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Hasten coconut industry modernization, Marcos tells PCA

PILIPINO STAR NGAYON

Photo: PBBM

B. DA FAMILY

BUSINESS WORLD

DA says meat supply sufficient; output of rice considered 'high'
Business chamber touts PHL prospects as tea producer

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Onion prices up anew
Hog raisers assail DA's plan to import more pork products

MANILA BULLETIN

DENR Secretary discusses the need to balance extraction with rehabilitation

BUSINESS MIRROR

DA exec says local hog raisers may be able to meet pork demand

THE MANILA TIMES

PhilMech plays vital role in coconut industry devt
UCAP congratulates PCA on its Golden Year Anniversary
PCA kicks off 50th anniversary celebration

ABANTE TONITE

P25 per kilong bigas mabibili pa sa Kadiwa

C. AGRI-RELATED STORY

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

The greatest good

ASF detected in 3 Zambales villages

BUSINESS MIRROR

PAGASA: El Niño no effect yet this planting season

JFC to govt: Go slow on salt – sugar tax bill

THE MANILA TIMES

Pangasinan salt farm rehabilitation begins

ABANTE

Tulong ng Ako Bicol sa mga magsasaka, PWD, may sakit

D. FOREIGN STORY

MALAYA BUSINES INSIGHT

Corn rebounds



GOTCHA JARIUS BONDOC

Are additional sugar imports for consumers or cartelists?



Will government's importation of more sugar finally make it affordable for consumers? Or will it enrich trade cartelists like before?

The 150,000 tons additional sugar is supposedly for buffer – standby for emergency, shortage, price spikes. We've heard that before.

The Sugar Regulatory Administration already imported such buffer stock for 2023. Still retail prices are spiking to P100-P140 a kilo.

SRA Sugar Order No. 6, Feb. 15, 2023 states: "Section 4. Volume and Type of Sugar:

"4.1 Two hundred thousand metric tons (200,000 MT) shall be allocated to Consumers.

"4.2 Two hundred forty thousand metric tons (240,000 MT) shall be allocated as buffer stock, for release to consumers upon the approval of the SRA board."

So what's the new buffer for? Did SRA botch its data gathering?

There's only one sugarcane planting-harvest-milling season per year, October-May. Producers vary only by a few weeks in Cagayan, Tarlac, Pampanga, Batangas, Camarines, Ormoc, Iloilo, Capiz, Negros, Bukidnon, Davao and Cotabato. SRA must research supply to determine if the country will export or import.

But favoritism marred Sugar Order No. 6. Agriculture Senior USec. Domingo Panganiban admitted choosing a month prior only three traders, from a three-page list of 120, to import 440,000 tons. Those three had met with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in Malacañang, a photo of which went viral. Panganiban told senators that Marcos Jr. ordered him to limit the selection.

SRA usually holds open bidding, then allocates import volumes to one or two dozen traders. Panganiban preempted the process. That resulted in what Sen. Risa Hontiveros denounced as "government-sponsored cartel."

The favored trio landed Thai sugar at only P25,000 per ton then sold at P70,000. Profiteering P45,000 per ton, they raked in P19.8 billion from all 440,000 tons. Just like that, Hontiveros exposed.

Consumers suffered. Procuring from the trio at P70 a kilo, wholesalers distributed at P85-upwards. Adding transport, other costs and margin, retailers sold at P100-P140. Same as during last Christmas' shortage; but higher than P70-P80 in September 2022. In early 2022 before the Marcos Jr. admin, it was only P35-P50.

Malacañang and SRA not only let the trio set the minimum price but also kept it at P70,000 a ton, or P70 a kilo.

Efforts of anti-smugglers were wasted. DAASec. for Enforcement James La-

yug and Customs had seized 9,827,000 kilos of contraband sugar in November 2022-February 2023. Government had not invested any capital in it. Valuating smuggled sugar at P100 per kilo, government's only loss was the five-percent import duty of P5 a kilo.

Government could thus have sold the stuff only that cheap.

Still, Malacañang and SRA retailed it in Kadiwa rolling stores in poor communities at the trio's price of P70 a kilo.

Same with the 6,500 tons "smuggled" in Batangas by one of the trio before Sugar Order No. 6 came into effect. Panganiban made Customs return it to the trader, who sold at P70,000 a ton, or P70 a kilo.

Panganiban barred industrial users from importing their own sugar, but instead buy only from the trio, Hontiveros bared. Result: prices of biscuits, juices and other sugared foods inflated.

Will SRA set things right with the forthcoming 150,000 tons? Will consumers ever enjoy P35-P50-a-kilo sugar like only 15 months ago?

Marcos Jr. is said to have won the presidency on his promise of P20-a-kilo rice. One year hence Malacañang says that price was only aspirational, as in "wish ko lang." Rice retailed this week in urban centers at P36-P60 a kilo.

Grit can make wishes come true. As concurrent agriculture secretary, Marcos Jr. has a Usec. for rice productivity. Thousands of experts have pointed out what need to be done. All await implementing:

Right seedlings for upland, lowland, irrigated and rainfed fields. Cheaper solar, windmill, gravity irrigation. Cheaper fertilizers and pesticides, preferably sourced locally. Support for mechanization in harrowing, harvesting, threshing. Cheaper electricity for drying, storage, milling. Remove "delihensya" in land and sea transport.

A president can work on all those simultaneously while fixing problems that crop up.

Like, ASec. Kristine Evangelista attributes present rice prices to higher palay farmgate rate: P20-P23 a kilo. At such rates, farmers merely recover costs and earn a little but do not become rich. Recovery rate of drying then milling palay to rice is only 50-60 percent. Too low, compared to 68-76 percent in Thailand and Vietnam. Marcos Jr. can call in the problem-solvers.

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BBM wants coconut industry modernization fast-tracked

President Marcos has directed the **Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA)** to fast-track the coconut industry's modernization for the Philippines to become a major coconut exporter.

"The PCA must intensify the implementation of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan to accelerate the modernization of the coconut industry and to improve the lives of our coconut farmers and their families," Marcos said yesterday in Pasay City during the 50th anniversary of the PCA.

Marcos, concurrently the agriculture secretary, has been urged by farmers' groups to ensure the coco levy fund would be used to support the industry.

The coco levy fund, at the time of the President's dictator father, was collected from coconut farmers to supposedly fund

programs.

Lawsuits were filed claiming the fund was used to support the businesses of the late Marcos cronies.

In a statement, the PCA said the coconut industry remains to be the Philippines' top dollar-earning export.

Coconut oil (\$1.431 billion), desiccated coconut (\$396 million) and copra oil cake (\$67.54 million) ranked first, fourth and tenth, respectively in 2021.

Coconut production rose by 1.6 percent, from 3.20 million metric tons in the first quarter of 2022 to 3.26 million metric tons in the first quarter of 2023.

Coconut exports declined by more than half, from \$1.04 billion in January to April 2022 to \$490.16 million in the same period this year, according to the Presidential Communications Office.

- Alexis Romero



President eyes PH as biggest coconut products exporter

By BETHEENA UNITE

There is no reason why the Philippines should not be the biggest producer of coconut products for export.

President Marcos made the statement during his speech at the 50th founding anniversary celebration of the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) ▶9



PCA 50TH ANNIVERSARY — President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. plants a coconut during the 50th anniversary of the Philippine Coconut Authority at the Coconut Palace in Pasay City on Thursday, June 29, 2023. Also in photo are Sen. Cynthia A. Villar, Agrarian Reform Secretary Conrado M. Estrella III, Philippine Coconut Authority Administrator Bernie F. Cruz, and Pasay City Mayor Imelda Calixto-Rubiano. (Ali Vicoy)



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President eyes PH as biggest coconut products exporter 1◀

on Thursday, June 29.

"This administration started to formulate the plans on how to redevelop our coconut industry, how to help our coconut farmers. There is no reason why the Philippines should not be the biggest producer of export in terms of coconut products," he said.

The President stressed that the country's potential in terms of exporting coconut products is "quite good."

He said the government is now "going to sit down to finalize" the plan to bolster the country's coconut production.

"Kaya hindi talaga tama (This is not right), we cannot allow this very, very grand opportunity for our farmers to slip by," he said.

The chief executive said the government is not at a point where it is looking

at the coconut industry as an industry, noting that "it is now time to revitalize that economy for the betterment not only of coconut farmers but the entire economy."

Replanting and intercropping will be included in the effort to bring back the old glory of the country's coconut industry.

"I am very optimistic that we will be able to bring back to the coconut industry... When the government fell in 1986, all of those very important programs for the coconut industry stopped," he said.

In order to achieve the goal, Marcos pointed out that coconut farmers must get all the support they need, directing the PCA to improve their conditions.

"Through their hard work, they are able to plant, take care of, and nourish

resilient coconut trees necessary for the emergence of a stronger coconut industry that we may all reap the benefits of this essential product," he said. "I thus encourage the PCA to continue to uplift the lives of our coconut farmers and empower them to improve their conditions, break free from the chains of poverty, and dream bigger for themselves and for their loved ones."

He also ordered the PCA to double their efforts in addressing issues in the industry and invest in technologies and initiatives that will safeguard and ensure the resilience of the coconut sector.

He added that the PCA must intensify the implementation of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan to accelerate the modernization of the coconut industry and to improve the lives of coconut farmers and their families.

PHILIPPINE DAILY
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Nurturing coconut. After instructing the Philippine Coconut Authority to intensify the implementation of the development plan for industry modernization and to invest in new technologies to ensure the resilience of the coconut sector, President Marcos Jr. waters a coconut seedling at the Coconut Palace in Pasay City.

PCO PHOTO



DA urged to pursue food security bills



Enough supply. Trucks deliver sacks of rice to warehouses in Tondo, Manila on April 17, 2023. DA says rice stock ending June is good for more than two months. (Photo by RHOY COBILLA)

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) said the government must push for the passage of bills that would help the country attain genuine rice self-sufficiency.

KMP said one of the first proposals by farmers when President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. assumed his post as secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA) was to repeal the Rice Tariffication Law.

The group had held the law largely responsible for

further lowering the income of local palay farmers as it liberalized trading of the staple food grain.

However, the proposal has yet to be considered.

KMP said legislative measures advocating food security and food self-sufficiency such as the Rice Industry Development Act and Genuine Agrarian Reform Bill remain pending in Congress.

The group also lamented the increased budget of the DA has not translated to the well-being of farmers nor the improvement of the entire sector.

KMP said "Last year, when (President Ferdinand) Marcos Jr. assumed the DA secretary portfolio, KMP demanded revive the local agriculture and make domestic food production a priority by suspending conversion of agricultural lands, providing a P15,000 subsidy for Filipino farmers and fisherfolk, allotting 10 percent of the national budget for agriculture and ending reliance on importation of agricultural products starting with the repeal of the Rice Tariffication

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DA

Law. However, he did the exact opposite and remained callous and indifferent to our demands," said Rafael Mariano, KMP chairperson emeritus, in a statement.

KMP said the lower palay production last year at 19.76 million metric tons (MT) is a proof of the government's lack of support to the rice industry.

It added the government is "far from achieving" Marcos' campaign promise of bringing down the price of rice to P20 per kilo.

"We have only seen rice price surges in the past year. Worse, the government has continued relying on the importation of other common agricultural items instead of strengthening domestic production to provide the people's and country's food needs," Mariano added.

Meanwhile, the DA said 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.

In a separate statement, DA

Undersecretary Leo Sebastian, who heads the Masagana Rice Industry Program, said production will go up 6 percent due to "a bountiful harvest for the January to June rice planting season."

"This is based on PRISM (Philippine Rice Information System) data of 8.153 million MT palay production in 2022 to 8.605 million MT palay or 5.6 million MT milled rice in 2023," he said.

Sebastian said this volume, plus the carryover stock of 1.8 million MT milled rice and 1.8 million MT of imports will be enough to fill in the demand and consumption of 7 million MT 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 said.

The DA also said current price movements are due to the high cost of production locally and globally.

Based on public markets monitor-

ing by the DA in the National Capital Region yesterday, the per kilogram (kg) price of imported rice range from P50 to P58 for special variety; P44 to P48 for premium and; P40 to P48 for well milled.

