Western Visayas.

The farmgate price in the Central Visayas rose 13.5% year on year to P19.52.

On a month-on-month basis, the PSA said that the average farmgate price rose 1.2% from P18.57 in March.

"Month on month, 12 regions recorded higher average farmgate prices, while CAR, Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, and Eastern Visayas posted decreases for this month," the PSA said.

Jayson H. Cainglet, executive director of Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG), estimated the current palay farmgate price at between P21 and P24 per kilo.

"As long as imports don't compete with harvest season, the millers are encouraged to buy palay, even some (local government units)," he

said. The peak of the harvest is March to May and September to October.

Mr. Cainglet said that SINAG affiliated millers signed a memorandum of agreement with the **National Food Authority (NFA)** in October, committing to buy palay at a base price of P21 per kilo.

He said with many buying at P21 per kilo, other traders and millers followed suit.

Under Republic Act No. 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law, the NFA has been stripped of its power to import rice and has been reduced to maintaining an emergency inventory from domestically produced rice.

In the five months to May, the Philippines has imported 1.62 million metric tons of rice, up 7.69% from a year earlier. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**



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#### NEWS BRIEFS

##### **DA reports increase in rice production**

The Philippines has enough rice to meet the daily needs of Filipinos for the third quarter of 2023 despite the rising prices of the country's staple food, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA). Undersecretary Leo Sebastian said in a statement that there was a 6 percent production increase from January to June, based on the Philippine Rice Information System. Palay production would thus reach 8.605 million metric tons (MT) in 2023, equivalent to 5.6 million MT of milled rice, higher than the 8.153 million MT in 2022. According to him, this volume, plus the carry-over stock of 1.8 million MT and augmented by the importation of 1.8 million MT would be enough to meet the demand and consumption of seven million MT from January to June. Rice prices in Metro Manila, however, increased by about P2 per kilogram but Sebastian said this was due to the high cost of production locally and globally. "We expect this to stabilize," he said. —NESTOR CORRALES



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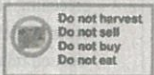
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Dumanquillas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur

Coastal waters of Dauis and Tagbilaran City in Bohol

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**ISIDRO M. VELAYO, JR., MDM**  
Officer-in-Charge

(PDI – June 29, 2023)



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PH SUPPLY AND DEMAND DATABASE

## AGRICULTURE DEP'T READIES 'DASHBOARD' TO AID POLICYMAKING

**By Jordeene B. Lagare**  
@jordeenelagare

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is developing a transparent and well-grounded database that will guide the agency in the decision-making process involving the essential agriculture sector, a ranking official said.

Agriculture Undersecretary

Mercedita Sombilla said her unit, the DA's Policy, Planning and Regulations office, is coming up with a dashboard that will enable public and industry stakeholders to access various data such as supply, demand, price, production and import volumes.

"I'm hoping by the third quarter I will already have an operating dashboard for supply and

demand, for prices, and inputs for the public," Sombilla said.

The DA would be able to come up with projections for a specific period and make the necessary adjustments, if any, once the official data from the Philippine Statistics Authority comes out.

"I think what we really need is transparent, well-grounded data and information that would

convince stakeholders that what DA is really doing is not really just because we want it done but because it is all based on what is happening," she added.

DA is seeking assistance from the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, World Bank and Asia Pacific College to set up the database and train employees. INQ





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## Be wary of jellyfish, BFAR warns public

THE Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) in Central Visayas warned the public to avoid being stung by jellyfish following the death of a 31-year-old tourist in Sta. Fe on Bantayan Island.

Director Allan Poquita said the box jellyfish can trigger allergies and high blood pressure that may lead to death.

The woman who died, Leslie Mardonero of Bohol, was on vacation in Sta. Fe and had been swimming with some friends on Sunday when her chest turned reddish and she collapsed.

A nurse and a physician who were also on vacation tried to revive the woman but failed.

Councilor Jaypee Lao from Sta. Fe, who is also active in local tourism, said the municipal government has posted several advisories warning people about the presence of jellyfish in the area.

The presence of jellyfish in Sta.

Fe is prevalent during the summer season but decreases in July.

The Philippine Red Cross warned that jellyfish stings can cause discomfort, pain and respiratory problems. It advised those stung by jellyfish to remove any remaining tentacles and scrape them off with a blunt object. Douse the area with vinegar or soak the area for 20 minutes.

The Cleveland Clinic advised against using urine to treat poisonous jellyfish. In fact, peeing on a jellyfish could make the sting worse.

Meanwhile, the American Red Cross recommends using hot water with a temperature of 106 to 113 Fahrenheit for 20 minutes until the pain has been relieved. Topical lidocaine gel can soothe the area and lessen the pain.

If there are signs of anaphylaxis or shock in the patient, he or she should be rushed to a hospital immediately.

**ANGELICA M. TAPAS**





## Leveling up the country's agricultural value chain

*Second of two parts*

**I**N the first part of this two-part column-series, I discussed the short-term recommendations of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) report released in June 2022 titled "Analysis of Fruit and Vegetable Value Chains in the Philippines" to level up the country's agricultural value chain.



**MOVING  
FORWARD**

**WILLIAM  
D. DAR**

The recommendations for six to 12 months are, and let me quote most of them, are: address input supply issues; provide training of producers in good agricultural practices (GAP), better harvesting technique, and improved post-harvest and processing technologies/practices; promote mechanization and irrigation to reduce labor costs and product handling; make plastic crates available to producers; promote community-based post-harvest and processing facilities; and increase access to credit and crop insurance.

While the ADB report covered tomato, onions and mango, it can give us an overview and valuable insights of the various value chain issues in the agriculture sector.

Meanwhile, the mid- to longer-term recommendations or from 12 months and beyond are as follows, and let me quote some of them: strengthen agricultural extension services through the Province-led Agriculture and Fisheries Extension Systems (Pafes); strengthen market development services for agricultural products; and support investment on climate-smart infrastructure development including post-harvest, processing and marketing facilities.

### Pafes as platform

It was during my watch at the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** that the Pafes was conceptualized, and more and more provincial governments are putting that system in place. The ADB report cited that there are 13 Pafes already established in the country, and I see more being set up in the future.

Besides providing full support for the Pafes, the ADB report recommended that concerned provincial local government units (LGUs) forge linkages and foster close collaboration with the DA and its regional field offices, other LGUs, state universities and colleges, and the private sector in delivering extension services to the grassroots level.

The ADB report also reiterated the criteria used for selecting a province where Pafes will be implemented. "The criteria used in the selection of the province is based on capacity, interest and governance. Pafes is being rolled out following a learning by doing approach, with the goal of integrating, coordinating and strengthening the various service delivery systems now operating," it said.

Under Pafes, the province serves as an extension hub to synchronize agricultural plans and programs, and orchestrate the activities of various stakeholders including the private sector and the academe. For its part, the DA will co-plan, co-invest, co-implement and co-monitor priority projects in the province, as the province embarks on specialization of crops and commodities to optimize comparative and competitive advantages.

For strengthening market development services, the ADB report said there is a need to push digitalization with establishment of online trading/digital marketing platforms.

It said this should be undertaken "in partnership with the private sector; web-based market information platform under the management of the DA Information Technology Center in close coordination with the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) [and] DoST (Department of Science and Technology)." For the private sector, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry can be engaged as it has a network nationwide and is also advocating digitalization.

