

CLIPPINGS FOR THURSDAY, JULY 20, 2022

A. SEC. PBBM QUOTED

REMATE

Disaster resilience program ng Marcos Administration suportado ni Legarda

B. DA FAMILY

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

Gov't P28M milk program in Mindanao gone sour

More farmers, fisherfolk to supply fresh produce to QSR chain

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Losses from swine fever top P700M in Western Visayas

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DA, Jollibee team up for agri-fisheries clustering

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Border inspection facility to rise in Bulacan

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CvSU develops tissue culture machine

'Sugar industry does not need laws'

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A 700% jump in tomato prices gives windfall to India farmers

REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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DISASTER RESILIENCE PROGRAMS NG MARCOS ADMINISTRATION SUPTADO NI LEGARDA

kuryente.

Aniya, dahil sa lokasyon ng Pilipinas na nasa "Pacific Ring of Fire" ay talagang bahagi na ng buhay ang mga kalamidad kaya dapat ay matutunan ang konsepto ng "disaster resiliency" ng bawat Pilipino.

Nanawagan din si Legarda sa lahat na sa gitna ng umepekto nang El Niño weather phenomenon sa bansa ay dapat na paghandaan ang water security.

Ikinatuwa niya ang pagkakaroon ng El Niño mitigation plan na binuo ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Public Works and Highways, Department of Agriculture, National Irrigation Administration at National Water Resources Board base sa direktiba ni President Ferdinand "BBM" Marcos, Jr.

Si Legarda ay kilala bilang isang mambabatas na nagsusulong ng kapakanan at interes ng mga katutubo, sinning, kultura, kalinangan, kalikasan at kapaligiran.

Sa kanyang apat na termino sa Senado ay marami siyang iniakdang batas pang-kalikasan kabilang na ang paglikha sa Climate Change Commission para tutukan ang laban at paghahanda ng bansa kontra nagbabagong panahon at umiinit na klima.

KAUGNAY sa obserbasyon ng National Disaster Resilience Month ngayong buong buwan ng July 2023 alinsunod sa Executive Order No. 29 ay nanawagan ng suporta si Senate President Pro-Tempore Loren Legarda sa mga isinusulong na mga polisiya, programa at proyekto ng Marcos administration kaugnay sa disaster resilience.

Para kay Legarda na tumanggap ng pagkilala bilang United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction Global Champion for Resilience, sa pamamagitan ng pagkilos ng pamahalaan ay mapaghahandaan ng bansa ang mga epekto at hamon ng mga kalamidad na darating at haharapin ng Pilipinas.

Nanawagan din ang senadora sa publiko na tulungan ang pamahalaan sa labang ito lalo pa't mga buhay at ari-arian nila ang nakataya sa tuwing may malalakas na bagyo, mga pagyanig, pagputok ng bulkan at iba pang nangyayari sa pamamagitan ng mga simpleng bagay katulad ng paghihiwa-hiwalay ng basura, pakikinig sa mga awtoridad, at responsableng paggamit ng tubig at



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Govt's P28M milk program in Mindanao gone sour

BY PETER TABINGO

RUSTY machinery, stale dairy, and empty shipping cartons are all that remained of the government's two-year-old milk production project in Mindanao that was supposed to be a

key contributor to the national feeding program.

Two years after transferring P28.62 million to its Mindanao field office to build and operate a sterilized milk plant (SMP), the **National**

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GOVT'S

Dairy Authority (NDA) has thrown in the towel, saying it decided to stop to "avoid further losses."

Government auditors are unhappy, noting that P7.59 million worth of new machinery is no longer being used after the initial run resulted in ruined milk due to bad choice of packaging material: the retortable pouches turned out to be defective.

"The implementation of the SMP project was stalled in July 2021 due to defects in the pouches that were procured for the production of pouched sterilized milk, with 40 percent of the production wasted," the Commission on Audit said.

Not only did the NDA terminate the supply contract for the retortable pouches, it also shut down the entire plant. Immediately, P1.24 million in perishable raw materials went to waste.

Needing to move 7,225 kilograms of

sugar and milk powder to prevent them from spoiling, the NDA said it decided to "lend" cooperatives and dairy partners. But without a written agreement clarifying the nature of the transaction, recovering the value of the goods is not, unlikely, auditors said.

Cocoa powder, refined sugar, and while milk powder worth P866,375 were also left exposed to high temperatures in a container van, which the Commission on Audit said "may result in chemical, physical and bacteriological changes."

Likewise, two million hard plastic straws and 36,000 shipping cartons are left idle deteriorating over several months.

"Due to the suspension of operation of the SMP after the first batch of milk production, ... machineries and equipment in the total amount of P7.59 million were no longer utilized and/or remained idle," COA said.