No data is available on the price of regular milled.

For local rice, special variety is at P48 to P60 per kg; premium at P42 to P50 per kg; well-milled at P39 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 now higher by P4 per kg at most.

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

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

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Govt vows to strengthen coconut industry

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. yesterday ordered the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) to strengthen the implementation of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan which calls for among others the modernization of the industry.

The President, in addressing the 50th anniversary celebration of the PCA, also acknowledged the challenges faced by the coconut

industry such as climate change, pests, and diseases that not just threaten the coconut trees but endanger the future of the whole agriculture sector.

“So, let us double our efforts to tackle these issues and invest in technologies and initiatives that will not only safeguard but also ensure the resilience of the coconut sector of our agriculture,” he said.

Marcos also told the PCA to

look into the plight and welfare of the coconut farmers and come up with measures that will empower them to improve their conditions and free them from poverty.

Marcos said his administration started to formulate the plans on how to redevelop our coconut industry and how to help our coconut farmers which included the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan.

“The PCA must intensify the implementation of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan to accelerate the modernization of the coconut industry and to improve the lives of our coconut farmers and their families,” he said.

He said the Philippines is a major exporter of coconut oil and

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GOVT

other products such as copra meal and desiccated coconut.

“We are thus in a prime position to harness this advantage to develop this crucial sector for the benefit of our economy and our people... There is no reason why the Philippines should not be the biggest producer of export in terms of coconut products,” he said.

Marcos said with the advancement of technologies, it is also important to continue developing and improving the coconut-made or based products as well as to find new uses and expand its distribution to new markets.

Coconut production in the country increased by 1.6 percent

from 3.20 million metric tons (MMT) in the first quarter of 2022 to 3.26 MMT in the first quarter of 2023.

Coconut exports declined by more than half from \$1.04 billion in January to April 2022 to \$490.16 million in the same period in 2023. - **Jocelyn Montemayor**



1 YEAR UNDER BBM

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Marcos Jr's commitment to giving new hope to Filipinos

BY EDISON JOSEPH GONZALES

UNDETERRED by his defeat in 2016, and fully committed to his vision of a united Philippines, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. decided to run for the highest office in government in 2022. He has remained resolute in his desire to steward the Filipino people towards an era of progress and development.



As President, Marcos Jr. vowed to be a leader for every Filipino and stands steadfast behind his vision of uniting the nation and delivering a brighter future for the people.

Here are some of his remarkable accomplishments for the Philippines' economic renewal and long-term growth, thus restoring prosperity for all Filipinos.

Continuing inflation slowdown

The continuing decline of the inflation rate of the country is an "encouraging" news for the Philippine economy, the President said.

In a video message, the Marcos Jr. said this piece of news is very welcome as it is coupled with the improving employment rate in the country.

The Philippine Statistics Authority announced that the country's inflation rate went down to 6.1 percent in May, the fourth consecutive month of deceleration.

Unemployment rate drops

The efforts by the Marcos administration to create more jobs for Filipinos started to pay off after the country recorded a drop in unemployment rate to 4.5 percent in April 2023, from 5.7 percent in the same month last year.

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The top five sub-sectors with the highest increase on the number of employed persons from April 2022 to April 2023 include wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (914,000); accommodation and food service activities (379,000); administrative and support service activities (345,000); transportation and storage (321,000); and other service activities (242,000).

Export development plan okayed

Marcos Jr. approved the proposed Philippine Export Development Plan (PEDP) 2023 to 2028 aimed at capitalizing on export growth opportunities amid the current market trends, developing local industries, and making the Philippines a global player in terms of exports.

Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual said the export plan outlines three strategic actions to develop the export clusters: addressing production constraints; developing a strong innovative export ecosystem; and increasing the Philippines' mindshare in the global market.

Online transactions monitored

The government continues to monitor transactions in the digital space to

protect the public against scammers and abusive online lenders, Marcos Jr. said as he warned the people against the threat and risks posed by artificial intelligence (AI).

eGov PH Super App launched

Marcos Jr. led the national launch of the eGov PH Super App and the National Information and Communication Technology Month Kick-off Ceremony in Malacañang, saying that the government

must facilitate the rapid development of the country's interconnectivity infrastructure and digitalization to boost the economy and fight corruption.

Govt to employ advanced technologies to entice youth into agribusiness

The national government will be making use of new technologies in the agriculture sector to attract young people to go into agribusiness and farming, Marcos Jr. said.

The chief executive said it is also important to continuously innovate and mechanize the systems in farming to draw the youth into agriculture.

PH, Israel collaboration

The Philippines and Israel agreed on a strengthened partnership in agriculture, water management, as well as in establishing direct flights between the two countries, following a meeting by Marcos Jr. with Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen.

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■ **HOPE TO FILIPINOS** from D3

Marcos Jr.'s commitment

Manage forests, combat climate change

Acting on the directive of Marcos Jr., the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) led by Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga created the national environment and natural resources geospatial mapping tool for identifying areas for reforestation, watershed management as well as for the crafting mining policies.

Govt can replicate Ilocos Norte forest program

The country can adopt a forest management concept developed in Ilocos Norte to ensure the sustainability of forest projects in the Philippines, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said on Monday.

The Ilocos project, financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), involved tree planting, watershed development and cooperative organization.

Speaking during the celebration of the Philippine Environment Month, Philippine Arbor Day, and the 160th Anniversary of the Philippine Forestry Service held in Quezon City, President Marcos said that as long as people have a sense of ownership and belonging in forest preservation, Filipinos will do everything they can to preserve the ecology, forestland, and biodiversity.

Oil spill recovery completed in Mindoro

The extraction of the remaining oil from the sunken MT Princess Empress in Oriental Mindoro has been completed, two days ahead of the target schedule date of June 19, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) reported.

Siphoning operations began on May 29 with the help of a Dynamic Support Vessel (DSV) Fire Opal chartered by

Malayan Towage and Salvage Corp. (MTSC).

5-year National Tourism Development Plan approved

Marcos Jr. approved the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) for 2023 to 2028, which will serve as the administration's blueprint and the development framework for the tourism industry.

The NTDP provides a framework to guide the development and implementation of programs, projects, and activities towards a sustainable, innovative, inclusive, and globally competitive tourism industry.

NTDP's seven strategic goals include improvement of tourism infrastructure and accessibility; cohesive and comprehensive digitalization and connectivity; enhancement of overall tourist experience; equalization of tourism product development and promotion; diversification of the tourism portfolio through multidimensional tourism; maximization of domestic and international tourism; and strengthening tourism governance through close collaborations with national and local stakeholders.

Visit the Malacañang heritage structures

The President invited the public to visit the Malacañang heritage structures and catch a glimpse of the country's history.

Among those opened by the First Family were the Bahay Ugnayan Museum, the Goldenberg Mansion and the Teus Mansion. It is the first time the three structures are being opened to the public.

Spearheaded by First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos, the Malacañang

Heritage Tours aims to preserve the remarkable contributions of past Philippine presidents to nation building. It is a must-see attraction featuring heritage museums that provide visitors with a greater appreciation for the country's past and distinguished leaders.

Pier 88 in Cebu as vital piece of puzzle

The President said he envisions the launch of the Pier 88 project in Cebu province as an important piece of the puzzle in pushing for connectivity, and seamless travel and international trade.

In his speech during the launch of Pier 88 in Liloan, Cebu, the President said the seaport project will be a springboard for bigger undertakings in the future.

P80-M livelihood project for fisherfolk in WPS

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) is now preparing to launch a project that aims to further more livelihood opportunities for fisherfolk living in the vicinity of the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

The program shall cover beneficiaries from the Ilocos region, Central Luzon, and MiMaRoPa, particularly areas near the West Philippine Sea.

Pilot testing of govt food stamp program

Marcos Jr. has approved the pilot testing of the food stamp program intended for one million poor families as part of the administration's thrust to combat poverty, malnutrition and hunger, the country's social welfare secretary said.

The food stamp program or the "Walang Gutom 2027" aims to provide electronic benefit transfers that will be loaded with food credits amounting

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Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco presents to President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. a Plaque of Appreciation as the guest speaker of the 50th DoT anniversary celebration recently. DOT PHOTO



President Marcos Jr.'s Kadiwa PCO PHOTO

to P3,000 to purchase a select list of food commodities from DSWD accredited local retailers.

It intends to target the bottom one million households from Listahanan 3 who belong to the food poor criteria as defined by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The DSWD has identified five pilot sites coming from different geopolitical characteristics: one in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, what used to be a former conflict area; one in geographically isolated regions or provinces; one in urban poor settings; one

will be calamity-stricken areas; and, one will be a rural poor area.

Marcos Jr. elated over survey

The President expressed gladness over a survey result showing increased approval rating about how he steers the country, and thanked those who continue to trust him and his administration.

Marcos Jr. said the administration's major thrust is improving the economy by attracting more investors and by showing to the world that the Philippines is ready for business and that it's an ideal labor and investment destination.

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President accepts 'incomplete' grade

BY KRISTINA MARALIT AND REINA C. TOLENTINO

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Thursday said he agrees with the "incomplete" grade given him and his Cabinet by economic experts as he wraps up his first year in office.

➤ 'Incomplete' A7



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■ 'INCOMPLETE' FROM A1

President accepts 'incomplete' grade

"I saw a report earlier this morning where one of the economists said the grade that I will give for the President is incomplete. I agree with him. We are not done," the President said at the sidelines of the launch of the Kanegosyo Center of Cebuana Lhuillier in Parañaque City.

"There are many, many things that we still need to do. We have to undo 30, 35, almost 40 years of neglect when it comes to the agricultural sector," he said.

"We have done a lot of growth, [and] we are beginning to see the systemic changes that are going to be part of the new bureaucracy, but there is still a long way to go," Marcos said.

He also said his campaign promises are still "a work in progress." The President said that under his watch, the government will continue to improve the economy and address the "biggest problem" that is inflation.

He said that while his administration has achieved significant changes in its first year, more needs to be done before his term ends in 2028.

"So, it's never enough. Whatever it is that we have managed to do, there is still a great deal more to do. We have to work smart, and we have to work well, and we have to be very conscious," he said.

He said he plans to gradually introduce structural changes in the Department of Agriculture (DA) before stepping down as its secretary. "The problem [is] during the beginning of this year there had been some sort of crisis: food supply, food prices, fertilizer prices, etcetera," Marcos said.

He said the goal for the DA is first, guarantee an adequate food supply; second, that the prices are affordable; and third, that the farmers "make a good living." As far as House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez is concerned, Marcos did well in his first year as president.

Marcos, who is his cousin, "has a genuine concern, compassion and empathy for the poor," he said.

"The economy grew by 7.6 percent and 7.2 percent in the third and fourth quarters of 2022, and 6.4 percent in the first quarter of this year. Those growth periods were the first nine months of the Marcos administration. I sincerely hope we can sustain it," Romualdez said.

During his trips abroad, the President promoted the country as an investment destination, he said.

Marcos "has cultivated our ties with our old, reliable ally and partner, the US, and renewed bilateral discussions with China to uphold our interests in the West Philippine Sea and our exclusive economic zone," Romualdez said.

Kabayan party-list Rep. Ron Salo gave Marcos an outstanding mark in his first year as president.

Marcos "has delivered on his promise of uniting the Filipino people. The President has worked to mend the divide caused by the past election, which is an outstanding feat by itself, considering it was very divisive," Salo said.

The congressman also credited the President for bringing down the unemployment rate to 4.5 percent in April 2023 from 5.2 percent in July 2022.

"I also commend the President for his efforts to ensure that our seafarers will continue to get the best opportunities in the maritime industry," Salo said.

"With still five years remaining on his term, it is admirable that the President recognizes that more work needs to be done and many issues are yet to be addressed in order for his administration to fully realize his promises to the people," he said.

"Through the President's strong and decisive political will, Congress has followed his lead to craft relevant and responsive policies that will enable the government in delivering the services and programs needed by the public. As a lawmaker, I pledge to continually support the President and his programs so we can achieve an inclusive progress for all Filipinos," Salo said.