Also, the DA-Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service can closely coordinate with the DTI to level up market linkages/matching and market promotion.

### Food terminals and storage facilities

The last long-term recommendation of the ADB report is to, and let me quote, support investment on climate-smart infrastructure development including post-harvest, processing and marketing facilities.

One of the major components of this recommendation is the establishment of food terminals and cold storage facilities.

Specifically for mango, which the ADB report covered, four new food terminal markets for Region 1 (Ilocos Region) while for Region 9 (Zamboanga Peninsula) are recommended for construction. A food terminal facility in Dipolog City, Zamboanga del Norte will need renovation or expansion. Also, three new food terminal markets are recommended for Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga City.

Also, 12 packing houses were recommended to be built for mango handling in Bulacan and Nueva Ecija; one in Iloilo; and three in Bukidnon. Also, the packing house in Dipolog City should be renovated and three new facilities be built in Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga City. A mango processing plant to produce dried mango and puree was recommended for Guimaras.

For onion, the ADB report said that nine onion farmer-members of two farmers' cooperatives/ associations who are not covered by the Philippine Rural Development Project are seeking one cold storage plant, two onion hanger storage facilities and refrigerated trucks. Such facilities, I believe, can also be used for other farm commodities like vegetables.

For tomato, the following equipment were recommended for Nueva Ecija and Bulacan: two new cold storage plants; 12 new packing houses; seven village-level processing facilities and equipment; and 14 refrigerated vans. For the tomato-producing municipalities of Bukidnon, the recommended facilities are packing houses and refrigerated trucks/vans.

Clearly, the ADB report shows that more investments in post-harvest, processing, storage and transport facilities must be made to level up the value chain system in the Philippines. Although the study covered only three commodities, I would not be surprised that similar findings will be made on other major crops like corn and vegetables.

Let me also emphasize that consolidation and clustering should be pursued or implemented over the long term as this will facilitate the delivery of the measures recommended by the ADB report.

Organized or clustered food producers are also easier to rally to level up the Philippine agricultural value chain.





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## App helps older rice farmers get free seeds



■ The Binhi e-Padala system has facilitated the delivery of certified inbred rice seeds to senior farmers under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund-Seed Program. PHOTO FROM PHILRICE WEBSITE

THE Binhi e-Padala system has improved the delivery of certified inbred rice seeds to senior farmers under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF)-Seed Program implemented by the **Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice)**.

Dominga Caranta, a 72-year-old farmer from Rosario, La Union, said the system's utilization of digital technology eliminated the need for her to wake up early and skip breakfast to join the long queues for seed distribution.

Through the Binhi e-Padala app or system, farmers receive

text messages informing them of their claiming schedule and a unique code to present when receiving seeds.

"As we follow a 'first come, first served' policy, I used to wake up at 4 a.m. and sacrifice meals just to ensure I was ahead of the hundreds of fellow farmers scheduled to receive the seeds," she said.

Another senior farmer, Romana Udan, 84 years old from San Juan, La Union, said that the system or app's scheduling feature removed the hassle associated with distribution.

Teresita Gacuta, a 64-year-old farmer from Sto. Domingo, Ilocos Sur,

who initially had limited experience with technology, said she appreciates how mobile technologies made seed distribution more organized.

During the 2021 wet and 2022 dry seasons, approximately, more than 35 percent of the 91,000 RCEF-Seed Program beneficiaries served by the PhilRice office in Batac City, Ilocos Norte were 60 years old and above.

PhilRice said the system also fast-tracked the financial transactions between the institution and the program's accredited seed cooperatives.

To facilitate the implementation of Binhi e-Padala, farmers'

cooperatives and associations gathered their member's details for inputting into the system during the pre-registration.

During the distribution schedule, pre-registered farmers promptly receive their seed allocation after presenting a valid ID and voucher.

The RCEF Seed Program is a component of Republic Act 11203, or "Rice Tariffication Law," which allocates P3-billion funds every year to develop, propagate and promote high-quality inbred rice seeds to help improve the competitiveness of Filipino rice farmers.

**CONRAD M. CARIÑO**





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## Leyte towns get solar irrigation systems

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) office in the Eastern Visayas has turned over solar-powered irrigation system (SPIS) projects in two Leyte towns to enhance rice productivity.

Members of Sitio Patag Farmers Association in Macupa village in Leyte, Leyte received on Tuesday the P5.9-million worth of SPIS that will bring water to 10 hectares of farm.

Last week, rice farmers of Guin-gauan village in Tabontabon, Leyte also received the P6.2-million SPIS that will also cover 10 hectares.

"This is to promote the use of renewable energy and make water accessible to rice farmers. The SPIS is an irrigation system powered by solar energy, consists of one or more solar panels, a pump, electronic controls, or a controller device to operate the pump, storage tank, and convey-

ance structures as applicable," said DA Eastern Visayas Regional Executive Director Andrew Orais.

In a statement, Leyte town Mayor Arnold James Ysidoro thanked the Agriculture department for the realization of the project in the village, providing a boost to the local rice sector.

"I challenge the farmer's association to work on how to fully maximize the benefits of the project among the farmer members and the community to further spur rural development," Ysidoro said.

Orais said at least 20 units of SPIS have been turned over to different farmer's groups in Eastern Visayas since 2019.

"There are requests for SPIS, especially in some rainfed areas of the region, but we have to validate through our engineering division," he added.



■ Members of Sitio Patag Farmers Association in Macupa village in Leyte, Leyte check the new solar-powered irrigation system project in their community. The SPIS will bring water to 10 hectares of rice farms. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The SPIS is one of the innovative strategies of DA in promoting renewable energy utilization in the country since it can provide

reliable, inexpensive and sustainable energy to irrigate production areas covered by rice, corn or high-value crops.

PNA





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## 27 agri groups to get coco processing facilities

**T**WENTY-SEVEN coconut-based farmers cooperatives and associations (FCAs) were shortlisted by the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) as recipients for shared processing facilities (SPFs) that will be funded by the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund (CFITF) as stipulated by Republic Act 11524 or the "Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act."

**PHilMech** Executive Director Dionisio Alwindia said the agency has started the process of enabling FCAs to manage, operate and maintain the SPFs with trainings conducted since early this year. He added that more coconut FCAs will be added to the shortlist.

"PHilMech is stepping up the distribution at no cost of SPFs to qualified coconut-based FCAs to be funded under the Coconut Farmers

and Industry Trust Fund or CFITF, and identifying the cooperatives and associations to be part of the shortlist of SPF recipients is one crucial step for that," he said.

Alwindia added that coconut-based FCAs that will receive the SPFs must have their own land and warehouse or shelter/shed to house the facilities. PHilMech is initially getting P500 million for the establishment of the SPFs. **TMT**

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## Group says some farmers skip rice planting on El Niño fears

**F**OOD security advocacy group Tugon Kabuhayan expressed concern over the reluctance of rice farmers to plant, given the looming El Niño threat.

"Most people think that El Niño is already here and [some are reluctant] to plant palay," Norbert Chingcuanco, Tugon Kabuhayan co-convenor said.

"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," he said.



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For her part, Ann Solis, assistant weather services chief of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa), said by the end of the year, around 36 provinces might experience dry spell, while two are expected to experience drought.

Solis explained that dry spell is a period of at least two months with 60 percent reduction in rainfall level or three months with 41 percent to 60 percent rainfall reduction.