But more than the wasted raw materials and unused plant machinery however,

the audit team said beneficiaries of the Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act (RA 11037) in public schools under the Department of Education and the Department of Social Welfare and Development are also being shortchanged.

With the shuttered milk sterilizing plant now unlikely to resume operations, the COA told the NDA that the entire venture is now considered "unnecessary expenditure or use of government funds," which would be disallowed in audit.

"We recommended that top management ... consider imposing administrative sanctions against officials and personnel concerned, who were remiss in their duties that resulted in the wastage of government funds," the commission said.

The NDA, however, defended the decision to halt plant operations citing "technical problems" in implementation.

It insisted that the project team's call to shut down was "a good decision to avoid further losses."



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More farmers, fisherfolk to supply fresh produce to QSR chain

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Jollibee Group Foundation (JGF) signed on Monday a memorandum of agreement aimed at enhancing farmers and fisherfolk access to markets to increase their income.

Under the partnership, farmers and fisherfolk will directly supply Jollibee Group's requirements for its food business.

"As a food company needing fresh produce for our meal offerings, helping farmers organize themselves to directly supply Jollibee seem the most relevant and meaningful way by which we can help our farmers," said Ma. Gisela Tiongson, JGF president and executive director, at the signing ceremony.

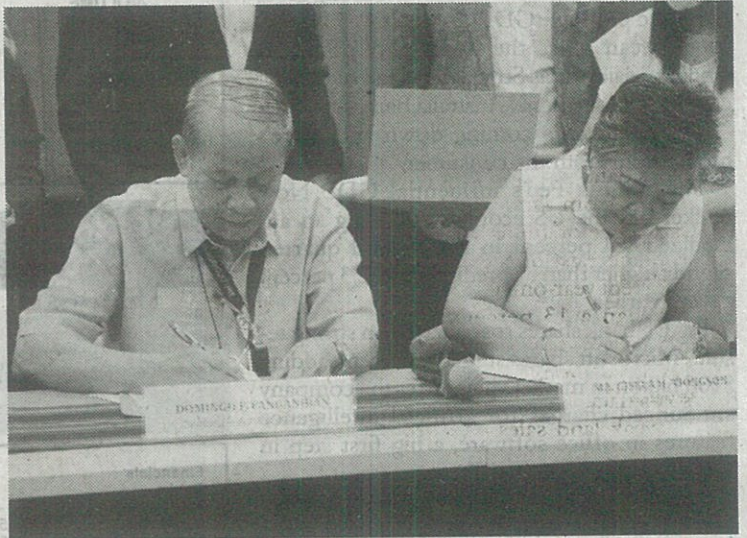
Tiongson said through the Jollibee Group's Farmer Entrepreneurship Program, at least 25 farmer groups currently sup-

ply Jollibee with fresh produce.

The partnership with DA did not indicate the target beneficiaries but is eyed to equip farmers and fisherfolk with improved skills and entrepreneurship knowledge to make their operations sustainable and efficient.

"Through this new partnership, we look forward to sustaining our efforts over the next three years in co-creating and implementing an agro-enterprise training program that build on each other's strengths and experiences and complement the efforts of DA personnel, in helping farmer cooperatives and associations become profitable and successful," Tiongson further said.

Tiongson said the partnership advances the interest and condition of small-scale Filipino farmers and fisherfolk, citing their previous experience that farmers gained not only a stable market but also the skills to project their



Panganiban (left) and Tiongson sign the MOA at the DA Office on July 17, 2023.

income and manage their costs to the minimum.

DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban said in a statement the agreement is part of

the Agro-Enterprise Clustering Approach which guides cooperative associations in the country in clustering and in marketing their agri-fishery products.



ALL PROVINCES IN REGION HIT BY HOG DISEASE

LOSSES FROM SWINE FEVER TOP P700M IN WESTERN VISAYAS

By Joey Marzan
@joeymarzanINQ

ILOILO CITY—Hog growers in Western Visayas have lost at least P762.5 million as the African swine fever (ASF) hit pig farms in the region, a report from the Department of Agriculture (DA) on Tuesday showed.

As of June 26, a total of 79,376 hogs in the region, composed of the provinces of Iloilo, Capiz, Antique, Aklan, Guimaras and Negros Occidental, died due to swine diseases and depopulation procedures to prevent the spread of ASF.

Capiz logged more than half of the total hog deaths in the region with 47,645 or equivalent to P428.89 million in losses.

Negros Occidental followed with 14,430 dead hogs valued at P162.61 million, Iloilo with 12,485 (P124.85 million). Aklan

with 2,389 (P23.35 million), Antique with 2,051 (P12.29 million) and Guimaras with 376 pigs (P3.675 million).