PBBM and the coconut industry

BY CHARLES R. AVILA

REVIEWING the speeches and declarations of PBBM on the coconut industry, particularly in the lengthy no holds-barred dialogues he had with coconut farmer leaders of Bicolandia and Southern Tagalog in Lucena and Lipa, with the leaders of the Visayas and Mindanao who gathered together at Tagbilaran, and with the national consultation conducted in Makati where farmer leaders from all three island regions of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao got together with then-senator Ferdinand R. Marcos, one cannot miss the following important pointers repeatedly emphasized by PBBM (all available in YouTube) in that year of consultation 2015, just a little less than a decade ago.

Firstly, he showed that he was acutely aware of the fact that "the coconut advantage is our nation's natural advantage." It had become clear to him that one of our nation's indubitably natural competitive factors is the "Tree of Life" — more popularly known everywhere as the coconut tree, the tree of a thousand uses: in food, fuel, energy, medicines, detergents and toiletries; a nut whose every part spells an invitation to added value and authentic usefulness — used in various names and in diverse forms by all peoples all over the world for the past so many hundreds of years.

There may be more than a few things going for the Philippines, but when one thinks of it — nothing beats the coconut advantage. More than any feature of this country, it is coconut that defines the Philippines. And it is coconut that is the realistic basis for the eco-industrialization of the whole country.

The coconut advantage

He knew that the world today needs the coconut more and more: *to preserve the environment* with coco-based geo-textiles and anti-erosion mats and totally degradable plastics and toxin-neutralizing oil additives; *to do a maintenance job of the human body* against AIDS and diabetes and SARS and Covid and heart ailments and other degenerative diseases, to mention just two areas (planetary environment and human health) of its world-demand functions aside from the traditional need for good old coconut oil.

For most of the developed world, coconut is the greatest source of lauric oil (C12-C14) — the most desired raw material for both nonfood products like soaps and toiletries, personal care and detergent products, and as well for cooking oil and fats component of food products.

In addition to food products, wellness items coming from coconut are in ever greater demand. Recent studies have found that increasing amounts of coconut flour in bakery products result in what scientists call "lower glycemic food

index." Why? Because coconut flour from "sapal" is a good source of dietary fiber. Coconut sugar is in this same category, fortunately for diabetics and others who prefer natural to synthetic sugars.

Of late, coconut became the most desired fruit for its role in strengthening the human body's immune system because of its richness in monolaurin, that medium-chain fatty acid (saturated fat) found in only two places: in coconut milk and mother's milk. These fatty acids are burned almost immediately for energy production, and so they are not converted into body fat or cholesterol and do not affect blood cholesterol levels. If they could, all hospitals and clinics worldwide like to have a good constant supply around.

These therapeutic benefits of coconut and its by-products are protection against heart disease, cancer, diabetes and a host of other degenerative illnesses. So, if there was oil that helped protect you from heart disease, cancer and other degenerative conditions, improved your digestion, strengthened your immune system, protected

you from infectious illnesses, and helped you lose excess weight, would you not be interested? Fast growing numbers of people are.

Coconut skim milk, you may not have known, has been found to be a one-on-one equal to fresh cow's milk in its nutrient composition, with the added superiority of being lactose-free: a boon for many lactose-intolerant populations like the Philippines itself. How many billions of pesos would we save if we used this instead of expensively imported cow's milk.

In sum, coconut oil is premium oil. It has no perfect substitute. The closest substitute is palm kernel oil (10 percent of palm oil).

Secondly, he said that the coconut advantage would never be realized unless or until the government got its act together in its necessary support for the farmers and the industry.

The tools

The tools of government to attain this end are mainly:

- The PCA, which is mandated by law on the productivity side to promote the rapid growth of the coconut industry and ensure that the coconut farmers become direct participants in such development and growth. But he heard about demoralization in the ranks of the PCA, which used to be the top agri-extension agent of government though lately due to government neglect, too, became an agency of casuals or of employees raring to retire. Something has to be done effectively to change this state of affairs;

- The CIIF-Oil Mills Group which was set up with coco levy funds purposely to establish a sound business platform as a catch-all for the PCA's greater productivity in the coconut industry by providing quality products and services to local and international customers, and providing a sustainable and recurring source

of revenue for coconut farmers nationwide through the establishment as well of a national structure of coco-industrialization to be the backbone of the national economy. But, then, he also heard that this group was deliberately weakened by corruption to the advantage of foreign and local birds of prey, even to the point of some of the mills being shut down and the proverbially famous Minola oil losing P50-some million pesos lately for the first time in its long history. Brand CIIF is globally famous and trustworthy. There is need to revitalize and re-engineer its present establishment to be attuned with the prevailing market trends which is not limited to coconut oil, but rather include other value-adding food and nonfood products through the utilization of the matured whole coconut fruit which the existing oil mills and prospective smaller-sized feeder mills can utilize as integrated coco hub. Needless to say, with the help of PCA and the Confederation of Coconut Farmers' Organizations, CIIF-OMG should not be made to give up and sell out but, rather, gather new life for a new sunrise;

- The UCPB, or the United Coconut Planters Bank, which was supposed to be the bank of the coconut farmers and the coconut industry. It was immorally and irrationally allowed to be merged with (or devoured by) another government-owned bank through a mere EO which everyone knows cannot be above an RA or a PD, to the detriment of the farmers and the industry. There is a need to get back the UCPB as challenging as such a task might be.

These three government agencies funded by the coco levy were to serve the coconut organizations concretely. Obviously they haven't done their job if one looks honestly at the relevant evidence, namely the wealth or poverty of the coconut farmers themselves, and the competitiveness or lack thereof of our coconut products as they want to be present and cherished around the world. The broad majority of coconut farmers and workers are



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some of the poorest of the poor in our country. That is the first undeniable evidence of failure. And, secondly, our coconut products are being shamefully trounced by countries of much lesser coconut importance. Hence, PBBM has consistently advocated the twin measures of farm modernization and rural (national) eco-industrialization.

To improve the income of coconut farmers:

- We must help them modernize their farms, practice or adopt intercropping subsystems in order to maximize the utilization of land and spread price risks to several crops — farm modernization;
- We must increase domestic and international demand for coconut by developing more uses for coconut and its byproducts in food, medicine, energy and other industrial uses which continue to have great potential — rural and ecological industrialization.

Where will the farmers and their allies get the capital to make this great leap forward? Let us apply the proceeds of the coco levy funds to these areas of endeavor and by this historic correction justice will rain on earth and peace and prosperity bloom in beauty.

Coco levy funds

Thirdly, again looking at and listening to his talks and declarations, PBBM clearly shows he understands quite deeply, as most politicians don't, the precise nature of the ownership of the coco levy funds and assets. He takes his cue from settled court doctrine. Are these funds public or private? They are trust-owned by the government; so, they are public funds. But they are beneficially owned by all the coconut farmers; so, they are private, for the benefit of coconut farmers and never to be regarded as general funds. Thus, in all his talks and declarations, PBBM emphatically says that the utilization of these trust funds must be governed by a foundation or corporation wherein both government

and farmers' representatives are directors or board members. In today's law (RA 11524), a mere committee governs the utilization of the trust funds, all members of which belong to the finance family. In their recognition at the time of legislative deliberations that the PCA had been utterly weakened through the years, the law as passed distributed the funds being used in any given year to various agencies many of which have very little or nothing to do with farmers and coconuts. So, the new law needs amending in the soonest time to be in conformity with the philosophy of court doctrine as regards the real ownership of these funds and assets and the need for guarantees that the real owners become the true beneficiaries rather than that these funds become wasted by bureaucrats who know no better than to mark time, if at all.

Without prejudice to pursuing the necessary amendments to RA 11524, which may take a little while coming, the urgent need today is a unified and coordinated approach on the part of government and the farmers themselves, which will mean a tripartite agreement among and between PCA, CIIF and the Confederation of Coconut Farmers Organizations of the Philippines (Confed). This agreement will mean an institutional partnership between and among those three parties toward forming and establishing a mechanism to create synergy and harmony in the utilization of coco levy funds and the implementation of projects identified and proposed by coconut farmers through CCFOP-Confed for an inclusive growth and development. Rather than a fragmented approach, this unity view might augur more surely for success in a common endeavor.

Charles R. Avila is the executive director and spokesman of the Confederation of Coconut Farmers Organizations of the Philippines (Confed). He is also the author of several books, including "The Untold Magellan Story."

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Ascending the agricultural value chain

REPUBLIC Act 8435, or the "Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997," (AFMA) authored by the late and highly esteemed Sen. Edgardo Angara, aimed to modernize the Philippine agricultural sector through the development of agricultural value chains.

Specifically, it intended "to induce the agriculture and fisheries sectors to ascend continuously the value-added ladder by subjecting their traditional or new products to further processing in order to minimize the marketing of raw, unfinished or unprocessed products."



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Twenty-five years after its passage, the AFMA failed to modern-

ize Philippine agriculture as its value chain remains unevenly developed. Karlo and Lourdes Adriano (2023) characterized the Philippine agricultural value chain as transitional, wherein traditional farmers mostly supplying the needs of wet markets coexist with modern agri-ventures catering pri-

marily to supermarkets, groceries and convenience stores.

The authors cited a number of reasons for the slow ascent of Philippine agriculture up the value chain ladder. First is the focus of most government assistance on increasing productivity to the

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Ascending

neglect of post-harvest, processing, transport and market facilities. The second is the obsession in attaining rice self-sufficiency, starving other commodities where the country has a comparative advantage of much-needed funds. And third is the protracted implementation of the agrarian reform program, leaving our tillers with minuscule land sizes that cannot enjoy economies of scale.

Data bear out the validity of these observations. Based on a World Bank survey in 2017, the Philippines had the highest logistics costs over sales ratio in the food sector compared to Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. Refrigerated warehouse capacity (in cubic feet) per urban resident in 2018 was only 1.3 in the Philippines compared to Vietnam's 4.1, China's 4.7, South Korea's 9.9, Japan's 11.1 and India's 12.1.

Forward linkages were at a low 10 percent, which means most agricultural commodities are not processed. Post-harvest losses ranged from 10 to 30 percent of the harvest because of inadequate post-harvest facilities such as dryers, mills, storage facilities, and poor roads and transport.

On agricultural funding, by now we know that more than half of the budget for the entire agricultural sector is devoted to rice. This means that other agricultural commodities will have to settle for whatever is left for them

to develop the various activities in the value chain. Undeniably, this is a tall order that is reflected in the backyard-type nature of the production of various agricultural products in the country.

Finally, our miniscule farm sizes prevent the attainment of economies of scale in production. Also, quality of products cannot be ensured because different varieties of the same crop are planted in these tiny plots of land and various amounts of inputs are applied only up to the level that the tiller's budget can afford, hence preventing application of good agricultural practices due to lack of access to modern farm knowledge and technologies.

The solutions are quite obvious. First and foremost is a need to declare the completion of the agrarian reform program to enable the land market to once again operate. The hectareage ownership ceiling should be raised up to a level where farming becomes economically viable. Studies have shown that 24 hectares are sufficient to successfully run a family-operated farm.

The other way of consolidating agricultural land is to allow leasehold and agribusiness venture agreements between small-sized farm holders and large agribusiness companies. The partnership between small farmers and agribusiness firms will allow application of modern farm technology and improve agricultural logistics.

What about relying on the government to provide the necessary logistical and extension support

services to our small cultivators? Unlike most studies (for instance ADB and Searca, 2022) that recommend the implementation of various state-sponsored programs to modernize Philippine agriculture, I am not fully convinced that the state should play the foremost role in this undertaking given previous experience of the AFMA. As noted earlier, 25 years of the law did not result in agriculture ascending the value chain ladder.

The state is not an efficient entrepreneur in this country. The "statist" approach — where subsidies should flow perpetually from the state to make producers efficient and competitive — does not simply work in the Philippines because we have an inefficient state.

Agriculture should be treated as a business venture. Its development should be left primarily in the hands of the private sector, whether small, medium or big. A private sector entrepreneur knows that if he makes a wrong investment decision, he will most likely lose his shirt.