A drought, on the other hand, occurs when more than 60 percent reduction in rainfall level is experienced for three to five months, she added.

The Department of Agriculture

(DA) earlier warned that at least 46 provinces might experience below normal average rainfall, affecting crops like rice, corn and coconut and various fruit and vegetables because of El Niño.

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

Meanwhile, the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) 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.

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

Raul Montemayor, FFF convenor, said free on board prices from Vietnam and Thailand have increased by 5 percent compared to their level in January to February.

He 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," Montemayor said.

"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," he added.

But based on public markets monitoring by the DA in the National Capital Region recently, 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 rice.

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.

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, domestic rice is expected to follow 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.

On June 27, the DA has assured that there is enough supply of rice to provide for the daily food requirement of Filipinos as the country enters the third quarter of the year.

DA Undersecretary Leo Sebastian, who heads the Masagana Rice Industry Program (MRIP), said a bountiful harvest for the January to June rice planting season is expected give a 6 percent production increase.

"This is based on PhilRice PRISM data of 8.153 MMT [million metric tons] palay production in 2022 to 8.605 MMT palay or 5.6 MMT milled rice in 2023," he said.

Sebastian added that the volume, plus the carry over stock of 1.8 metric tons milled rice augmented by the import arrival of 1.8 MMT is enough to fill in the demand/consumption of 7 MMT from January to June.

"By the end of June, the stock available will be good for more than two months, in addition to the incoming supply from the new harvest and import arrivals in the coming months," he said.

Sebastian stressed that the price movement currently taking place is fueled by the high cost of production locally and globally that also push the price of palay and imported rice, respectively.

"We expect this to stabilize," he said. Raadee S. Sausa





## PSA: Farmgate price of palay up 9.1% in April

**T**HE average farmgate price of unmilled rice rose by 9.1 percent year-on-year in April, as all regions recorded higher quotations during the period, according to the latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

PSA data showed that the average farmgate price of palay in April reached P18.79 per kilogram, P1.56 higher than the P17.23 per kg recorded a year ago.

"At the national level, the average farmgate price of palay went up to P18.79 per kilogram in April 2023, which indicates an annual increase of 9.1 percent from the P17.23 per kilogram in April 2022.

Similarly, it posted a month-on-month increment of 1.2 percent from its price level of P18.57 per kilogram in March 2023," the agency said in its latest report.

Among the regions, the highest farmgate price of palay in April was observed in Region 10 (Northern Mindanao) at P20.77 per kg, while the lowest farmgate price of palay was still posted in Region 8 (Eastern



# BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

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FRESHLY harvested rice in the Philippines is shown in this file photo. BLOOMBERG

Visayas) at P16.09 per kg.

"All regions continued to record positive annual increments in the average farmgate price of palay in April 2023," PSA said.

The highest year-on-year increase was registered in Region 10 (Northern Mindanao) at 14.6

percent, while the lowest annual increment was noted in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) at 3.7 percent.

Month-on-month, 12 regions recorded higher average farmgate prices, while CAR, Region 1 (Ilocos Region), Region 2 (Cagayan Valley),

and Region VIII (Eastern Visayas) posted decreases for this month.

"Among the regions, Region 10 [Northern Mindanao] registered the highest month-on-month increase at 5.8 percent, while Region 2 [Cagayan Valley] recorded the highest decrease of -3.9 percent," PSA said.

Data released by the Bureau of Plant Industry in January indicated that the Philippines imported a record high of 3.826 million metric tons (MMT) of rice to prevent price spikes caused by the rise in production costs.

BPI data showed the Philippines overshot the projected 3.8 MMT import volume cited by the United States Department of Agriculture-Foreign Agricultural Service in Manila.

International market watchers and local experts have pointed out that the country imported a lot of

rice in 2022 to compensate for the reduction in domestic palay output due to reduced fertilizer application.

The high-ranking officials of the agriculture department have described the higher than usual import volume last year as a "blessing in disguise" to ensure the country's staple supply and avert increase in prices of the commodity.

The country's total rice imports in 2022 were 38.07 percent higher than the 2.771 MMT it imported in 2021, based on BPI data.

A total of 152 eligible rice importers brought in the volume after using 4,302 sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances.

Vietnam remained as the country's top supplier and accounted for 83 percent of total rice imports or about 3.178 MMT. It was followed by Myanmar at 244,738 metric tons (MT) and Pakistan at 198,912 MT.

# Abante TONITE

MABILIS SA BALITA

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## BIGAS 'DI NAAWAT SA TAAS-PRESYO

Sumipa ang average farmgate price ng palay sa P18.79 per kilo noong Abril dahilang para tumaas ang presyo ng bigas sa mga palengke.

Base sa ulat ng Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), mas mataas ito ng 9.1 porsyento kumpara sa farmgate price ng palay noong Abril 2022 na nasa P17.23 kada kilo.

"Similarly, it posted a month-on-month increment of 1.2 percent from its price level of P18.57 per kilogram in March 2023," ayon sa PSA.

Tinukoy sa PSA report ang mga rehiyon na nakapagtala ng pinakamataas na presyo sa bilihan ng palay noong Abril 2023 at kabilang dito ang Northern Mindanao na nasa P20.77 per kilo. Pinakamababa naman sa Eastern Visayas na umabot ng P16.09 per kilo.

Lahat umano ng rehiyon sa bansa ay nakapagtala ng pagtaas sa presyo ng palay noong Abril 2023.

Samantala, ipinaliwanag naman ni Department of Agriculture (DA) Undersecretary Leo Sebastian na ang pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas sa kasalukuyan ay dahil sa mataas na production cost sa lokal at sa labas ng bansa.

Pero tiniyak nito na bababa rin umano ang presyo ng bigas sa mga darating na araw.

"We expect this to stabilize," pagtiyak ni Sebastian sa Malacañang.

Siniguro rin nito na sapat ang supply ng bigas para tustusan ang pang-araw-araw na pangangailangan ng mga Pilipino hanggang sa third quarter ng 2023.

Sinabi naman ng Presidential Communications

Office na batay sa report ni Sebastian, asahang aabot ng anim na porsyento ang pagtaas sa produksyon ng palay mula Enero hanggang Hunyo na planting season.

(Aileen Taliping)



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# RICE PRICES UP, BUT SUPPLY ENOUGH

THE country has a sufficient supply of rice, the Department of Agriculture (DA) assured the public on Tuesday, amid the surge in the prices of the country's staple food.

In a statement, DA Senior Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian said the rice supply is enough to meet the Filipinos' food requirements in the third quarter of 2023.

Sebastian said the carry-over stock of 1.8 million metric tons (MMT) milled rice and import arrival of 1.8MMT are enough to fill in the demand and consumption of seven MMT from January to June.

"By the end of June, the stock available will be good for more than two months, in (addition) to the incoming supply from the new harvest and import arrivals in the coming months," Sebastian, who heads the DA's Masagana Rice Industry Program (MRIP), said.

Sebastian attributed the current movement in rice

prices to the "high cost of production locally and globally."

"We expect this to stabilize," he said.

He said a "bountiful" harvest for the January to June rice planting season is seen to boost the supply by 6 percent.

"This is based on PhilRice PRISM data of 8.153 MMT palay production in 2022 to 8.605 MMT palay or 5.6 MMT milled rice in 2023," he said.