The DA in the region, as of July 14, collected 2,853 samples from 527 barangays, with 996 samples from 338 barangays yielding positive results for ASF, representing a swine population of 4,468 with positive samples. More than 600 farmers reported losses.

Guimaras recovery

Dr. Jonic Natividad, DA Western Visayas regulatory division chief, said Guimaras was on track to be the first province to go into a recovery process.

Their records indicated that hog farms in three out of five Guimaras towns had been affected—Buenavista, Nueva Valencia and the capital Jordan. The towns of San Lorenzo and Sibalom had not recorded any

case of the hog disease.

He said officials of the island province had been working closely with them, diligently sending blood samples for testing and complying with the DA's documentary requirements.

Natividad said that relieving villages of swine fever would rely heavily on hog raisers, regardless of the health status of their stocks, as they must implement their own respective biosecurity audits.

"If they are hit [by ASF], they have to [investigate] why they were hit; [check] if they [bought contaminated] meat or pork products or if they go out often. For those who are not affected, they have to look at their practices which may lead to [ASF infection]. These are practices that we need to address," he said.

Western Visayas is one of the country's top hog produc-

ers. Negros Occidental leads the region with an inventory of 491,066. Iloilo comes next with 182,020 hogs in its inventory, followed by Capiz (124,976), Aklan (98,398), Antique (76,384) and Guimaras (23,686).

ASF, according to the National Meat Inspection Service, is a highly contagious viral disease that affects pigs, warthogs and boars. It causes pigs to have high fever and lose their appetite, and causes hemorrhages in the skin and internal organs.

Hogs die in a span of two to 10 days upon infection. There is no known vaccine that has been developed to fight swine fever.

But ASF, health officials stressed, does not pose any threat to humans, and pork products from areas where swine fever cases have been detected are safe for consumption. INQ



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DA, Jollibee team up for agri-fisheries clustering

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has teamed up with the Jollibee Group Foundation (JGF) to promote clustering and consolidation in the agri-fisheries sectors, which will enhance market access and income of farmers and fisherfolk.

The partnership was formalized through a memorandum of agreement (MOA) signed by the two parties last Monday.

DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban stressed the important role of agri-fisheries clustering and consolidation and the Agro-Enterprise Clustering Approach (AECA) in achieving inclusive agricultural productivity in the country.

"As you may know, clustering and consolidation is a top priority of President Marcos Under his leadership, the Department of Agriculture is levelling up and pushing for strategies to achieve key milestones toward food sufficiency and security," he said.

Panganiban said one key measure in attaining these goals is the mainstreaming of Farm and Fisheries Clustering and Consolidation (F2C2) program in the DA banner programs and operating units, particularly the institutionalization of the AECA course in the Department through the Philippine Rural Development Program Scale-Up.

"We hope that through this strategy, we are contributing to the national goal of increasing the incomes of our farmers and ensuring that food is always available at the tables of every Filipino family," Panganiban said.

JGF president and executive director Ma. Gisela Tiongson affirmed their commitment in advancing the interest and condition of small-scale Filipino farmers and fisherfolk through various agro-enterprise capacity building activities in line with the F2C2 program.

"Through this new partnership, we look forward to sustaining our efforts over the next three years, in co-creating and implementing an agro-enterprise training program that build on each other's strengths and experiences, and complement the efforts of DA personnel, in helping farmer cooperatives and associations become profitable and successful," she said.

The MOA signifies the renewal of collaboration between the DA and JGF in empowering farming and fishing communities to produce enough, accessible, and affordable food for Filipinos since its inception in January last year.

AECA is one of the banner activities that was born from the partnership, which seeks to guide cooperative associations in the country in clustering and collective marketing of their agri-fishery products.

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More ASF cases detected in Bataan

More cases of African swine fever (ASF) have been reported in Bataan.

In a radio interview yesterday, Bataan provincial veterinarian Dr. Alberto Venturina said 800 pigs in backyard farms died recently due to the swine disease.

He issued a warning that the ASF outbreak in Bataan would continue due to the failure of concerned hog raisers to report cases, adding that trading of infected pigs continues.

"Our backyard farms have poor biosecurity. That's why any time, ASF can hit them," Venturina said.

ASF cases were reported in the towns of Orion, Morong, Samal, Pilar and Herbosa.

Venturina said indemnification of affected farmers is ongoing.

"The national government previously offered P5,000, but the province can afford only P3,000 per head and a maximum of 20 pigs," he said.

Venturina said the provincial government wrote the **Department of Agriculture** to seek financial assistance for affected hog raisers.

— Bella Cariaso

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Palawan govt joins nationwide launch of 'Kadiwa ng Pangulo'

PALAWAN Governor Victorino Dennis M. Socrates led the launching of KADIWA ng Pangulo (KNP) 2023 in the province wherein local agricultural products such as fresh and nutritious vegetables, fruits, poultry, nuts and dried products, rice, and groceries were made available at affordable prices.