On the other hand, a government bureaucrat does not care much whether funds are allocated efficiently because it is not his money. His foremost consideration is increasing the budget for his unit so that he can hire more people, raise the prestige of his office and enjoy more perks from the job.

Unfortunately, the private sector — whether local and particularly foreign — will not heavily invest in agriculture if our land problems persist due to the protracted implementation of agrarian reform. Note that the biggest agribusiness investments took place in the 1960s to the 70s with the entry of

big companies in the banana and pineapple markets. Hardly any significant agricultural investments happened in the 1980s up to now when the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program was passed.

The results are too clear not to notice. A secular decline in agricultural productivity. Our agri-exports went down as other neighboring countries dramatically raised their agri-export revenues.

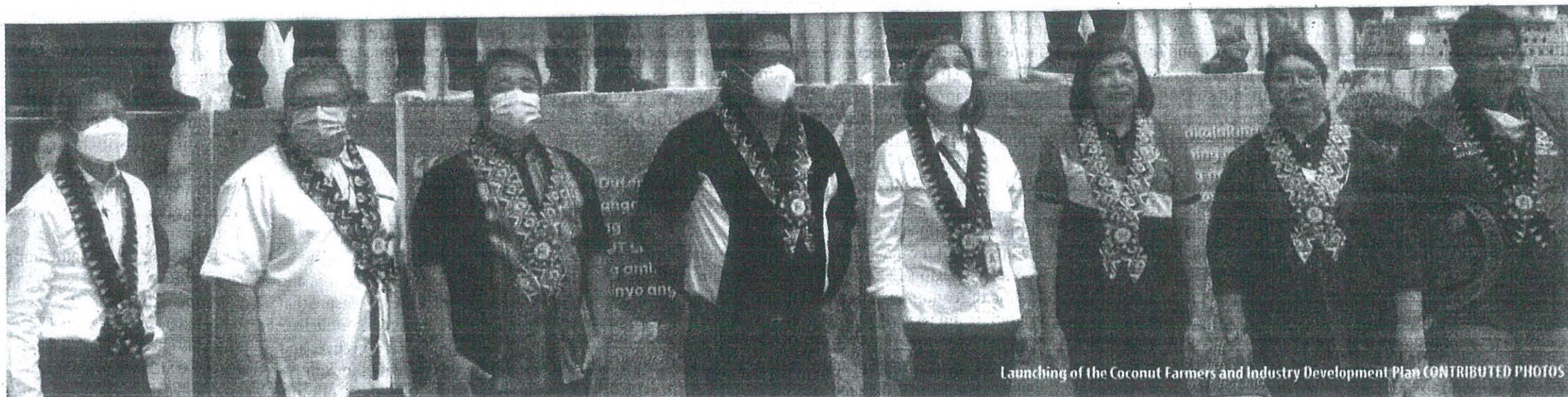
In 2001, agri-exports of selected Asean countries including the Philippines were below \$5 billion. By 2020, Philippine agri-export was still below the \$5-billion mark while Vietnam generated \$16.1 billion; Malaysia, \$20 billion; Thailand, \$26.5 billion; and Indonesia, \$28.4 billion. Note that the agri-export revenues of Thailand and Indonesia are practically the same amount of remittances that our overseas Filipino workers sent to their families during the same year.

This brings home the point that if only Philippine agriculture's full potential is realized, we can significantly increase our foreign exchange revenues and the incomes of our farmers. But such a result cannot be attained under a regime where the state has a controlling hand in agriculture. Agriculture should be in the hands of our entrepreneurs to realize our goal of making our farmers agripreneurs.

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Launching of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

PCA makes strides in implementing coconut industry plan

BY CONRAD CARINO



THE Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) is making significant strides in the implementation of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP) that was launched about a year ago as the whole country slowly came out of the pandemic.

This, as the PCA spearheaded the conduct of the first National Inter-Agency Technical Committee (NIATC) meeting on May 31, 2023, at the Sequoia Hotel, Quezon City. The NIATC meeting aims to review progress, coordinate implementation, and craft measures to improve the CFIDP's implementation.

Among the attendees were the committee members and representatives of the 15 implementing agencies (IAs) of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund (CFITF) Act. Representatives from Department of Budget and Management (DBM), Bureau of Treasury (BTr), and Commission on Audit (COA) also attended to provide guidance on the utilization of the Trust Fund.

The offices of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries, and Agrarian Reform (CAFAR) and the House Committee on Agriculture and Food were also invited to provide thrusts and directions on the implementation of the CFITF Act.

PCA Administrator Bernie Cruz reiterated the importance of continuous convergence and coordination among and between agencies to ensure that the Trust Fund will be utilized properly and services will be delivered to the coconut farmers in the most efficient and effective way.

Before the NIATC, the PCA led the groundbreaking of the first shared processing facility supported by the CFIDP on April 12, 2023, in Tagkawayan, Quezon. The White Copra Processing Center will be operated by its proponent, Sama-Sama sa Kaunlaran Multipurpose Cooperative (SSK MPC), for establishment at Brgy. Sta. Monica Tagkawayan, Quezon.

With the participation of the local government units (LGUs) in Tagkawayan along with several implementing agencies of the CFIDP involved in its conceptualization and through a message from Senator Cynthia Villar, government agencies expressed their full support to the cooperative on their first milestone.

"We commend our fellow countrymen from the Sama-Sama sa Kaunlaran Multipurpose Cooperative for their victory in starting this project. We assure you from this very moment of all-out support from the PCA. Let us all rally to level up the Philippine coconut industry," said PCA Administrator Bernie Cruz in Filipino.

The PCA administrator also thanked the overwhelming support of the concerned LGUs, especially the teams of Quezon Province Governor Helen Tan, Congressman Mike Tan, and Mayor Carlo Eleazar.

With the assistance of the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech), the White Copra Processing Center is expected to be completed and turned over to the cooperative this year.

Key strategies

The NIATC meeting concluded with a consensus on the key strategies to be included in



PCA Administrator Bernie Cruz

the next quarters of CFIDP implementation to encompass a multi-faceted approach, financial assistance, infrastructure development, and support for value-adding activities.

The outcome of the NIATC meeting is set to shape the future trajectory of the CFIDP implementation until the end of 2023. The concerted efforts of all IAs and partner stakeholders, from the legislative and Trust Fund Management Committee (TFMC), signal a promising outlook, as the country strives to unlock the full potential of its coconut resources and uplift the livelihoods of smallholder coconut farmers across the country.

Launched in 2021

The CFIDP was drafted following the signing of Republic Act 11524, better known as the Coconut Farmers and Industry Fund Act, of President Rodrigo Duterte on February 26, 2021. The plan was approved through Executive Order 172, which was signed on June 2, 2022.

CFIDP aims to increase the income and productivity of the 2.5 million coconut farmers in the country; promote poverty alleviation, education, and social equity; and rehabilitate and modernize the Philippine coconut industry.

The CFIDP is composed of various components to be realized by the PCA, in partnership with other government agencies:

1. Social Protection

- Health and Medical Program (PCA, Philippine Health Insurance Corporation)
- Crop Insurance (Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation)
- Scholarship (Commission on Higher Education)
- Trainings and Farm Schools (Agricultural Training Institute, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority)

2. Coconut Farmers Organization and Development

- Farm Cooperatives and Associations Development (Cooperative Development Authority)

3. Hybridization

- Hybridization Operations (PCA)
- Hybridization Research (Department of Science and Technology – Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development)



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4. Community-based Farm Enterprise Development: Farm Rehabilitation and Improvement

- Intercropping with Cacao and Coffee (Department of Agriculture [DA] – High Value Crops Development Program)
- Livestock and Poultry Integration (DA – Bureau of Animal Industry)
- Dairy Integration (DA – National Dairy Authority)

5. Integrated Coconut Processing and Downstream Products

- Shared Processing Facilities (DA – Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization)

6. Innovative Research Projects and their Practical Application on Coconut Processing, Production, and Distribution

7. Support Services

- Credit (Land Bank of the Philippines, Development Bank of the Philippines)
- Research, Marketing, and Market Promotion (Department of Trade and Industry)
- Infrastructure (Department of Public Works and Highways)
- Policies and Regulations

The CFITF Act, through the programs, projects, and services written in the CFIDE, aims to uplift the lives of coconut farmers and improve the competitiveness of the Philippine coconut industry. With the validation and monitoring activities in place, the government hopes to achieve its goals for the enhancement of the lives of Filipino coconut farmers.

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1 YEAR UNDER BBM

Marcos administration manages the economy well

BY EDISON JOSEPH GONZALES

THE Marcos administration is managing the economy well as shown by the higher-than-expected growth in the first quarter of 2023, Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez said.



Marcos Jr. said his administration has achieved changes and growth in its first year but more still needs to be done. PCO PHOTO



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He made the statement in reaction to the report of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) that the economy grew by 6.4 percent in the first three months of this year.

The House leader assured the people that the economy remains on the high-growth path.

To put context to the 6.4-percent growth in the first quarter and citing PSA data, Speaker Romualdez said the economy expanded by 7.6 percent in the third quarter and 7.2 percent in the fourth quarter of 2022, when the economy start to reopen and recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

He pointed out that the high growth quarters of 2022 and the first quarter of this year are the first nine months of the Marcos administration.

"The average economic expansion during that period is 7.07 percent, which is a respectable growth rate that is slightly higher than the median of last year's growth target of 6.5 percent and 7.5 percent. So the economy is in good hands," he stressed.

The Speaker noted that the 6.4-percent growth in the first quarter is almost in the middle of this year's expansion goal of 6 percent to 7 percent.

"So our first quarter growth rate is within target," he said.

The House leader said the Philippines "was the star economic performer in the first quarter among Association of Southeast Asian Nations members, plus China and India."

According to National Economic and Development Authority Director General Arsenio Balisacan, the country outperformed Indonesia (5 percent), China (4.5 percent) and Vietnam (3.3 percent).

The Philippine growth rate was also higher than first-quarter expansion forecasts for Malaysia (4.9 percent), India (4.6 percent) and Thailand (2.8 percent).

Speaker Romualdez said the national government is expected to ramp up spending, especially in infrastructure and social services.

"The government will be the lead driver of economic activities and job and income generation," he said.

More needs to be done

Meanwhile, there are still many things to be done to fulfill all the campaign promises, Marcos Jr. said a year after assuming office.

In a media interview after the launch of the

Kanegoso Center of Cebuana Lhuillier in Parañaque City, the chief executive said his administration has achieved significant changes and growth in its first year in office, but that more should be done in the succeeding years.

Marcos pointed out his administration still has to "undo" almost 40 years of neglect in the agricultural sector.

"There are many, many things that we still need to do. We have to undo 30, 35, almost 40 years of neglect when it comes to the agricultural sector. And the agricultural sector still occupies the most fundamental part of our economy," the President said.

"We have achieved a lot of growth. We are beginning to see the systemic changes that are going to be part of the new bureaucracy, but there is still a long way to go," added the President, who also serves as Agriculture secretary.

The President also described the realization of his campaign promises as a "work in progress" as he gave himself an "incomplete" grade going into his first year in office as chief executive on June 30.

"I saw a report earlier this morning where one of the economists said the grade that I will give for the President is incomplete. I agree with him. We are not done," President Marcos said.

He also cited that his administration is still coming up with programs and projects that would temper inflation in the country.

"We are still fighting inflation. That is definitely one of the biggest problems we face. We are doing everything we can do so that our people will not suffer too much," the President said.

"So it's never enough. Whatever it is that we have managed to do, there is still a great deal more to do. We have to work smart, and we have to work well, and we have to be very conscious," President Marcos added.

In a previous interview, the President said he will be putting in place structural changes in the Department of Agriculture (DA) first before stepping down as its secretary, to ensure food security in the country. He also said that since he assumed as DA Secretary, he has put in place some substantial changes to address the issues in the agriculture sector.

"You know, the truth of the matter is... we have really managed to make some very important structural changes in the Department of Agriculture. So, we are going through that one by one. The problem during the beginning of

this year was a crisis in all food supply, food prices, all fertilizer prices, et cetera," he said.