Earlier this month, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., also serving as DA chief, directed the department to look into the feasibility and efficiency of the proposal to build silos as rice and corn storage to maintain a 30-day buffer stock of agricultural commodities.

Marcos also expressed optimism that the government may surpass 100-percent rice self-sufficiency with its agricultural initiatives.

PNA



# REMATE

## ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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### PURO HIRAP SA MAGNINIYOG

MALUNGKOT na balita para sa mga magniniyog na bagsak ang presyo ng kopra sa pandaigdigang merkado bilang epekto ng pandemya at giyera sa pagitan ng Russia at Ukraine.

Ayon sa Philippine Coconut Authority, nasa P21-24 kada kilo ang presyo ng kopra mismo sa mga koprahan o mula mismo sa mga magsasaka dahil sa pandemya at giyera.

Sinasabi naman ng mga magniniyog na kung P25 kada kilo ang kopra, napakababa na umano ito ngunit may mga panahon din umano ngunit paminsan-minsan lang na umaabot ng P50 kada kilo ito.

Sa P25 kada kilo, sinasabi ng mga magniniyog na nagiging taghirap ang kanilang kalagayan.

Kaya naman, kung P21-24 na ang presyo, lalong mahirap ang kanilang kalagayan.

Ang mahirap na kalagayan ay nangangahulugan ng hirap na pagpapaaral ng mga bata, pagpapagamot sa maysakit, pagbili ng pagkain na bigas at ulam, pagbabayad ng kuryente at tubig at iba pa.

Dito nauugat ang kalungkutan sa mababang presyo ng kopra.

#### KALAGAYAN SA 5 EKTARYA

Nanggaling ang pitak na ito sa Kabikulan kamakailan lang at narito ang kanyang napag-alaman.

Ayon sa may niyugang limang ektarya na may libong puno, kada 40 araw o mahigit pa



REMATE OPINION

### LUPA'T LANGIT NI PUDI CABALBAG

ang pagpapakawit o pagpapaani dahil nakikipag-agawan siya sa panahon ng madalang na grupo ng mga magkakawit.

Umaabot umano sa nasa P65,000-P70,000 ang halaga ng ani ngunit 30 porsyento ang agad na parte ng mga magkakawit.

Ibabawas pa rito ang gastos sa trucking na papunta sa Lucena City, Quezon na roon nakatayo ang oil mills.

Ang masama pa, may kom-

petisyon din sa kalidad at suplay ng produkto ng mga magniniyog na taga-Bicol, taga-Quezon at mga nanggagaling sa Samar at iba pang mga nasa Kabisayaan na ikinababawas ng mga presyo.

Dito na nagkakandaloko-loko ang kita ng mga magniniyog na nagbubunga ng kahirapan.

Nakararamdam ng konting ginhawa ang may-ari ng niyugan pero puro hirap sa mga obbrero.





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## PH SEEN IMPORTING LESS PORK THIS YEAR

PHILIPPINE pork imports are expected to drop this year amid higher domestic production and a decline in global output, the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said.

The FAO forecast imports totaling 489,000 metric tons (MT) for 2023, down 1.41 percent from 496,000 MT previously.

"The latest forecasts point to reduced pig meat imports by the United States, Japan, Mexico, Vietnam and the Philippines, with likely higher imports by the United Kingdom, China, Canada, Uruguay and the Republic of Korea," it said in a report.

A recovery in domestic output could facilitate the drop, but the continuation of lower tariffs may also encourage more imports, the FAO noted.

The UN agency expects the Philippines to produce 1.26 million MT of pig meat this year, some 4 percent higher than the previous year's estimated output of 1.21 million MT.

Globally, pork production is forecast to reach 121.7 million MT, down 0.5 percent from 2022's 122.3 million MT.

Global pork exports are expected to hit 11.4 million MT this year, down from 2022's 11.5 million.

►Pork B3

FAO attributed this to tight supplies in leading exporting countries and limited import purchases amid rising domestic production and high stocks, especially in East Asia.

Meanwhile, the Philippines' poultry meat imports were forecast to rise as demand remains strong despite tight supply.

"Significant increases in poultry meat imports are expected for China, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the European Union and South Africa, as well as in the Philippines, Canada and the Democratic Republic of the Congo," the FAO said.

It attributed this to growing internal demand amid tight domestic supply, high prices, more active food services sales and relative affordability.

Global poultry meat imports were forecast to reach 15.6 million MT this, slightly higher than last year's 15.4 million MT.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

Today's Management Action column  
will be carried online due to space  
constraints.





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## What do we want to see for year 2?

What do we want to see for Year 2 of the BBM administration?

Barring any major global upheavals, the current government should be able to build on the gains made by previous administrations to strengthen the economy. The latest growth projections have shown positive developments on gross domestic growth (GDP) numbers higher than other countries in the region.

During the first quarter of 2023, the economy expanded by 6.4 percent year-on-year, and this would seem to keep within

### BIZLINKS



REY GAMBOA

similar levels in the second quarter. Our neighbors have shown lower growth levels, with Vietnam and Thailand showing weaker results than everyone in the pack.

In the coming months, the challenge is not just to keep growth at even keeling, but to prevent it from sliding down to markedly lower levels like Thailand's 2.7 percent or Vietnam's 3.3 percent.

These two countries are often always benchmarked against the Philippines, although our fundamental growth drivers are different, with the dissimilarity most marked in our reliance on remittances by overseas Filipino workers and Filipinos living as emigrants in other countries.

Unabashedly, money sent by Filipinos from abroad have saved the Philippine economy multiple times, and have served as a reliable plug that prevented the dam from draining its life waters during many crises.

For example, during the pandemic when extended lockdowns were in place, Filipino families staved off starvation and surprising survived in better shape than many in other countries, thanks to the continued inflow of financial help from their relatives and close kin abroad.

In fact, year after year, total remittances have increased, often to record highs. No doubt, without these monies coming in, impaired consumer spending levels in the country would have sunk the whole economy since the country is a laggard

in terms of productivity of many sectors, from agriculture to services to industry.

#### Focus on MSMEs

If the Philippines were to improve on the above, economic growth would easily surpass the seven percent mark. Such grounded fundamentals would have made us an impeccable tiger economy in the region.

That said, as the BBM administration enters its second year, more attention should really be given to strengthening the country's other pillars of growth to solidify growth in the medium- and long-term. My favorite areas remain agriculture and local entrepreneurship, given the still huge number of Filipinos in the country who do not earn enough to transition to middle-income status.

Promoting local entrepreneurship is about pouring the necessary support to the development of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Not only is credit availability a problem for the expansion needs of MSMEs, improved ways of business needs to be given attention.

As consumer spending continues to strengthen, MSMEs must be able to take advantage of all the money that is going around to improve their production capabilities. Many of consumers' basic commodities are imported, notably China and the United States.

The most ridiculous example of our dependence on importations is with salt. Our laws have killed the local salt-making industry, and shifted supply lines to be almost totally dependent on importations, all because we were not able to provide the incentives and technical help for our salt industry to establish iodizing technologies.

We have given up of clothing manufacture in favor of imports from China and other smaller countries, when we continue to have a young population that needs new clothes yearly to replace what they have outgrown.

Our local livestock sector continues to flounder. We now import more pork and chicken for fast food chains. Shouldn't the government put a program to boost local business capability to set up the necessary technology to cater to processed meat requirements?