The launching held at the Centennial Pavilion of the Provincial Capitol, Puerto Princesa City last July 17, 2023 was spearheaded by the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPA), in partnership with the Palawan Tarabidan Multipurpose Cooperative as the official "Katuwang sa Diwa at Gawa para sa Masaganang Ani at Kita" or KADIWA partner in Palawan, **Department of Agriculture (DA)**, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Palawan, National Food Authority (NFA), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and NCCC Mall Palawan.

In his message, Socrates expressed his appreciation for the project which aims to help local producers earn higher income by eliminating intermediaries and, at the same time, allow consumers to buy agricultural products and other goods at a lower price.

"Thank you for this project *sapagkat alam natin na maraming makikinabang dito, matutulungan ang ating mga producers at ganun din ang ating mga consumers sa pamamagitan ng mabibiling pangangailangang pagkain at basic necessities sa murang halaga,*" he said in a statement.

According to Provincial Agriculturist Romeo Cabungcal, aside from having these basic commodities accessible and affordable to the poor, the project also provide farmers, fisherfolks and micro-enterprises a rent-free venue to sell their products and increase their income.

The activity also coincides with the nutrition month celebration this July with the theme "Healthy diet, gawing affordable for all!" In her message, Provincial Nutrition Action Officer Rachel Paladan conveyed the significance of the project in addressing the problem of malnutrition in the province.

"Ito pong KADIWA ay sagot po sa ating problema sa malnutrisyon... suportahan po natin ang mga local produce ng ating mga farmers kasi nakikita po natin na masustansiya at sariwa tapos dito lang po natin mabibili na affordable po sa lahat."

Meanwhile, the nationwide launching of KNP was held at San Fernando City, Pampanga and participated simultaneously by all provinces in the country.



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DA, Jollibee aim to expand access of local farmers, fishers to markets

By RAADEE S. SAUSA

✉@raadeeboy

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Jollibee Group Foundation (JGF) signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) that aims to “enhance” the access of farmers and fishers to markets, which will give them opportunities to increase their income.

Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban said the government’s MOA with Jollibee is consistent with the administration’s goal of achieving

“inclusive agricultural productivity” in the country.

“As you may know, clustering and consolidation is a top priority of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. Under his leadership, the DA is leveling up and pushing for strategies to achieve key milestones toward food sufficiency and security,” Panganiban said in a statement.

He added that one key measures in attaining these goals is the mainstreaming of Farm and Fisheries Clustering and Consolidation (F2C2) program in the DA Banner Programs

and Operating Units, particularly the institutionalization of the Agro-Enterprise Clustering Approach (AECA) Course in the department through the Philippine Rural Development Program Scale-Up.

“We hope that through this strategy, we are contributing to the national goal of increasing the incomes of our farmers and ensuring that food is always available at the tables of every Filipino family.”

As a complement to the efforts of DA, Ma. Gisela Tiongson, president and executive director

of JGF, affirmed their commitment in advancing the interest and condition of small scale Filipino farmers and fisherfolk through various agro-enterprise capacity building activities in line with the F2C2 program.

“Through this new partnership, we look forward to sustaining our efforts over the next three years, in co-creating and implementing an agro-enterprise training program that build on each other’s strengths and experiences, and complement the efforts of DA personnel, in helping farmer cooperatives and as-

sociations become profitable and successful.”

The DA said the signing signifies the renewal of collaboration between the agency and JGF in “empowering” farming and fishing communities to produce enough, accessible, and affordable food for Filipinos since its inception in January 2022.

It added that AECA is one of the banner activities that was born from the partnership, which seeks to guide cooperative associations in the country in clustering and collective marketing of their agri-fishery products.



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Border inspection facility to rise in Bulacan

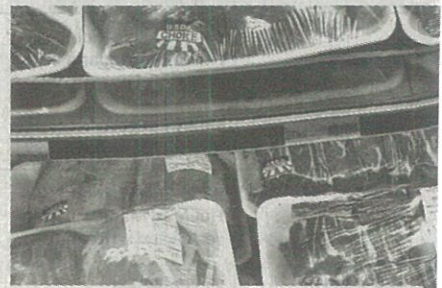
THE Philippines's campaign against smuggling is set to reach an important milestone with the construction of the first border inspection facility for agricultural imports in Bulacan.

The Department of Agriculture and the private sector are expected to sign on July 20 a memorandum of understanding on the facility's construction. A groundbreaking ceremony will also be conducted in Angat, where the facility will be built.

Nongovernment organization Samahang Industriya ng Agriculture (Sinag) thanked President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., who is

also the chief of the agriculture department, for giving his blessing to the facility's construction.