The President said he envisions the agriculture department to have efficient systems in place to ensure food security before stepping down from the agency.

"So my desire for DA is that, when I get to leave DA by that time, we will have systems in place so that we can guarantee the food supply of the Philippines; we can guarantee the prices are affordable;

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AFTER 50 YEARS

HASTEN COCONUT INDUSTRY MODERNIZATION, MARCOS TELLS PCA

By Nestor Corrales
@NCorralesINQ

President Marcos on Thursday ordered the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) "to improve" the condition of coconut farmers, the sector demanding a just share from the controversial multibillion-peso coco levy fund.

He did not specify ways in his speech during the 50th anniversary of the PCA, but the

President said he wanted the Philippines to be the biggest exporter of coconut products.

Mr. Marcos said the government has already started to formulate plans on how to redevelop the country's coconut industry to help coconut farmers.

"There is no reason why the Philippines should not be the biggest producer of export in terms of coconut products," he

said, adding that "the potential is really quite good."

He ordered the PCA to invest in new technologies and initiatives to guarantee the resilience of the coconut industry.

Expand distribution

He said the Philippines needed to continue developing and improving coconut byproducts "so that we can find new uses and expand its distribution

to new markets."

According to him, the PCA must intensify the implementation of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP) "to accelerate the modernization of the coconut industry and to improve the lives of our coconut farmers and their families."

"I thus encourage the PCA to continue to uplift [the] lives of our coconut farmers and em-

power them to improve their conditions, break free from the chains of poverty, and dream bigger for themselves and for their loved ones," he said.

On June 2 last year, former President Rodrigo Duterte signed Executive Order No. 172, or the CFIDP to serve as the basis for using the P75-billion coco levy fund through various programs and projects.

From 1971 to 1982, the gov-

ernment under the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos collected money from coconut farmers by imposing levies, taxes, charges and other fees for selling copra.

After the Marcoses left Malacañang in 1986, lawsuits filed by coconut farmers alleged that cronies of the Marcos administration diverted the funds to finance their own business interests. INQ

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Pinangunahan ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. ang pagtatanim ng coconut tree nang dumalo sa 50th anniversary ng Philippine Coconut Authority sa Coconut Palace, Pasay City kahapon. (KJ Rosales)



DA says meat supply sufficient; output of rice considered 'high'

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Thursday that the supply of rice and meat products is sufficient for the Philippines' needs, with production of rice in particular seen as "high."

"According to the National Rice Program, our production plus the imports and the beginning stock (is) sufficient," DA Spokesperson Kristine Y. Evangelista said at a Laging Handa briefing.

"As far as our National Rice Program is concerned, production is high. That is good news; at least we have more local production. We still have imports to augment supply, but the bottom line is, we are sufficient," she added.

On Tuesday, Agriculture Undersecretary Leocadio S. Sebastian said rice output rose 6% in the six months to June.

Citing the Philippine Rice Information System, he said production of palay, or unmilled rice, was estimated at 8.605 million metric tons (MT), up from the 8.153 million MT recorded a year earlier.



PHILIPPINE STAR/WALTER BOLLOZOS

The carry over stock of rice at the start of the year was 1.8 million MT, augmented by the arrival of 1.8 million MT more in imports, sufficient to meet demand for more than two months.

Ms. Evangelista added: "Right now, our pork meat (supply) is sufficient... On a monthly basis, we have a watch on price and volume to gauge the supply situation," she said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**



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Business chamber touts PHL prospects as tea producer

DREW JEMMETT-UNSPLASH

GLOBAL DEMAND and growing health consciousness are expected to support tea production in the Philippines, though a "tea culture" needs to be established before the market takes off, a business chamber official said.

Cecilio K. Pedro, president of the Federation of Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce & Industry, Inc. (FFCCCII), said at the Pandesal Forum in Quezon City on Thursday: "There's a very lucrative and a big market out there in China and all over the world — Korean, Japanese, English people. They love to drink tea because of the health benefits."

"But we don't have a tea culture here in the Philippines. *Mas mahilig tayo sa coffee* (we prefer coffee) ... We have to drink something that is beneficial to our body, which is tea," he added.

Mr. Pedro supports a pilot project to determine the Philippines' suitability for tea growing, with due consideration for varieties and intended markets.

"The processing should also be in the Cordilleras," he said.

Citing a study presented by Dominique T. Molintas, a researcher from Benguet State University, FFCCCII Committee Chairman for Government Affairs George Chua Cham said

the idle land in the highlands of Luzon would be suitable for tea cultivation.

"After planting for three to five years, you'll be harvesting for the next 50 or 100 years so it's good payback," he said.

Benguet Governor Melchor D. Diclas said the province is open to collaboration with academics and the encouragement of smallholder farmers seeking to engage in tea production but noted the need for investment.

"As much as we would like to have this, of course, we need investment for this tea production. So, we would like to invite anyone who would like to invest and we will help them," he said.

Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) Director Gerald Glenn F. Panganiban said that the Department of Agriculture can conduct research into appropriate tea varieties for Philippine growing conditions.

"The BPI has five research centers around the country; we can try varieties needed by the market. Once we find out which variety is needed and appropriate, we can upscale tea farming in selected areas," he said.

Mr. Panganiban said the Philippines imported about 134 metric tons of tea products from Vietnam and China in the five months to May. — **Sheldeem Joy Talavera**



Onion prices up anew

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Retail prices of onions started to go up anew, reaching as high as P200 per kilo, based on latest monitoring of the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** in at least 13 Metro Manila markets.

The highest retail price of the bulb was P20 more compared to the P180 per kilo sold last Monday, June 26.

The P200 per kilo of onions was monitored in Commonwealth Market in Quezon City.

Based on monitoring of the DA in 13 Metro Manila markets, onions are sold at as high as P180 per kilo at Marikina Public Market; P170 per kilo at Guadalupe Public Market in Makati City; San Andres Market, Quinta Market, Pritil Market in Manila; Muñoz Market in Quezon City, and in Malabon Central

Market; P160 per kilo at New Las Piñas City Public Market, Pamilihang Lungsod ng Muntinlupa, Pasay City Market, Pasig City Mega Market and in Mega Q-Mart, Quezon City.

For his part, Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) executive director Jayson Cainglet blamed the upward trend in the retail prices of onions on the decision of the DA to postpone the P150 per kilo suggested retail price (SRP) on onions.

"The SRP, as agreed by everyone, including offices within the DA, was postponed since May by the Office of the Secretary. This, despite the fact that the cold storage operators and retailers followed the agreed SRP and cold storage prices," Cainglet said.

Last month, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and deputy spokesman Rex Estoperez announced the decision of

Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban not to sign the draft memorandum order on the SRP for onions which was supposed to take effect on May 22.

"They (DA) even blame onion growers for the price hike despite the fact that harvest season then was over and onions are already in the hands of traders, importers and cold storage operators. We asked the DA then, what will be their alternative for that SRP that everyone in the value chain should follow?" Cainglet added.

The SINAG official said that in the absence of the SRP or any regulation coming from the DA, there will be attempts to manipulate the price of onions just like what happened in December 2022 where the retail price of the bulbs reached as high as P720 per kilo.



Hog raisers assail DA's plan to import more pork products

Hog raisers have assailed the Department of Agriculture (DA)'s plan to import more pork products even as millions of kilos of frozen meat are currently in the country's cold storage facilities.

In a radio interview yesterday, Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) president Rosendo So said: "The importation (of frozen pork) continues as at present there are at least 75 million kilos of frozen pork still in cold storage."

At a press conference on Monday, Agriculture Assistant Secretary for operations Arnel de Mesa said that the country needs to resort to more importation of pork to address the shortage in supply amid the outbreak of African swine fever (ASF) in many areas, particularly in

the Visayas.

But So has countered: "The DA should first determine the local stocks as in Luzon, hog raisers were able to repopulate."

He clarified that while SINAG is not preventing the DA from resorting to importation, "there should not be an over importation of pork."

So also noted that while the supply of pork from Visayas and Mindanao declined amid the outbreak of ASF, the local pork production in Luzon has improved.

"The farmgate of pork in Luzon for backyard raisers is now averaging between P155 and P160 per kilo, same compared to the farmgate in Visayas," he said.

The agriculture sector leader also pointed out that the spread of ASF in

the country, particularly in Visayas, could even be a result of the flooding of imported pork.

"Imported meat products enter the country without necessary tests. If a frozen meat is infected, it can still cause infection even if it is stored for 300 days. The virus is still alive," he said.

He then questioned the DA's failure to establish border facilities first despite the allocation of P1 billion each for testing facilities in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

"We are puzzled why the undersecretaries and assistant secretaries of the DA failed to implement the facilities despite already having a budget," he said.

He said the DA allegedly keeps on delaying the establishment of these

facilities "despite the order already from President Marcos last year."

For his part, Philippine Pork Producers Federation president Nonon Tambago said the DA should consult local hog producers before allowing more frozen pork importation.

"They should consult the local producers as Visayas and Mindanao have a lot of supply now," Tambago told **The STAR**.

In a separate radio interview, National Federation of Hog Farmers Inc. president Chester Tan said there is an oversupply of pork in the last month.

"For the past weeks, for almost a month, there has been an oversupply despite the outbreak of ASF in the provinces. Pork from Visayas keeps on arriving for the past month that

is why there is an oversupply in Luzon," Tan said, adding that the DA should limit the importation as it hurts the local industry.

"What we are asking the DA is even if it allows the importation (of pork), it should only be enough to prevent an oversupply. We submit computation on the volume needed for one year but the DA fails to follow. Normally, the importation is doubled," Tan added.

Based on data of the Bureau of Animal Industry at least 229.3 million kilos of imported pork products arrived from January to May 2023.

The retail price of pork ham ranged between P270 and P330 per kilo and pork liempo, between P300 and P390 per kilo.

— Bella Cariaso



DENR Secretary discusses the need to balance extraction with rehabilitation

I was invited to a roundtable with Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonia "Toni" Yulo-Loyzaga to discuss the Department's thrust regarding its policies and activities. A number of topics were brought up, including the issue of the effects of open-pit mining on the environment.

Sec. Loyzaga has a very pragmatic approach to the issue, which is that minerals are needed to fuel economic growth, even and especially as the world moves towards sustainable energy sources, but these should be balanced with scientifically sound rehabilitation to affected areas.

"Globally, there are examples of open pits that have actually been successfully restored... we're looking at examples now in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia wherein you don't plant trees in areas that have been excavated for open pit — you actually develop the ecosystem to sustain the future life of the area," she said. "Some of these areas... have actually been used as solar farm (or) water retention areas. And so there are all these different ways for mitigation to happen."

The Department, under her leadership,

follows a mitigation hierarchy: "First of all, you do no harm to the ecosystem — but of course that's not possible. Second is you minimize, [and] where you cannot minimize, you mitigate... The [third] is where you cannot mitigate fully — and this is the case for mining in many cases — you actually look for ways to invest in high value biodiversity and high value ecosystem areas in order to compensate and offset. This is already happening globally," she says.

She understands that this does not make her popular with certain sectors on both sides of the mining vs. environment issue, but stresses that this is the best way they've identified so far to be able to balance the effects of mineral extraction with environmental conservation. "Here's the reality of climate change and mining: to actually move towards renewable energy, we need minerals. Copper. Lithium. Nickel. And the push towards net



AVANT GARDENER
YVETTE TAN

zero will drive the demand for minerals. Exponentially in some cases, copper being one of them," she said.

"What we're trying to do... is there are geostrategic implications in the way we manage our minerals as natural resources. There is a global demand for everything. I've been approached by investment bankers, for example, to tell me that the prevailing sentiment is buy everything when you can today. So our own policy needs to be somehow reflective of what critical and strategic minerals are being demanded globally, and what we need for our own energy transition and other needs. And that has to do not just with extraction but also that has to do with building an environment that actually creates an investment climate for processing here, value-adding here, instead of just exporting raw ore."