A strong MSME no doubt can provide more and better jobs to tens of millions of our countrymen, thus opening new wealth avenues to those at the lower-income levels and providing the channels that can lift up close to 20 percent of the

population who live in poverty.

#### Encouraging private investments in agriculture

Agriculture remains neglected, and this does not only call for more funds in the sector, but also much improved programs that can really boost land productivity and make agriculture profitable for farmers, fisherfolk, and livestock growers.

The government must go beyond paying lip service to its aspiration of ensuring the country's food security and to actually come up with a doable programs to strengthen rice production, reduce corn importation to the barest, invest in the farming of other grains essential to our food needs, and protect land for food production.

We need to bring in private investments in local agriculture, and admit to ourselves that the government is not in the best overseer of land productivity for food. How many laws have been passed, for example, to support local rice production by our small farmers?

Perhaps, it is time, in the interest of rice self-sufficiency, to support a pilot project involving private business to bring back profitability to rice farming. This would likely entail overriding some provisions of current laws, but could pave the way for its much-needed revisions and updating.

Agriculture should be given immediate attention with the increasing risks that come with over-reliance on global supply chains and the changing climates. Once countries that provide for our imported food needs are jeopardized by droughts, flooding, typhoons, and other weather disturbances, inflation immediately rears up.

For a country our size with almost 110 million, the last thing our people would want to worry about is finding food – or buying it at elevated prices.

#### Facebook and Twitter

We are actively using two social networking websites to reach out more often and even interact with and engage our readers, friends and colleagues in the various areas of interest that I tackle in my column. Please like us on [www.facebook.com/ReyGamboa](http://www.facebook.com/ReyGamboa) and follow us on [www.twitter.com/ReyGamboa](http://www.twitter.com/ReyGamboa).

*Should you wish to share any insights, write me at Link Edge, 25th Floor, 139 Corporate Center, Valero Street, Salcedo Village, 1227 Makati City. Or e-mail me at [reydgamboa@yahoo.com](mailto:reydgamboa@yahoo.com). For a compilation of previous articles, visit [www.BizlinksPhilippines.net](http://www.BizlinksPhilippines.net).*





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## **'Sugar industry liberalization good for majority of Pinoys'**

By **LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON**

Liberalizing the sugar industry will benefit the great majority of Filipinos despite resistance from producers to open up the sector to the free flow of importation, Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno said yesterday. Appearing before media at the Kapihan sa Manila Bay weekly forum, Diokno said Filipinos stand to gain from liberalization by making sugar available at more affordable prices.

This is Diokno's compromise to the planned expanded levy on sweetened beverages to allow manufacturers to bring in their own supply amid the high price of domestic supply.

As expected, the finance chief's proposal was met with opposition by sugar producers, who argued that the move will kill the more than five million Filipinos dependent on the sugar industry.

"When you do policy, you have to think of what is the greatest good for the greatest number, all the time," Diokno stressed. "Just like what we did with rice, many were concerned with our rice farmers, but what about the 110 million Filipinos?"

The DOF is already moving to broaden 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.

At present, there is a two-tier rate of P6 and P12 per liter, as started by the Duterte administration.

"That is the proposal on the table right now. It is not yet final," Diokno said. "There will be consultation and hearings. And they (sugar producers) can appeal in the House and Senate and make their objections."

He noted that prices of domestic sugar remain significantly expensive as compared to the world market. "If you allow them to import their requirements, that would be more affordable," he said.

The expanded tax on sweetened beverages aims to curb excess consumption of unhealthy food items while generating revenues for state coffers.

The DOF proposal plans to expand the list of sugary products to be slapped with taxes, based on the study being conducted by the Department of Health.

DOF data show that the government can generate P53.7 billion from an expanded levy on sweetened beverages during the first year of implementation by 2025. — **With Gilbert Bayoran, Bella Cariaso**





## Coconut exporters bag deals at Anuga

THE participation of Philippine coconut exporters in THAIFEX-Anuga Asia 2023 generated a total of \$6.9 million in initial export sales.

The five-day trade exhibition was held last May 21 to 27 at Impact Muang Thong Thani Bangkok, Thailand.

Nine coconut exporters and two industry associations showcased their high-value coconut products.

Aside from participating in the expo, the delegation conducted market scanning and store visits in Talaad Thai, the largest wholesale market for the trade of agricultural goods in the Asean region and the Big C Supercenter, which is one of the biggest supermarket chains in Thailand.

The initiative is part of the implementation of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan and the ARISE Plus Philippines project.

"The Philippines participation in THAIFEX-Anuga Asia served as a gateway to expanding horizons and enhancing the nation's standing as a dependable and premium source of coconut products. Philippine coconut exporters were able to showcase its high-value coconut products," said assistant secretary Glenn Peñaranda said.

As one of the premier international trade shows in Asia, the THAIFEX participation has been considered a substantial platform for establishing linkages and increasing the understanding of exhibitors on the demands, and distribution routes that will impact the coconut industry. It also has provided a brand-new perspective on the future of Asia's food and beverage trends that businesses should look ahead.





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# PH among nations most at risk to El Niño

Climate phenomenon threat to agri sector, GDP growth, says Nomura

By **Ronnel W. Domingo**  
@RonWDomingoINQ

The Philippines is among Asian countries that are most vulnerable to El Niño in terms of the climate phenomenon's impact on economic growth which may prompt a monetary policy rate hike, according to Nomura Group.

The Japan-based analysis and research firm said this as climate experts announced the onset of El Niño, which brings lower-than-usual rainfall to the Philippines and poses a threat to agricultural production.

At the same time, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) noted that international prices of rice have been increasing.

Nomura said in a report that, with El Niño occurring, they expect fiscal and supply-side policies—such as social assistance,

price controls and subsidies — to serve as the first line of defense. "Monetary policy is unlikely to be used, though rate cuts could be delayed," the company said. "Given the Philippines' limited fiscal space and high inflation risks, the BSP (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas) may need to resume its rate hiking cycle."

Nomura said El Niño can limit agricultural production and drive higher food inflation, especially among net importers of food like the Philippines.

"An El Niño will likely result in a stagflationary shock—higher inflation, lower growth," the group said. "Within Asia, we see India, Philippines and Thailand as more vulnerable to downside growth risks, while most countries would likely suffer the effects of higher inflation, especially food importers like the Philippines."

Nomura noted that the Phil-

ippine government plans to import 330,000 metric tons of rice this year to cover an expected deficit in the buffer stock.

## Price hikes

According to the FAO, international rice prices increased further last May.

The UN agency said domestic prices of rice increased in most exporting countries, including Vietnam and Thailand—from where the Philippines usually imports rice.

Prices of rice in these two countries increased for the second consecutive month in May, mostly driven by steady demand, as exporters continued to fulfill contracted shipments to traditional buyers.

"Concerns over the potential impact of the El Niño phenomenon, which is normally associated with below-average

rains in some countries of the subregion and may affect both areas planted and yields of 2023 crops, also supported (helped push up) prices," the FAO said.

According to Nomura, a severe occurrence of El Niño could eat away 0.2 percentage point off Philippine GDP growth.

In an advisory dated June 8, the United States-based Climate Prediction Center (CPC) declared that El Niño conditions are present and are expected to gradually strengthen into the Northern Hemisphere winter 2023-2024.

"In May, weak El Niño conditions emerged as above-average sea surface temperatures strengthened across the equatorial Pacific Ocean," the CPC said.