"The [facility] is a game-changer and is a dream come true for the local agriculture industry," Sinag Chairman Rosendo said in a statement. "A week after his assumption to the presidency, PBBM [President Bongbong Marcos] gave the directive to us in the private sector and the DA



THIS BUSINESSMIRROR file photo shows imported meat products from the United States.

to work together in establishing the Cefa."

"The Pacific Road Link Incorporated, after consultation with Sinag, offered 10 hectares of its Angat property as our first Cefa that will provide shipment inspection services in Customs facilities outside our Philippine ports, at no cost to the government. *Maraming salamat kay PBBM.* We also applaud the relentless efforts of Senator



Cynthia Villar [dahil] sampung taon natin siyang kasama sa pagtulak ng first border inspection facilities."

Lawmakers have repeatedly raised the importance of Cold/Commodity Examination Facilities for Agriculture (Cefa) or the 100 percent first border inspection of agricultural imports to combat smuggling during public hearings.

Aside from preventing smuggling, Sinag said Cefa will assure

the country's food safety and public health from unsafe and untested agricultural imports that crippled and continue to devastate the agriculture sector, like the African swine fever (ASF) and avian influenza, among others.

"ASF alone has ravaged the livestock industry and allied sectors by at least P70 billion for the past four years."

Sinag said the Angat property will house government employees from the Bureau of Customs, the DA, and any other affiliated government agencies necessary to accomplish the ultimate purpose of focused, but expeditious inspection of agricultural shipments without sacrificing strict adherence to regulatory guidelines and customs tariff and quarantine protocols.

The group said only smugglers

and those involved in illicit trade and their cohorts in government "will make every effort to hamper the construction of Cefa."

"Imagine, 4 years nang may pondo ang Cefa subalit hindi ito ma-implement. *Ganoon kalakas ang mga puwersa na ayaw ipatayo ang Cefa.* Alam din natin na up until today, they continue to lobby against its construction."

Sinag noted that agricultural smuggling has deprived government of much needed revenues, hovering between P15 billion to P25 billion annually. Local producers continue to suffer from unfair competition as smuggled goods directly compete with local production.

"Worse, unsuspecting consumers have no idea of what they are buying, putting at risk public health and safety concerns."

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Misamis Oriental coco planters get shared processing facilities under CFIDP

THE province of Misamis Oriental has been granted shared processing facilities (SPFs) for coconut worth P76.9 million under the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP).

The **Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHILMech)** will spearhead the establishment of SPFs for qualified farmers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs).

Two barangays will receive the facilities—the Odiongan Multi-Purpose Cooperative

(MPC) based in Barangay Odiongan in Gingoog City in Misamis Oriental will get a white copra processing facility worth P30.1 million.

Meanwhile, the Alayon Multi-Purpose Cooperative (MPC) based in Barangay Bonifacio Aquino in Magsaysay, Misamis Oriental will receive a white copra and coconut oil processing facility worth P46.8 million.

PHILMech Director Dionisio Alvindia congratulated the beneficiaries and assured them that the attached agency of the

Department of Agriculture will continue to show its support through projects under the CFIDP.

The two cooperatives will operate and manage the facilities that will benefit more than 2,000 coconut farmers in the area alone.

The two SPFs are also expected to cater to coconut farmers from other municipalities/cities and provinces in Region 10 (Northern Mindanao).

Andres Tuates Jr., head of Coconut

Trust Fund Facility Management and Field Operations Division of PHILMech is spearheading the agency's projects under the CFIDP.

Earlier, PHILMech said it has shortlisted 27 coconut FCAs as recipients of SPFs that will be funded by the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund (CFITF) as stipulated by Republic Act 11524 or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act.

Alvindia said the agency has also started the process of enabling FCAs to manage,

operate and maintain the SPFs with trainings conducted since early this year.

He added that more coconut FCAs will be added to the shortlist.

"PHILMech is stepping up the distribution at no cost of SPFs to qualified coconut-based FCAs to be funded under the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund or CFITF, and identifying the cooperatives and associations to be part of the shortlist of SPF recipients is one crucial step for that."

Raadee S. Sausa



Using less resources to grow food



MOVING
FORWARD

WILLIAM
D. DAR

THIS column can be considered a continuation of last week's article that discussed advances in irrigation technology, enabling farmers to save on water usage and increase yields. Let me stress that lessening water usage in agriculture is a critical issue as global freshwater resources are dwindling amid challenges from climate change and a growing population.

For this column, let me discuss how to reduce the resources or inputs needed to grow food, and why many current cultivation practices are unsustainable over the short to long term.

Let me start the discussion from an article I read from the website of The Strait Times titled "Existing technologies can increase food supply without harming the environment: Tharman" that is based on Singapore Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam's views on the need to make food production more sustainable.