It's easy to vilify the mining industry, especially since it is prone to the abuse of the environment, not to mention its workers. Miners and their families comprise one of the country's poorest sectors, often prone to chronic illnesses, disabilities, and drug abuse, often without recompense from their employers. But minerals are important resources, especially for a developing country, and it has always been a challenge for the DENR to balance both mineral extraction with the protection of the environment and of Filipinos, particularly mine workers and their families. This is a balance that can be hard to achieve, but one that Sec. Loyzaga thinks can be achieved.

"We need to understand how mining has become — and this has been stated by the DOF (Department of Finance), etc. — a source for economic recovery. That's already one established policy. But we need to actually

begin to realize how this country can be competitive but also manage its own resources responsibly for the future, not just for now."

She adds that rehabilitation includes a social aspect: "We talk about the ecosystem and the dividends, the impact to the ecosystem, and that has to do with the whole agro-ecological value we're trying to realize by managing the different habitats sustainably."

She further explains, "...what we're trying to do is take an ecosystems-based approach towards agricultural development... Right now we're talking very closely with Usec Mercy Sombilla, who is with NEDA (National Economic and Development Authority), and so there are different conversations ongoing with how we can work together with the **DA (Department of Agriculture)**."

"Lately our conversations have been about unutilized fishponds, areas, and the kind of regeneration of the salt farming industry...what we have now is a salt production sharing agreement, which has a very minimal portion going to the government and the rest staying with the salt farmers. So Pangasinan is actually now opened up, I would say 400 small farms."

While richer countries like Australia and Japan are able to devote bigger budgets to rehabilitation, the Philippines, like many countries in the Global South, have to work with limitations. As Sec. Loyzaga explained, "We don't happen to have those resources. And so where we can follow what can be ecologically sustainable, this is great, but where we can also decide to cumulatively assess the impact of these multiple projects on the ecosystem and perhaps work on some modifications, that's where I'm coming from."

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DA exec says local hog raisers may be able to meet pork demand

A DEPARTMENT of Agriculture (DA) official on Thursday expressed confidence that local hog raisers may be able to meet the local demand for pork.

"We believe that they [local hog raisers] can. It's a matter of really making sure that the demand situation is very clear as far as our stakeholders are concerned so that they know how much they will produce, not only when it comes to pork, but also when it comes to chicken," DA Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista said during the Laging Handa briefing.

"So now more than anything, we are really emphasizing the relevance of data, the relevance of price and volume watch not only of the DA but also with our stakeholders," she added.

Evangelista said that when the supply is flooded, the price will fall and the first who would most likely to be hit are actually the local producers.

Earlier, DA Assistant Secretary for Operations Arnel de Mesa said the country still needs to import pork.

"We still need to import pork until the end of the year. But because of the vaccine development program, we expect the repopulation program to continue," he said.

"Based on our data, we don't need to import as much as we did last year," de Mesa added.

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

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.

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 pork this year, some 4 percent higher than the previous year's estimated output of 1.21 million MT.

Raadee S. Sausa



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PHilMech plays vital role in coconut industry devt

The Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) will empower coconut cooperatives to produce value-added products from coconuts, including coconut oil.

This, as the agency will be spearheading the establishment of shared processing facilities (SPFs) for qualified coconut farmer cooperative that has a P500-million budget for the next 12 months.

PHilMech Executive Director and Scientist IV Dr. Dionisio Alvindia said that the agency is eyeing the production by coconut farmer cooperatives of the following value-added products: Crude coconut oil; processed coconut oil; virgin coconut oil; desiccated coconut; coconut coir; and coconut sap.

He added that PHilMech has set requirements for coconut farmer cooperatives that will qualify under the program for SPFs that will be distributed at no cost to them. Their counterpart will only be the land where the SPF will be established.

"To qualify, target beneficiaries or project proponents should be a duly registered coconut farmers' cooperatives at the Cooperative Development Authority with more than 100 members, and has a total of 5,000 coconuts daily production," Director Alvindia said.

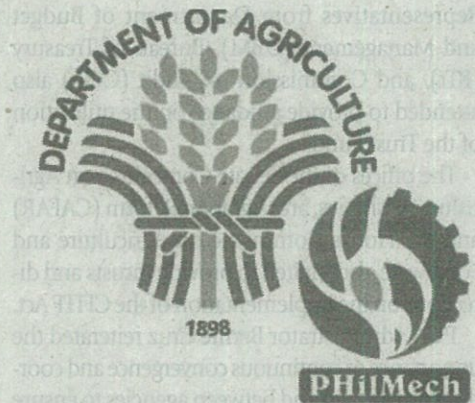
The P500 million for the establishment of SPFs will be disbursed per region as follows:

- P8.63 million for Ilocos region, Cagayan Valley and Central Luzon
- P58.61 million for Calabarzon
- P25.49 million for Mimaropa
- P43.65 million Bicol Region
- P27.13 million for Western Visayas
- P25.01 million for Central Visayas
- P50.15 million for Eastern Visayas
- P52.66 million Zamboanga Peninsula
- P53.84 million for Northern Mindanao
- P51.74 million for Davao Region
- P32.51 million for SOCCSKSARGEN
- P29.74 million for Caraga
- P40.84 million for BARMM

At present, most coconut farmers' cooperatives are still not capable of producing value-added products and are mostly engaged in producing copra that are sold to oil millers to produce coconut oil.

Also, the discarded coconut husks or shells are mostly thrown away.

Director Alvindia said that the SPF program will enable coconut farmer cooperatives to produce coconut oil while sourcing their raw materials from smaller farmer cooperatives. Also, the smaller coco-



nut cooperatives that will have SPFs to efficiently produce more copra can directly supply to existing large coconut oil mills.

The SPFs will also allow coconut farmer cooperatives to produce various products from coco coir from discarded husks. These include geotextiles, mats, ropes, planting medium, among others.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the Philippines is still the top producer and exporter of coconut oil globally, with estimated production placed at 1.668 million metric tons (MT) based on latest figures. Coming in second is Indonesia with 1.025 million MT and India with 476,000 MT.

As for coco coir, India and Sri Lanka are the top producers and exporters followed by Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Meanwhile, the country is still the top exporter of desiccated coconut, accounting for 147,000 MT of the total 438,052 MT global productions in 2020, according to figures gathered by the Department of Trade and Industry.

PHilMech is mandated under Republic Act 11524 or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act to establish SPFs for coconut farmer cooperatives that will be funded by 10 percent or P7.5 billion of the P75-billion Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund (CFITF).

Under Executive Order (EO) No. 172, or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP), P5 billion each will be released in the first two years of the plan's implementation.

Director Alvindia said that PHilMech will also provide training for the farmer's coconut cooperatives and will coach and monitor their progress. The objective is for the cooperatives to become viable business enterprises.

"We will provide three years of coaching and mentoring. We want these cooperatives to be successful," he added.



UCAP congratulates PCA on its Golden Year Anniversary

The United Coconut Association of the Philippines (UCAP) congratulates the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) on its 50th founding anniversary. The last 50 years had been rewarding for PCA, making milestones after milestones in the service of the coconut industry. We wish that the next 50 years will exceed all expectations with the various stakeholders doing their share to keep the industry a major pillar of the Philippine economy.

In all these years, UCAP has been a partner of PCA.

UCAP is private entity with membership comprising of various coconut industry sectors representing the industry's supply chain. This includes the coconut producers; downstream coconut end-users such the coconut oil millers, coconut oil refiners, oleochemical manufacturers, desiccated coconut manufacturers, virgin coconut oil producers, activated carbon manufacturers; coconut brokers; research organization; among others.

Given the organization's membership, its role has been for the most part towards the downstream value chain that have expanded the sphere of coconut products as well as their uses. There may be no other agricultural produce as versatile as the coconut when talking about what it can provide mankind.

In addition, UCAP complements PCA in developing markets locally and overseas as well as promoting the use and appreciation of all things coconut through its various sectors. Apart from making coconut oil the country's leading export commodity, the industry has developed more value added and

consumer ready products that at times many consumers never thought have something coconut in them.

The private sector also promotes sustainability for the future. Sustainability is the subject of the World Coconut Congress 2023 (WCC 2023) happening on August 30 to September 1 at the World Trade Center Metro Manila. Organized by UCAP, WCC 2023 has adapted the theme Sustain the Source, which aims to explore the impact of sustainable practices on health, food, feeds and energy. This is supported by the Philippine Coconut Authority, Department of Trade and Industry and the International Coconut Community.

WCC 2023 expects about 400 local and international delegates to the three-day conference comprising of decision makers, industry influencers, policy makers, economists, researchers/scientists, medical practitioners, nutritionists, academicians, educators, among others. The event will also showcase the latest products and services at the Exhibitions, B2B (business matching) Sessions, and post conference familiarization visits. For more information, visit www.worldcoconutcongress.com.ph.



PCA kicks off 50th anniversary celebration

The Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) has kicked off the week-long celebration of the 50th Founding Anniversary with the theme "PCA@50: Honoring the Past, Embracing the Future of the Philippine Coconut Industry."

Among the highlights of the celebration are the opening of the photo exhibition featuring PCA milestones and the showcase of the coconut products produced by coconut farmers supported by the authority.

"This is a remarkable year for all of us. From being three different government agencies to

competitive. He also called on the support of the media in the PCA advocacy of reaching and empowering the Filipino coconut farmers.

Following the press conference is the Ceremonial Awarding of the Coconut Farmer and Industry Trust Fund (CFITF) Act Program benefits to coconut farmers and coconut farmer organization.

A total of about P65 million worth of programs, projects, and services under the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP) was awarded to the invited coconut farmers and organization.

Meanwhile, the Coco Bazaar located at the PCA grounds was open to the public until Tuesday,

merging as one institution whose foundation lies within its core values of commitment, honesty, and competence, the men and women who passionately served the Filipino coconut farmers with all their hearts and minds made PCA a stronger and better institution," said PCA Administrator Bernie Cruz.

Cruz also emphasized that there are still many things needed to revitalize the Philippine coconut industry - making it progressive, sustainable, and globally



June 27, 2023.

The Philippine Coconut was created in 1973 through the Presidential Decree No. 232 with a mandate to (a) promote the accelerated development of the coconut and or palm oils industry in all its aspects; (b) provide general directions for the steady and orderly development of the industry; and (c) achieve vertical integration of the coconut industry so that coconut farmers become participants in and beneficiaries of the development and growth of the coconut industry.

The PCA is one of the implementing agencies of the CFITF Act with an annual allotment of 15 percent from the Trust Fund that shall be utilized on the Coconut Hybridization Program, particularly operations on the ground, through its Regional Offices and Research Centers.

PCA identifies 2.9M beneficiaries for coconut program

The Philippine Coconut Authority (DA-PCA) has initially identified 2.9 million out of the 3.1 million coconut farmers listed in the National Coconut Farmers Registry System (NCFRS) as qualified beneficiaries of programs under the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP).

The CFIDP sets the directions and policies for the modernization and industrialization of the Philippine coconut industry within 50 years to increase the productivity and incomes of

millions of marginal coconut farmers and their families.

For the CFIDP pre-implementation activities, the Program Management Office (PMO) of PCA reported that the ongoing nationwide enlisting, delisting, and updating process (EDUP) of all registered coconut farmers and farm workers ensure the integrity of the data.

The PCA Regional Offices are leading the continuous cross-validation and registration of coconut farmers in the country as the updated registry will ensure that all registered farmers will be supported through the CFIDP.

With P75 billion guaranteed funding for five years through the Republic Act (RA) 11524 or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act, the CFIDP shall implement national programs for community-based enterprises, social protection of farmers, and coconut farmers organization and development.

Through the CFIDP, programs on innovative research projects and their practical application and integrated processing of coconut and downstream products will also be implemented.

Harmonization and convergence workshops with identified National Implementing Agencies under

RA 11524 were also conducted as part of the CFIDP pre-implementation.

The workshops resulted in the finalization of the operations manual (with reporting channels and structures, risk management plan, monitoring and evaluation structure including Year 1 programs, and financial management plan) and the identification of CFIDP focal persons.

In addition, the software requirement for the Integrated Information Management System (IIMS) will be developed to automate submissions, reporting, monitoring and data collection and to have a system for consolidated monitoring to be accessed by the PMO, implementing agencies, and the public.