The agency added that there was a 56-percent chance that El Niño will be "strong" and an 86-percent chance of "exceeding moderate strength." INQ





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## PALAY PRICES UP SLIGHTLY IN APRIL 2023

THE monthly average farmgate price of "palay" (unmilled rice) in the country went up to P18.79 per kilogram (kg) in April, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Tuesday.

The figure is higher by 1.2 percent from March 2023's price of P18.57 per kg and 9.1 percent more to April 2022's price level of P17.23 per kg.

Among the regions, the highest farmgate price of palay in April 2023 was recorded in Northern Mindanao at P20.77 per kg, followed by Ilocos Region with

an average price of P20.40 per kg.

Northern Mindanao also posted the highest annual increase in farmgate prices of palay at 14.6 percent, while the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) logged the lowest annual increase at 3.7 percent.

Farmgate prices of palay in Central Luzon, dubbed as the country's rice granary, is P20.02 per kg, slightly higher than the P19.87 per kg posted in March 2023.

Meanwhile, the lowest farmgate price of palay was posted in Eastern Visayas at P16.09 per kg. Next is Cara-

ga and Calabarzon (Region 4A) with P17.47 and P17.58 per kg, respectively.

PSA said that 12 regions recorded monthly increases in the average farmgate price of palay this year in April while CAR, Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley and Eastern Visayas posted decreases for the same period.

Among the regions, Northern Mindanao still registered the highest monthly increase at 5.8 percent, while Cagayan Valley recorded the highest decrease of 3.9 percent.

Michael Ricafort, chief

economist at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., attributed the increase in palay prices to warmer weather and drought in some Asian countries that somewhat reduced rice supplies.

"Rice importation, especially during the lean season, could help augment local rice supplies and lower prices, provided it does not coincide with farmers' harvest season," he said.

Ricafort added that the El Niño could potentially reduce local palay output and somewhat lead to slight increase in rice prices.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL





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# Searca seeks collaboration with New Zealand

**LOS BAÑOS, Laguna:** To strengthen research collaborations, the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) presented its initiatives and programs on education and training in agriculture at the Philippines-New Zealand Program Launch here. The program launch was held at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) chancellor on June 20, 2023.

Searca joined the New Zealand Agricultural Greenhouse Gas Research Centre, the Department of Agriculture-Philippine Carabao Center and the UPLB.

During the event, New Zealand Ambassa-

dor to the Philippines Peter Kell discussed his country's present and potential engagement for global research with the Philippines. Also covered during the launch event was an overview of objectives and components of the current New Zealand investment and the UPLB project titled "Enhancement of Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Mitigation for Cattle in the Philippines."

For Searca, Deputy Director for Programs Nur Azura Adam presented the center's initiatives and programs on education and training in agriculture in Southeast Asia as well as the center's Web-based Integrated and Spatial Engine and Smart

Ecosystem or Wise Carbon Farming Project. Gregorio said there were five emerging areas of research that were also tackled: circularity in agriculture; indigenous engagement in Philippine agricultural science; Philippine agriculture toward low carbon, climate-resilient food systems with progressive farmers and fisheries; development of climate-smart feeding rations for cattle and buffaloes; and climate change. During the roundtable discussion segment of the program that was also participated by Searca, possible areas of collaboration between the Philippine and New Zealand were also explored.

**LEANDER C. DOMINGO**





# SEC: Dairy producer lacks license to offer securities

By VG CABUAG @villygc

**T**HE Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has advised the public against investing in Moca Farm or in Moca Farm Dairy Inc., which operates an online trading platform, as it has not been authorized to solicit investments.

Based on reports and information gathered by the agency, Moca Farm claims that it specializes in producing high-quality dairy products from a family-owned and operated agricultural venture. It also claims that its farm is dedicated to sustainable and

responsible farming practices, ensuring that its milk and other products "are of the highest quality and taste."

An investor, who will be asked to register in the company's online trading platform, can invest P50 for a condensed milk, and will have to

double his money in five days and will have five levels of investments starting at P400 to P12,790, all promising at least double their investments in 120 days.

In this regard, the SEC said an investment contract, which is a kind of security, exists when there is an investment or placement of money in a common enterprise with a reasonable expectation of profits to be derived from the efforts of others which is prominent in the scheme of Moca Farm.

As such, the Securities Regulation Code requires that said offer and sale of securities must be duly registered with the SEC and the entity or its agents should have the appropriate registration and license to sell such securities to the public.

"The transactions entered by Moca Farm or in Moca Farm Dairy

Inc. through their online trading platform are considered investment contracts and must be registered with the Commission," the agency said.

The investment scheme of Moca Farm has the characteristics of a Ponzi scheme, promising exorbitant rates of return with little to no risk at all to the investors, the SEC said.

SEC said Moca Farm is not registered with the agency, either as a corporation or a partnership.

"Hence, the public is advised not to invest or stop investing in any investment scheme being offered by any individual or group of persons allegedly for or on behalf of Moca Farm or in Moca Farm Dairy Inc. and to exercise caution in dealing with any individuals or group of persons soliciting investments for and on behalf of it," the agency said.





## Diokno: Salt, sugar tax measure ready for HOR by 3rd qtr

By BUTCH FERNANDEZ

@butchfBM

**F**INANCE and health managers expect to be ready with an administration measure embodying the proposed salt-and-sugar tax package, for submission to the House of Representatives, by the third quarter of the year.

Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno gave this projection, while vowing that the bill will be a "science-based" policy option, amid criticism that it may unduly burden the poor who patronize relatively cheaper sugary drinks and salt-laden snacks.

"Our plan is, by the third quarter, we will endorse a proposed administration bill with the House of Representatives, where all money measures must emanate," Diokno said, partly in Filipino, in an interview Wednesday with Rey Pacheco of DWIZ aired on Aliw23 TV.

Diokno was asked for comment on the remarks of some hardline health advocates—on the other end of the argument—that government imposing tax on what it concedes to be unhealthy food sounds exploitative, meaning, it should simply consider banning altogether very salty or low-nutrient food.

Diokno replied, "we always consider the greatest good for the greatest number," citing as example policy options on rice. "In rice, we don't just consider rice farmers, but also the millions of rice consumers."

Right now, he said, the government tries to control salt and sugar levels and other food ingredients with potential adverse impacts, through regulation via agencies like the Food and Nutrition Research Institute.

Regarding the sugary drinks tax, he added that "we already have existing rates for that, we just want to simplify and collapse into one rate." The tax on sugar-sweetened beverages was first imposed under

the TRAIN law of 2018.

Diokno acknowledged the report of the World Health Organization (WHO) saying diabetes is becoming "too widespread," and he stressed how "it cuts longevity and affects quality of life."

So, as a policy reform, government tries "to discipline" people's lifestyles and shape behavior, i.e., in sugar consumption.

He likened the situation facing them to the government's approach in e-cigarettes. "We call them sin products, right?" he noted, and expressed hope that the proposal (to replace 6 percent on the existing two-tier sugar-sweetened beverage tax with a single rate of 12 percent) would help curb the dire impacts of high sugar levels.

Moreover, Diokno noted that it is not just consumers who respond to policy tweaks using taxation. There is a response as well of some (manufacturers) who could sometimes "reduce the sweetening ingredients."

He noted that in the past, "The industry makes its own response" to new impositions by government.