Speaking at the 43rd Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) conference in Rome recently, Tharman

said that current methods or systems of rice production are not sustainable as it is water-intensive and produces a large amount of methane.

He pointed out that the Vietnamese government is promoting a new system to grow rice in the Mekong Delta called "alternate wetting and drying irrigation" where farmers first irrigate the land to fill up about 5 centimeters (cm) above the soil. After that, farmers wait for the water to subside to around 15 cm below the soil before adding a little amount of water.

Tharman said this system improved yields by up to 40 percent while reducing water usage in growing rice. This sounds realistic as the roots of the rice crops can still absorb water that has been held below the soil level, especially for varieties developed for dry season planting or drought

conditions.

In China, the Singaporean official said farmers in that country have affordable drip irrigation systems and use of sensors in growing rice, increasing yields by up to 22 percent and reducing water use by almost 40 percent.

At the FAO conference, Tharman said there is a need to approach food security taking into account water security and environmental security.

And in the Philippines, this statement of Tharman should be echoed as the El Niño episode will gain more strength toward the end of this year, threatening the country's water resources.

As for fertilizer use, I learned of a company named Ninja Ag founded by a group of agricultural researchers from the Oklahoma State University that has developed aerial imagery technology to help farmers determine the right amount of fertilizer usage.

The company's methodology is simple yet innovative, and utilizes satellite and drone technology to help reduce fertilizer usage. The first step is the company asks

farmers to apply an ample quantity of fertilizer over one strip of a plantation, and this will serve as a reference point to determine the optimum level of fertilizers needed for the rest of the plants in the field.

Ninja Ag then deploys drones or satellites to generate images that can compare the greenness of the leaves of plants, which will help determine their health. The data and images generated are then used to determine the optimum amount of fertilizers that will be applied over the whole of the plantation or farm.

How I wished that Ninja Ag would introduce its technology in the Philippines. But now, there is one sure way to reduce inorganic fertilizer use through balanced fertilization.

Harnessing natural sources

It was during my watch at the Department of Agriculture (DA) that the Balanced Fertilization Strategy (BFS) Program was launched in

May 2022 after the global trade of inorganic fertilizers was disrupted by the rising prices of crude oil and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Also, the DA saw at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic the need for farmers to start shifting to more sustainable methods of farming that would entail lesser use of inorganic fertilizers.

This led to the conceptualization and launching of the BFS program, which is gradually being adopted nationwide.

The overall aim of the BFS is for farmers to also use organic materials that are readily available like rice straw, livestock and chicken manure, among others, in cultivating crops. Also, the use of biofertilizers is encouraged under the BFS. Various materials can be utilized as biostimulants or biofertilizers such as algae extracts, humic acids, enzymes, hormones and plant growth-promoting microorganisms.

The BFS also advocates the adoption of the optimum combination of inorganic fertilizers and inorganic inputs based on the spe-

cific climatic and soil conditions of a farming locality.

Prior to the formal launching of the BFS in May 2022, the DA-Philippine Rice Research Institute reported palay (unmilled rice) yields of up to 7 metric tons per hectare (MT/ha) from field trials using a combination of inorganic and inorganic fertilizers. Farmers can reduce their inorganic fertilizer use by as much as 50 percent. The average palay yield in the Philippines is 4 MT/ha.

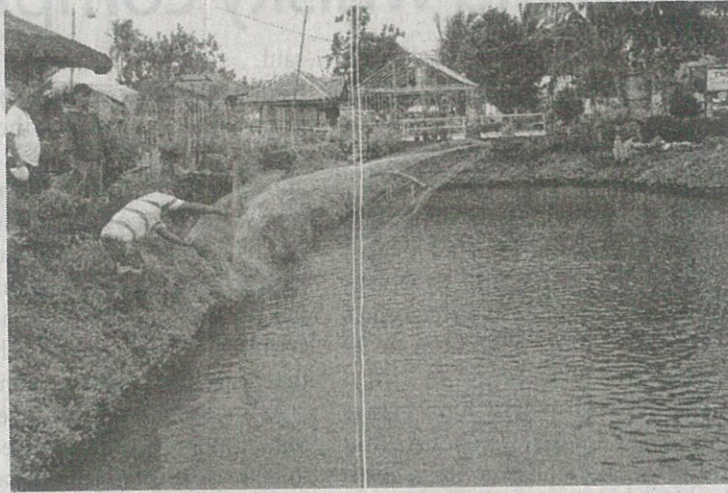
Improved soil health has also been reported with the adoption of BFS, making that strategy a viable solution to make farming less harmful to the environment.

From what I have discussed, there are a lot of proven solutions to lessen or optimize the amount of inorganic inputs in cultivating crops, and most of them are not rocket science. And these can be adopted by smallholder farmers and scaled up in coverage.