Seven out of 11 memorandums of agreement with implementing agencies have been reviewed and approved. For efficient sharing of data, data sharing agreements were also drafted with the concerned agencies.

In line with the 36th National Coconut Week celebration this year, the CFIDP was launched in all regions on August 11–25, 2022 to cascade the programs in the field, register more eligible farmers, and fast-track the program implementation.

Monitoring activities

Also, to ensure the effective implementation of RA 11524, the PCA, through its Program Management Office (PMO), has begun its validation and monitoring activities for the various programs and projects stipulated in the CFIDP.

On top of the initial assessment of program implementation, validation, and monitoring activities ensure that CFIDP programs are conducted according to their objectives and targets. Said activities include regular field visits, data collection and analysis, and stakeholder consultations.

"The government has allotted a significant budget for the implementation of the CFIDP program, and it is our responsibility to ensure that this budget is utilized properly and that the programs are implemented as planned," PCA Administrator Bernie Cruz said.

Validation and monitoring activities of the PMO cover various CFIDP programs, projects, and services implemented in 2022, including the distribution of hybrid coconut seedlings, the establishment of coconut-based enterprises, and the provision of financial assistance to coconut farmer cooperatives.

PCA has also emphasized the importance of transparency and accountability in program implementation. Through its PMO, the Authority has set up a monitoring and evaluation system to track the progress of the programs and guarantee proper fund utilization.

The PCA is also strengthening partnerships with local government units and other stakeholders to deliver the CFIDP programs effectively in their respective areas. Furthermore, the PCA will work closely with coconut farmer organizations to gather feedback and recommendations on improving the programs.

"We want to ensure that the funds allocated for the CFIDP programs are utilized properly. We also want to make sure that the programs are reaching their intended beneficiaries and that they can make a positive impact on their lives," Cruz added.

Validation and monitoring activities for the 2022 CFIDP programs are expected to run until the second quarter of this year. The results will be used to improve the operationalization of the programs, craft steering measures, and ensure success in achieving the objectives of RA 11524.

The Manila Times®

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NEWS BRIEF

P25 per kilong bigas mabibili pa sa Kadiwa

Nilinaw ni Department of Agriculture (DA) Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista na magpapatuloy pa rin ang bentahan ng murang bigas sa mga Kadiwa store na mabibili lamang sa halagang P25.

"Mayroon pong inasahang harvest, inayos natin ang market

linkage para mag-convert growing ang mga magsasakang ito sa lokal na pamahalaan na interestado rin po na magkaroon ng tig-P25 na bigas sa kanilang Kadiwa store," ayon kay Evangelista.

Malayo ito sa presyo ng bigas sa mga palengke na aabot sa P32 hanggang P60 batay sa

monitoring ng DA.

Pero sinabi ng Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura na kung hindi gaanong makaapekto ang El Niño ay maaari pang bumbaba ang presyo ng bigas sa palengke.

Makakabawas din sa presyo kung mapapamigay na ang libreng abono mula sa China kaya tiwala ang ahensya na posibleng maabot ang tig-P20 na bigas.

Tiniyak naman ng DA na sapat ang supply ng bigas sa bansa. (Natalia Antonio)

Date: 30 JUN 2023

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COMMONSENSE

MARICHU A. VILLANUEVA

The greatest good

At 75 years old, Department of Finance (DOF) Secretary Benjamin Diokno wishes to see the poverty incidence in our country reduced during his lifetime. At the very least, Diokno is determined to achieve the goal of a single digit poverty incidence by 2028. Or this is towards the end of the six-year Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP) of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (PBBM). As the head of the Cabinet economic team of PBBM, Diokno disclosed the 2023-2028 MTDP targets to bring down the poverty level to as low as nine percent.



As a former member of the Cabinet economic team during the term of former President Rodrigo Duterte, Diokno recalled the original target of poverty reduction was set at 14.5 percent. Diokno previously headed the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and stayed on as member of the Duterte Cabinet economic team even after he was subsequently appointed as the Governor of the *Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas* (BSP).

"We did not sit idly during the pandemic. We put in a number of reforms needed," he stressed. He cited as examples the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law; the amendments of the Public Service Act; the new Foreign Investments Act, among other landmark measures that got enacted even while the pandemic impact derailed economic projections.

"All of these made the Philippine economy stand resilient," Diokno enthused.

"I've been in the government for more than three decades already. I have seen the ups and downs of the Philippine economy," Diokno waxed sentimental at the *Kapihan sa Manila Bay* news forum last Wednesday.

Diokno though won't be drawn into commenting on the specific role of disbarred lawyer and losing senatorial bet in last year's election Lorenzo "Larry" Gadon as Presidential Adviser on Poverty Alleviation. Purportedly, it is a Cabinet-ranked position, it is not clear yet if Gadon has a one-peso appointment, or *pro bono*. Gadon is supposed to advise the Chief Executive on the various anti-poverty programs of the government. Incidentally, Lope Santos III also holds Cabinet-ranked post as chairman of the National Anti-Poverty Commission of PBBM.

It is, however, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) that has the largest fund allocations of as much as P100 billion in the yearly budget for the so-called "*ayuda*" for the poor. Foremost of which is the conditional cash transfer, more popularly called as the 4P's geared to ease the lives of the impoverished Filipino families. Diokno though noted with deep concern the "leakage" in the 4P's cash card program due to large amounts of "unclaimed" funds lying idle in the Land Bank.

"All of these made the Philippine economy stand resilient," Diokno enthused.

Pursuing this desired goal to reduce poverty, Diokno echoed the commitment of the DOF to improve the government fiscal position and plug the "leakages" in the State coffers to better finance these anti-poverty programs.

"We are planning to revise our revenue collection targets further upward to take into consideration the implementation of tax measures that we are prioritizing in the medium term," Diokno announced. Among these measures are the two remaining fiscal reform measures under the Comprehensive Tax Reforms Program (CTRP) but never got through the previous Congress.

The first is the Reform Package 3, or the Real Property Valuation and Assessment. As of last check by the DOF, the draft committee report is pending with the Senate ways and means committee. The counterpart version has already been approved on third reading at the House of Representatives in December last year.

And the Package 4 of the CTRP on Passive Income and Financial Intermediaries Taxation Act which Diokno cited aims "to simplify the complicated tax structure of financial transactions and deepen the capital markets" of the Philippines. It was passed by the Lower Chamber in November last year and has been pending at the Senate since August, 2022.

Also pending approval by the Senate, Diokno added, is the proposed value added tax (VAT) on digital services. This tax bill "seeks to level the playing field between and among traditional and digital enterprises," he pointed out. The bill was approved by the Lower House in November last year.

Diokno confirmed the DOF is revisiting the implementation of the VAT system in the country. He admitted the government will not accept new or additional VAT exemptions and might even push for repeal of some exemptions if needed to maximize potential revenues.

As he has previously announced, the DOF will propose higher tax rate adjustments and new taxes to raise additional sources of revenues. These include the now controversial "sweet" tax and tax on "salty" or junk food products. The tax on "sweetened" products like beverages will seek the adjustment from the present 6 percent to uniform rate of 12 percent.

"These corrective tax measures aim to achieve the twin goals of curbing excessive consumption of unhealthy foods such as chips and sugary drinks while increasing fiscal resources for public programs," he stressed. For obvious reasons, instant noodle products are not included in this proposed "salty" tax because these are mainstay items in the food packs given out as relief goods to calamity victims and low-income families.

Diokno credited the previous administration for nearly achieving the poverty reduction target at the end of the Duterte's own MTDP from 2016 to 2022. Unfortunately, Diokno rued, the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 until last year had reversed the downtrend of poverty incidence that went up again to 21 percent at the end of the Duterte Presidency.

Diokno described the Marcos administration's anti-poverty program is both "focusing on the poor" and has "trickle down" effect. He cited a World Bank (WB) study that identified 500 "poorest of the poor" municipalities in the Philippines have no access to clean potable water and high malnutrition rate.

Amid the severe criticisms on pushing such tax measures, Diokno comforts himself hewing close to English philosopher Jeremy Bentham's "the greatest good for the greatest number" principle.

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ASF detected in 3 Zambales villages

OLONGAPO CITY – African swine fever (ASF) has been detected in three barangays in Candelaria, Zambales.

These are in Barangays Libertador, Panayonan and Taposo.

The municipal government ordered stricter implementation of biosecurity measures after blood samples from affected hogs tested positive for the virus.

Mayor Byron Jones Edquiling directed barangay officials to implement ASF prevention and biosecurity measures in consultation with the municipal agriculture office.

Edquiling stressed the need for stricter measures to prevent the spread of the swine disease.

He did not give details on the exact number of ASF-infected hogs in affected barangays.

Early this month, the Bureau of Animal Industry recorded ASF outbreaks in eight towns in Aklan and two towns each in Negros Oriental and Negros Occidental.

ASF outbreaks were also recently detected in Capiz, Cebu, Iloilo, Guimaras, Leyte, Northern Samar and Southern Leyte.

– Ric Sapnu



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PAGASA: El Niño no effect yet this planting season

THE Philippine weather bureau said the lower rainfall phenomenon of El Niño is not yet in effect, and rice farmers would have enough rainfall for the July to September planting season.

"There will be near to normal rain from July to September 2023," said the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said in a statement on Tuesday, June 27.

Analyn Solis of PAGASA said the chances of feeling the effects of El Niño are getting higher, but the lower rainfall pattern in the coming months has not been established yet.

"The possibility of El Niño is high. In July, we will again issue an advisory with a forecast for affected provinces. Rainfall pattern is yet to arrive, when will the effect be. There is a reduction in rain, but it does not always mean drought. Rain potential is high today," Solis said.

Decrease in rainfall

SHE said rainfall is expected to decrease in September and to drop further from October to December this year.

As this is the harvest season, low rainfall benefits rice farmers, said former Agriculture Secretary and Federation of Free Farmers president Raul Montemayor.

PAGASA's rainfall forecast is only up to December 2023.

"For December, 36 provinces will experience dry spell, drought for two provinces," Solis said.

Farmer Rene Cerilla, in a forum conducted by Tugon Kabuhayan on Monday, June 26 said that farmers are under the false impression that El Niño is arriving this July.

"That's why it is so important for us to have the correct information so that we could make the right decisions and plan ac-

cordingly. If there is a shortage of water, we have to plant crops that don't require as much water, like corn and monggo," Cerilla said.

Norbert Chingcuanco, a convenor of Tugon Kabuhayan, said other government agencies should synchronize the information about the onset of El Niño.

He also urged them to have a unified message about the climate phenomenon.

"I heard on the radio on the way to work that the DOH (Department of Health) is advising people to drink more water during El Niño. Many Filipinos are under the incorrect assumption that El Niño is already here, when according to PAGASA, it will arrive much later in the year. Because of this, nobody is planting anymore. We ask the government to synchronize its messaging and disseminate correct information," Chingcuanco said. PNA

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JFC to govt: Go slow on salt-sugar tax bill

THE Joint Foreign Chambers of the Philippines (JFC) said the government should reconsider the proposals to impose new taxes on "junk food" and increase the existing tax on sugar sweetened beverages, saying this will be "inflationary" for Filipino consumers and "discriminatory" to certain businesses.

"While we recognize the need for the government to boost revenues and support initiatives to improve the health and well-being of Filipinos, we recommend careful reassessment of any pro-

posal to impose additional taxes that will be inflationary for Filipino consumers and discriminatory to certain businesses," the JFC said in a statement on Thursday.

The JFC said it believes it is "not the right time" to introduce additional taxes on products primarily consumed by middle and lower-middle-class households because the country is still recovering from the pandemic and a prolonged period of high inflation.

SEE "JFC," A2

JFC...

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Moreover, the foreign business groups said the proposal would affect micro and small enterprises that rely on selling these products as a source of income.

"Imposing additional taxes will only strain the capacity of businesses in affected sectors to continue operations and grow their businesses, especially when issues related to the supply of certain raw materials remain unresolved," the JFC statement read.