That is why, he said, he recently dangled what he also called a "sweetener" to food manufacturers: the right to import their own sugar needs. "Recall the time when they had to close down some factories because sugar prices locally became too high," he said, partly in Filipino. The DOF may allow them to source 50 percent of their sugar needs from domestic products; and import 50 percent.

Meanwhile, Diokno noted that "chichirya" per se is not being targeted en masse by the finance and economic agencies.

The snacks that don't have high sugar content, for example, peanuts, which boost the brain, won't be covered by the proposed measure. Also, "some stuff we buy from sidewalks won't be covered by law."





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## Solar-powered cold storage facility unveiled in Benguet

**T**HE municipality of Buguias in Benguet province recently inaugurated a solar-powered cold storage facility, which was built with assistance from the Japanese government.

Tachikawa Jumpei, First Secretary and Agriculture Attaché of the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines, attended the inauguration ceremony for the solar-powered cold storage facility in Buguias.

The event was also graced by Benguet Governor Melchor Diclas, Buguias Mayor Ruben Tinda-an, Japan Agricultural Exchange Council Executive Director Sakamoto Ryoji, officials of the

Department of Agriculture, and other local government officials.

Farmers in Benguet frequently face the challenge of earning low income despite harvesting competitive and high-quality produce, according to a statement from the embassy.

Despite being known as the "Salad Bowl of the Philippines" and having favorable climate for growing vegetables, Benguet suffers from an unstructured production system, subpar post-harvest handling procedures, and unstable product prices.

To aid the farmers in Benguet, the Japan Agricultural Exchange Council

(JAEC), a Japanese NGO, has been implementing the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Grassroots Cooperation Project since 2007.

Among other things, JAEC carried out dissemination activities for safe vegetable farming techniques and improved post-harvest procedures. However, the activities for this initiative were suspended in 2019 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2021, through the funding support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, JAEC commenced the Safe Vegetable Production Technology Dissemination and Vegetable Distribution System Improvement Project.

The farmers were equipped with various Japanese farming technologies under this initiative.

This project will also enable the development of a cold chain system through the completed solar-powered cold storage facility in the Municipality of Buguias, Benguet, as well as the other cold storage supplies and equipment.

By enhancing the quality of the produce through an effective distribution system, the Japanese embassy said farmer's income are expected to improve and their losses to decrease, while consumers may benefit from buying healthy, fresh, and quality vegetables.





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## Corn at five-week low

SINGAPORE- Chicago corn lost more ground on Wednesday, while soybeans slid for a second session as forecasts of rains in some of the parched growing regions in the United States weighed on prices.

Wheat dropped to a one-week low on easing worries about Russian supplies.

Weather models are calling for additional precipitation for dry areas of the US Midwest and parts of the US wheat-growing areas, said Terry Reilly, a senior commodities analyst with Futures International.

"Wheat also faces additional pressure from easing concerns over Russia political instability," Reilly said.

The most-active corn contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) fell 0.1 percent to \$5.60-1/2 a bushel, not far from the previous session's lowest since May 22 at \$5.55 a bushel.

Soybeans fell 0.3 percent to \$12.91 a bushel and wheat gave up 0.1 percent to \$6.98-1/2 a bushel, after dropping earlier in the session to \$6.90-1/4 a bushel, the weakest since June 20. - *Reuters*





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## Sugar future prices fall 3% to lowest in 3 months

NEW YORK — Raw and refined sugar futures on ICE fell around 3% on Tuesday to hit their lowest in three months on signs of weak demand and improving Brazil crop, while London cocoa steadied after hitting its highest since the mid-1970s in the prior session.

**SUGAR:** July raw sugar settled down 0.69 cent or 2.9% at 23.03 cents per pound (lb) — its lowest since early April.

Front month sugar futures have, after some ten months, flipped to a discount versus second month futures, a bearish sig-

nal that indicates weak demand, improved supply, or both.

"There's no denying the major supply-side problems the sugar market has, but in the short term I'd note the collapsing spreads and tread carefully," Stephen Geldart, head of analysis at trader Czarnikow, said in a note.

"It's entirely possible everyone is fixating on supply and ignoring more invisible demand side problems."

On production, Brazil sugar output was up 18% in the first half of June, as expected, while sugarcane yields rose 26%, signaling a possibly larger crop.

August white sugar fell \$21.20 or 3.3% at \$627.20 a ton, having hit its lowest since late March at \$614.50.

**COCOA:** September London cocoa settled up 5 lbs or 0.2% to 2,537 lbs per ton, having hit its highest since the mid 1970s on Monday at 2,555.

Dealers said technical signals point to more gains ahead, while fundamental signals are bullish as the market's deficit is widening.

Above-average rain in most of Ivory Coast's cocoa regions last week have flooded plantations and could affect the start of the next October-to-March main crop.

September New York cocoa ended stable at \$3,258 a metric ton, after setting a fresh seven-year high of \$3,281 on Monday.

**COFFEE:** September arabica coffee settled up 1.8 cents or 1.1% at \$1.6695 per lb, after earlier setting a six-month low of \$1.63.

September robusta coffee rose \$5 or 0.2% at \$2,715 a ton.

An expected pick-up in robusta exports from Brazil in the coming months may calm a rally in prices which hit a record this month, Rabobank said in a quarterly update. — *Reuters*





## FSI exports fish to Japan, Canada via USAID program

**F**ISHTA Seafood Inc. (FSI), a seafood exporter, said it is able to ship fish to other countries with stringent requirements like Japan and Canada.

The company said it has partnered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Fish Right and Seatrace International Inc. to promote responsible fish sourcing, reversing the adverse impact of illegal, unreported, unregulated (IUU) fishing.

"Sustainability of the supply chain is something I champion and believe in. We help the community by investing in the supply chain and by teaching people. We become the linkage [between fishermen and the market]," FSI General Manager Carina Ong Tan during Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc.'s forum titled

"Usapang Pagkain."

The company said it sources products from fishing communities in Busuanga, Palawan and helps at least 50 women in these communities.

FSI, a spinoff from parent firm aquaculture feeds producer Sante Feeds Corp. (SFC), supplies seafood to supermarkets, restaurants, and overseas markets from its owned or contracted farms. These are in the form of live, frozen, chilled, and smoked products.

It has invested in the seafood supply chain to achieve fish production sustainability, ensure its products' safety, and reach bigger local and export markets.

The company has invested in facilities—blast freezing, indirect contract freezing, and individually quick frozen technology.

"This is an example of the idea of introducing innovation and market linkage direct to the source, from the fishing communities themselves. We buy their products direct from them, and they no longer have to go to traders," said Tan.

"It's a program that gives attention to the island itself. Other fishing communities go to us for the replication of this program. We can contribute these ideas to the seafood industry because we have access to technology and markets. This way, we can make an impact directly to fisherfolks."

With its ability for traceability, food safety is ensured. Consumers are able to send feedback on the quality of a seafood product as their origin may be traced. With traceability, the company can pull back products in the market that pose

any adverse risk on human health.

"We are still in the process of creating our RSS [responsibility sourced seafood standard] Policy to achieve 100 percent traceability and transparency in our supply chain," said Tan.

FSI's parent firm, SFC, was founded by PCAFI Chairman Philip Ong in 1990.

SFC boasts of ISO-certified manufacturing facilities that produce "optimally bioavailable ingredients" for fast seafood growth and for environmental sustainability.

FSI's program with USAID aims to sustain food production while protecting the seas and fish populations.