So, let us start adopting the proven methods, systems or technologies to lessen the inputs required to grow food.



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■ The Kitcharao LGU Farm in Agusan del Norte is an integrated farming system operated by the local government. PHOTO FROM PIA

Kitcharao a showcase for integrated farming

SITUATED in the heart of the Kitcharao, Agusan del Norte is a 3-hectare lot at Sitio Lapucon in Barangay Crossing that hosts a P34.5-million farm facility known as the Kitcharao LGU Farm.

Established by the Kitcharao local government unit (LGU), it is a showcase for integrated farming that integrates livestock, crop production, fish, poultry, tree crops, plantation crops and other components that complement each other.

Kitcharao Mayor Jenry Montante said they established and managed the Kitcharao LGU Farm primarily to capacitate and empower the farmers and fisherfolk with new farming and fishing techniques, and the use of modern equipment.

The initiatives also aimed to make Kitcharao a highly productive agricultural production area for vegetables, poultry, fishery products, rice, among others.

"I want our farmers to learn and be guided with the modern way of farming, with the help of our agriculturists, experts of the field, workers and partner agencies like the Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Training Institute, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, and

the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, they will be guided on how to practice integrated farming with the use of modern technology and equipment," said Montante.

Raul del Agua, the municipal agriculturist, also wanted the rice farmers in the LGU to do away with monocropping. "We have our training center and demonstration farm. We will train them because we want them to increase their income and provide them sources of food through integrated farming," he added.

Marty Billones is just one of the many local farmers in Kitcharao who has benefited from the demo farm. "I am thankful to the government, especially to our local officials for supporting us and for teaching us new ways to improve our farming knowledge and skills, so we are now self-reliant, and our livelihood will be stable," said Billones.

The Kitcharao LGU Farm also has the potential to become an agri-tourism destination as it hosts a 2,000-square-meter fish pond for tilapia production and fishing, surrounded by cottages where visitors can relax. Since 2021, the Kitcharao LGU Farm has trained and supported a total of 300 farmers. **THE TIMES**

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PREPARING FOR EL NIÑO

THE Department of Agriculture is lining up interventions and prepositioning farm inputs for farmers, especially rice and corn planters, who are expected to be badly hit by the dry spell of the El Niño threatening the country this year.

Alejandro Rafal, Provincial Agriculture Program Coordinating Officer of the DA-Negros Oriental, said the agriculture sector would be the most affected by this abnormal weather phenomenon.

"We have already prepositioned seeds, fertilizers, and machinery for distribution to farmers tilling two hectares and below who will be hit by the El Niño," he said during a Kapihan forum on Tuesday.

Central Visayas is among

the 14 regions in the Philippines predicted to be hit by the El Niño, Rafal said.

Some of the preparations being undertaken by the local DA offices include the maximization of non-vulnerable areas to flooding and drought that may be planted with rice or corn, he said.

DA is now mapping out these areas, Rafal said, adding that vulnerable areas will be aided with the use of the agency's Quick Response Funds.

For Central Visayas, Rafal said the agency has allotted over PHP292.8 million in anticipation of the El Niño, to be distributed to four provinces.

For now, Rafal said there is hope for the farmers to still enjoy good yield during the wet season, which has already start-

ed because of the rains.

Negros Oriental has about 19,000 hectares planted to rice and some 60,000 hectares of corn fields.

Based on PAGASA forecast, during the wet season which has already commenced, crops will not be affected yet but from Sept. 16 up to early next year or the dry season would be the most critical time for the farmers, Rafal said.

It would be difficult for the rice farmers to produce the desired number of metric tons during the dry spell, he said.

The DA official reassured that while Negros Oriental is not self-sufficient on rice with only 32 percent production due to lack of areas and limited source of irrigation, importa-

tion of the staple will assure the constituents of food security.

"In terms of food security, the province is really secured because of the availability of rice in the market but as far as the production is concerned for Negros Oriental, we cannot meet the requirement," he said.

The province has a requirement of 117,000 metric tons of rice and is only producing 37,000 metric tons, he added.

Rafal said the agency's concern now is to protect the rice and corn farmers from the abnormal effects of the El Niño, to include flooding and extreme dry spell.

Projected to be affected by flooding are 14,395 hectares of corn while 572 hectares of rice are expected to be damaged by drought, he said.

PNA



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CvSU develops tissue culture machine

BY ANTONIO PAPA

INDANG, Cavite: The Cavite State University (CvSU) has developed and patented a machine to mass produce tissue-cultured coffee and embryo-cultured macapuno seedlings, which can help boost the propagation of the two plants in the Philippines.