According to JFC, this could potentially reduce competition in the market "to the detriment" of Filipino consumers and the growth of the economy driven by consumption.

Instead, the foreign business groups are recommending that the impact on consumption and health of the existing [sugar-sweetened beverage] SSB

tax imposed under Republic Act 10963, otherwise known as the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law, be fully studied and presented before any additional taxes are imposed.

"We also strongly recommend the prioritization of improvements to tax administration—such as in the proposed Ease of Paying Taxes Act—and non-tax interventions as alternative, non-inflationary measures to raise government revenues and improve health outcomes of Filipinos," JFC said.

The JFC is composed of the American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, Australian-New Zealand Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Philippines Inc., Korean Chamber of Commerce Philippines and the Philippine Association of Multinational Companies Regional Headquarters Inc.

Andrea E. San Juan



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PANGASINAN SALT FARM REHABILITATION BEGINS

BOLINAO, Pangasinan: The provincial government has begun the rehabilitation of a 473-hectare salt farm in Barangay Zaragoza here to enable it to start producing salt by November.

Last week, village residents, who are beneficiaries of the Department of Social Welfare and Development cash-for-work program, started planting mangroves and helped clean the farm.

The salt farm, which used to be operated by the Pacific Farms Inc., was the country's largest producer of salt, contributing up to 25,000 metric tons (MT) a year to the country's total salt production.

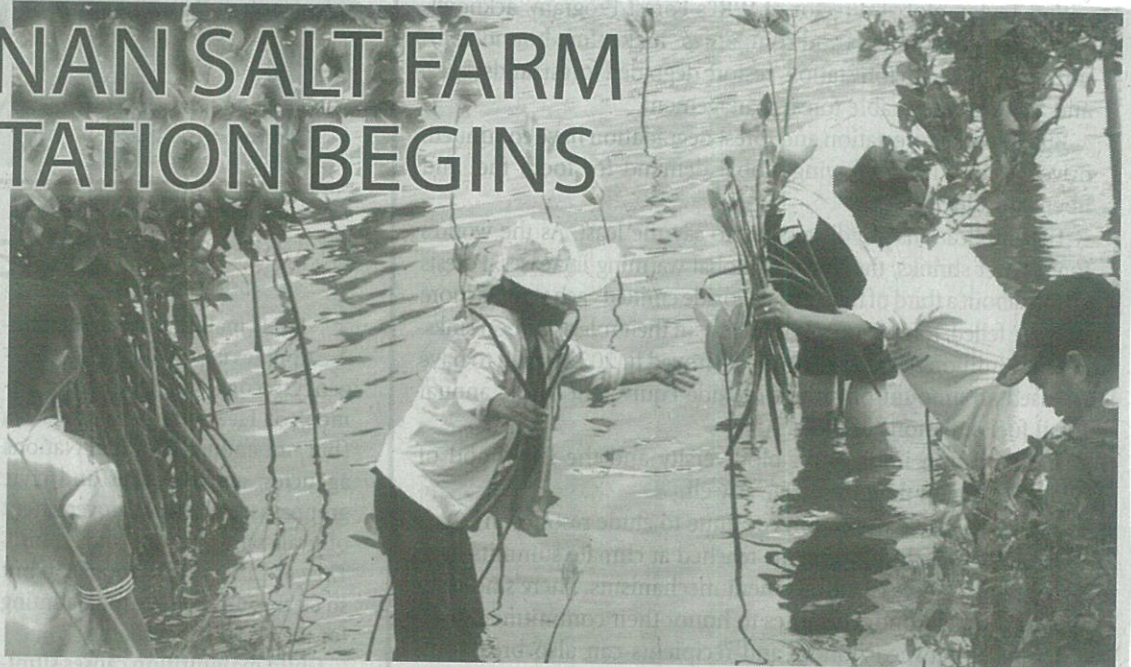
But the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) closed the farm in February 2021 after the company's lease contract expired and was not renewed.

Last December, Gov. Ramon Guico 3rd signed a memorandum of agreement with the DENR for the "interim management" of the foreshore area for salt production and other related activities, such as bangus (milkfish) production.

Assistant provincial agriculturist Nestor Batalla said while the area was being cleaned, engineers were preparing a program of work for the rehabilitation of facilities in the farm, such as the administrative office, pump houses, warehouses and workers' barracks.

"We also need to repair the cableway," Batalla also said.

The cableway is where baskets loaded with salt are hung during harvests



BACK TO THE SALT (FARM) Residents of Bolinao town in Pangasinan, who are beneficiaries of the Department of Social Welfare and Development's cash-for-work program, plant mangroves on Monday, June 26, 2023, at a salt farm managed by the provincial government in Barangay Zaragoza in Bolinao. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

and manually pulled from the salt beds to the warehouses.

The sprawling salt farm, which is located in Tambac Bay, a body of water separating this town and the island town of Anda, is said to produce high quality salt because the brine from the bay is better compared to those in other places.

The cleaning of the farm will take a month and will be done by 320 cash-for-work beneficiaries, who will work in three batches.

Batalla said by September, other workers will start repairing the salt beds.

But, he added, they will have to pump out the water that had submerged the salt beds this rainy season.

Salt production in Pangasinan is at its

peak during sunny months.

During rainy months, the salt beds are turned into fishponds.

Batalla said the farm will produce initially 10,000 MT of salt annually.

But in an interview earlier this month, special assistant to the governor Von Mark Mendoza said the provincial government will eventually be producing more salt because of innovations that will be introduced.

These innovations include use of plastic-roofed tunnels to cover the salt beds so that salt is produced even when it rains, and the use of high density-polyethylene sheets, instead of ceramic tiles, as linings of the salt beds.

Guico's decision for the provincial government to venture into salt production was in

response to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s call for help to resolve the salt crisis.

"We have a crisis in salt, and with this development, we are able to respond to the call of the President (Marcos) to contribute to national food security," Guico said.

Last year, industry experts said the country imported 93 percent of its salt requirements of 600,000 MT per year.

Pangasinan, whose name is derived from "asin," the local term for salt, is the country's largest salt producer.

In 2021, the province produced 64,156 MT from its 1,432.4-hectare salt farms located in seven towns and Alaminos City, the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist said.

GABRIEL L. CARDINOZA



Tulong ng Ako Bicol sa mga magsasaka, PWD, may sakit



REP. ZALDY CO

Magandang araw muli, mga kababayan kong Bicolano! Kamakailan ay naghain ang inyong lingkod at dalawang kasamahan natin sa Mababang Kapulungan ng Kongreso ng panukalang batas na naglalayong buwagin ang kartel ng sibuyas sa bansa.

Nakasaad sa House Bill 8462 na pinamagatang 'Onion Competitiveness Enhancement Fund Act' ang pagsuporta sa mga lokal na magsasaka upang mapalaki ang kanilang produksyon. Layunin din nitong makasabay sila sa pandaigdigang merkado gayundin ang pagpapagting sa pagbuwag ng kartel sa sibuyas.

Sino ba naman kasi ang makakalimot sa nangyari noong Disyembre 2022 kung saan umabot sa P500 hanggang P800 ang bawat kilo ng sibuyas? Mas mahal pa nga ang sibuyas na panggisa o pangrekado lamang kumpara sa karne ng baboy o baka.

Dahil sa nakakalulang presyo ng sibuyas, nabalita ang Pilipinas na siyang may pinakamahal na sibuyas sa buong mundo. Napakasakit nitong isipin lalo pa't isa tayong agricultural country.

Ang pagsirit ng presyo ng sibuyas ay nagpalobo rin sa January inflation rate na 8.7% - pinakamataas sa loob ng 14 taon. Noong Mayo 2023, bumaba sa P150 hanggang P200 ang ba-

wat kilo ng sibuyas ngunit kung ikukumpara noong Mayo 2022, mataas pa rin ito ng 87.5%.

Dahil dito, nagsagawa ng siyam na public hearings ang House Committee on Agriculture and Food. Mula Pebrero 8 hanggang Mayo 17, siniyasat ng komite ang alegasyon ng hoarding, price manipulation, at kartel sa industriya ng sibuyas.

Bagama't natumbok sa isinagawang pagdinig ang pagpapagting sa anti-cartel enforcement bilang long-term solution sa mataas na presyo ng sibuyas, kailangan pa rin ng short-term intervention tulad ng pag-angat ng sibuyas.

Natukoy din sa mga pagdinig ang pangangailangang suportahan ang ating mga magsasaka kaya marapat lamang na mabigyan sila ng parte mula sa kita sa importation.

Ang pagtatatag ng Onion Competitiveness Enhancement Fund ay mabisang paraan upang masuportahan ang ating mga magsasaka nang sa gayon ay mapataas ang kanilang produksyon at makasabay sila sa kompetisyon sa buong mundo.

Hindi lang ito ang mga hakbang na isinusulong natin upang mapalaki ang produksyon ng mga magsasaka. Noong Marso ay ating isinulong ang solar mapping o paggamit ng solar panels sa mga sakahan.

Ang solar panels ay magagamit din bilang source ng kuryente para umagos ang irigasyon sa mga taniman. Mas makakatipid ang mga magsasaka kumpara sa sistema nila ngayon sa patubig.

Isa ring makabagong paraan ngayon sa pagsasaka ang fertigation o ang sabayang pagtutubig at paglalagay ng fertilizer. Marami nang magsasaka ngayon ang gumagamit ng fertigation dahil nabibigyan na nila ng sapat na nutrients ang kanilang pananim, nakatitipid pa sa tubig.

Samantala, nais ko lang ibahagi ang ating misyon na magbigay ng munting ginhawa para sa ating mga kababayang patuloy na lumalaban sa kanilang karamdaman, pati na sa mga senior citizens at persons with disabilities (PWDs).

Katuwang ang Children International Philippines Inc. at Free Wheelchair Mission, hinandugan natin ng libreng wheelchair ang limang taong gulang na si Janine Mirales Reyes ng Sitio Pag-asa, Brgy. Malbog, Pilar, Sorsogon na hindi na makalakad at hirap magsalita.

Tumulak rin ang Ako Bicol Party-list sa isla ng Masbate upang mamahagi ng libreng wheelchair katuwang ang mga maaasahan nating partner.

Ating nahandugan ng libreng wheelchair si Dominique Ancero, 20-anyos na mayroong orthopedic disability kung saan lumang skateboard ang kanyang nagsisilbing paa upang makakilos.

May handog din tayong wheelchair sa pitong taong gulang na si Maria Sofia Centron ng Barangay Marintoc sa bayan ng Mobo na mayroong cerebral palsy.

Matinding komplikasyon ng diabetes at stroke ang dahilan naman para maputulan ng isang binti si Tatay Rex Danao, 44-taong gulang ng Barangay Pinaubuhan, Purok 1, sa bayan ng Mobo na atin pong binigyan din ng wheelchair.

Asahan po ninyo na ang Ako Bicol Party-list ay walang sawang maglilingkod sa ating mga kababayang PWDs, senior citizens at mga mayroong karamdaman.

Hanggang sa muli, mga kababayan kong Bicolano!

Asahan po ninyo na ang Ako Bicol Party-list ay walang sawang maglilingkod sa ating mga kababayang PWDs, senior citizens at mga mayroong karamdaman.



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Corn rebounds

CHICAGO corn futures rebounded in Asian trading on Thursday after two sessions of sharp losses, with traders awaiting US weekly export sales data later in the day and US acreage and quarterly grain stocks reports on Friday for further direction.

Gains were however capped as forecasts for beneficial rains in the US Midwest eased persistent worries about dry weather hurting the crop.

The most-active corn contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 1 percent at \$5.42 a bushel, after tumbling more than

4 percent in the previous session.

Soybeans gained 0.6 percent to \$12.72 a bushel, also recovering from a two-session slump, while wheat added 0.2 percent at \$6.71 a bushel after a four-session sell-off amid signs of rising global supply.

CBOT corn, soybeans and wheat, however, remained on track for weekly losses even as prices, analysts said, are expected to continue fluctuating.

Earlier this week, brokers were seen squaring positions ahead of the US acreage and quarterly stocks reports due on Friday from the US Department of Agriculture. *-Reuters*