The USAID program recognizes that the Philippines loses an estimated P68.5 billion yearly from IUU fishing.





## Japan's soaring fish prices hit healthy-eating elderly hardest

**A** HEALTHY eating habit of adding fish to their diets is getting increasingly more expensive for older adults in Japan.

The nation's food inflation surged to a 47-year high in May, with the price of fish increasing by 14.8 percent compared to the year before, while gains in meat price tags remained at a more modest 8.6 percent, according to data released by the Statistics Bureau of Japan.

That means the nation's elderly aged 70 and over, who spent an average of more than 7,000 yen (\$48.73) on fish per month according to the latest household spending data, are feeling a much larger inflationary hit than younger people. Those aged 20-29 only spent less than a third of that amount on fish.

Fish remains a major source of protein in Japan, and is particularly important for senior citizens to help reduce loss of muscles and brain cells.

The government has announced an increase of monthly pension payments for the first time in 3 years this year, which would raise pensioners' income by an amount between 1.9 percent and 2.2 percent.

But that's not quite enough for the growing number of older people facing a higher cost of living, as overall inflation



A VISITOR at Nijo fish market in Sapporo, Hokkaido, Japan, on April 17, 2023. NORIKO HAYASHI/BLOOMBERG

remains above 3 percent, while the number of workers contributing to the pension system also shrinks.

### Food prices in Britain

BRITAIN'S biggest supermarkets said they're keeping food prices as low as possible in response to questions from UK politicians on whether they're profiteering from rampant inflation on groceries.

Representatives from Tesco Plc, J Sainsbury Plc, Asda and Morrisons were asked whether they have been "behaving" in their pricing for cash-strapped shoppers, by politicians on the House of Commons Business and Trade committee on Tuesday. All the supermarkets highlighted that their profits have declined in the past year as

they have tried to minimize price increases.

"We are acutely aware of the pressure that many millions of ordinary people have come under as a result of this cost-of-living crisis and food inflation in particular," said David Potts, Chief Executive Officer of Morrisons.

Supermarkets are in the political spotlight as food emerges as a larger contribution to inflation than energy. The consumer prices index rose the same amount in May as the previous month, surprising markets and leading to a larger-than-expected Bank of England rate rise last week.

Grocers have been passing on some price cuts in recent weeks including in staples like milk, bread and butter. Those measures led to food price inflation falling for a second month to 14.6 percent, according to the

British Retail Consortium. That's still well above the average inflation in shops at 8.4 percent.

Asda is still lowering prices despite higher debt payments after its takeover by the billionaire Issa brothers and TDR Capital, said Kris Comerford, chief commercial officer at Asda.

"We are inflating behind our input costs," said Rhian Bartlett, food commercial director at Sainsbury.

The supermarkets were asked to justify paying out dividends to investors when their customers are so badly off. Scrutiny was also placed on executive salaries, particularly Sainsbury CEO Simon Roberts who took home £4.95 million (\$6.3 million) in pay last year.

"How is that justifiable when people who come into stores are suffering from a grotesque cost of living crisis?" asked Labour MP Andy McDonald.

Earlier this week Sainsbury unveiled plans to make £15 million worth of price cuts on household staples including pasta, rice and cornflakes while discounter Aldi lowered the price of toilet roll by 24 pence. Marks & Spencer Group Plc reduced prices on more than 70 items earlier in June, while Morrisons announced its sixth round of price cuts this year, costing the retailer £26 million. *Bloomberg News*



## GEF approves FAO-led projects to transform agrifood systems



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**B**UILDING on growing momentum to tackle environmental problems by addressing the ways in which food and fiber are produced, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has approved 26 projects led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

"To achieve the 2030 Agenda we need a healthy planet and healthy people. These projects will help countries conserve and use natural resources sustainably while providing nutritious diets and green and climate-resilient livelihoods and contribute to the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Paris agreement" said FAO Deputy Director-General Maria Helena Semedo, welcoming the greenlighting of the projects by the 64th Council Session of the GEF, held last June 26 in Brasilia.

The projects total \$174.7 million in GEF funding and leverage \$1.2 billion in co-financing. With these new projects, FAO's partnership with the GEF will have helped countries access over \$1.4 billion in financing and leverage over \$9 billion in co-financing to transform agrifood systems into solutions to biodiversity loss, climate change, ecosystem degradation, and pollution on land, in fresh water, and in our seas, Semedo said.

### 'Integrated programming'

THESE 26 projects will support countries to create or improve the management of nearly 17.9 million hectares of protected areas on land and sea, improve the sustainability of fisheries, forestry, and agricultural practices on over 27 million hectares of landscapes and seascapes, restore 820,000 hectares of ecosystems, mitigate 275 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions, improve cooperative management of 4 shared water ecosystems, and benefit 1.6 million women and men.

■ Six projects in Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nicaragua, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Thailand and Venezuela are part of the Critical Forest Biomes Integrated Program, which will support the protection and conservation of globally important forests and improve management of forest resources. FAO and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) are leading the \$38 million Indo-Malaya Critical Forest Biome Integrated Program.

■ Five projects in Cabo Verde, Cuba, Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago, and Vanuatu are part of the Blue and Green Islands Integrated Program, which will address the interdependence of environment and economic systems in SIDS (Small Islands Developing States).

■ Four projects in Côte d'Ivoire, Nepal, Sao Tome and Principe, and Viet Nam are part of the Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program, which will return hundreds of millions of hectares of

degraded landscapes to functioning ecosystems and generate economic, ecological and livelihood benefits.

■ One project in Costa Rica will join the Net Zero Nature Positive Accelerator Integrated Program, which will advance a whole-of-government strategy, across all sectors and actors, to address the twin threats of global biodiversity loss and climate change.

■ One project in Pakistan will join the Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals from Supply Chains Integrated Program and utilize circular bioeconomy principles to transform banana waste into a sustainable alternative to cotton.

FAO said it will also support countries through individual projects that focus on biodiversity conservation, land degradation, climate change adaptation, and management of shared water systems:

■ A regional project in Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Jordan, Sudan, and Yemen will promote sustainable fisheries management in the Red Sea Large Marine Ecosystem.

■ A global project will pilot solutions to reduce sea-based marine plastic litter in Costa Rica, Kenya, and Vanuatu.

■ In Venezuela, FAO will strengthen management to combat invasive aquatic species in Marine Coastal Protected Areas.

■ In Chile, FAO will strengthen inter-institutional coordination for biodiversity mainstreaming on local, national, and regional levels.

■ In Honduras, FAO will support income diversification through restoration and nature-based solutions while improving governance of sustainable production and biodiversity conservation in the forest corridor.

■ In Mexico, FAO will help rebuild ecological integrity and promote green recovery through integrated landscape management, improved governance, and innovative financing in the Biocultural Corridor of the Central West of Mexico.

■ In Haiti, FAO will promote sustainable land management to recover and restore prioritized landscapes in Southern Haiti for environmental services and food security.

■ In Zambia, FAO will enhance climate change adaptation in local communities, reduce land degradation and enhance biodiversity conservation through an integrated climate-resilient landscape management approach.

■ In Cabo Verde, FAO will support climate change adaptation and increased food security through agro-ecological solutions, improved governance, and access to climate financing.

FAO's global GEF portfolio currently exceeds \$1.3 billion, assisting more than 120 countries in projects that respond to local priorities, deliver global environmental benefits, and advance the Sustainable Development Goals.