The Cellula Growth Chamber has a programmable logic controller and a high-capacity tissue/embryo growth chamber. It was specifically developed for mass production of tissue-cultured coffee and embryo-cultured macapuno seedlings. It has been registered with the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines with the trademark Cellula.

Cellula has high capacity and is made from materials that are lo-

cally available. It has temperature controls and monitoring and can be transported. The total cost of fabricating Cellula is P275,000.

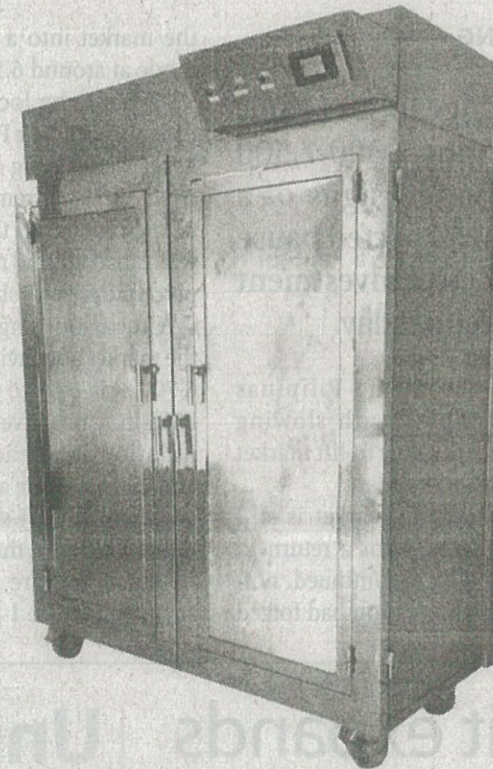
Gerry Castillo, director of the CvSU National Coffee Research, Development and Extension Center, said Cellula is priced competitively compared to those that are commercially available and imported from other countries.

"The introduction of the Cellula Growth Chamber — a local-

ized plant tissue culture growth enhancement technology in the tissue culture laboratories offers comparable technical performance at a much cheaper purchase price than of the commercially available ones," he said.

"Considering the number of tissue culture laboratories in the country, the production of locally developed equipment like the Cellula will have good market potential," Castillo added.

At present, the most popular method to propagate plants in the Philippines is growing seedlings using parts of the plants including stems and seeds. However, tissue or embryonic culture is believed to offer advantages over traditional seedling propagation like producing more robust seedlings.



■ The Cellula Growth Chamber developed by the Cavite State University in Indang, Cavite. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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'Sugar industry does not need new laws'

BACOLOD CITY: The domestic sugar industry in the Philippines needs "better implementation" of existing laws rather than passing additional laws to protect it, Sen. Ana Theresia "Risa" Hontiveros said on Tuesday.

Hontiveros, who visited Bacolod City for a series of consultations with sugar industry stakeholders, said there was a need "for better implementation of existing laws like the Sugar Industry Development Act (SIDA)."

"Is the Sugar Consultative Assembly fully constituted? Should they not be consulted in formulating the sugar orders? These are the questions the stakeholders were asking," the senator said.

The senator, however, is also looking at amending current laws like the SIDA and the Price Act to strengthen them.

Hontiveros said sugar industry stakeholders were surprised by the pronouncements of Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin that there was no need for a sugar order for the importation of sugar.

"It's not enough for them to know if prices of sugar are competitive this year or not, but they want to look at the future. What's the fair price for the end-user or consumer? What's the right evolution of prices from production to retail sales that's fair to all and will make the industry sustainable? Hontiveros said.

She said that she talked with the different stakeholders in the sugar industry "to assess what they feel about Sugar Order (SO) No. 7."

Released on July 6, 2023, SO 7 authorized the importation of an ad-

ditional 150,000 metric tons of sugar to cover the projected supply gap and increase the country's buffer stock of the commodity.

Hontiveros also paid a courtesy visit to Negros Occidental Gov. Eugenio Jose Lacson at the provincial capitol on Wednesday, July 19.

The senator, meanwhile, asked the sugar industry stakeholders where the revenues of the Sugar Regulatory Administration are going.

"Where is it being spent? Was any of it spent for the programs that should be funded under the SIDA Law? Is it possible to amend the appropriate law to earmark funds for the development of the sugar industry? she asked.

Hontiveros said her office would study all the suggestions and recommendations made by the stakeholders.

She also said that she would ask Sen. Francis Tolentino, chairman of the Senate blue ribbon committee, for at least two more hearings on the alleged sugar smuggling in the country.

"We want to complete the story of Sugar Order No. 6. We can't accept the explanation of Secretary Bersamin that you don't need a sugar order anymore to import sugar; otherwise, it will be open season for the importation of agricultural products," Hontiveros also added.

The need to complete the issue on "profiteering" needs to be exposed, she said, adding that "we want to make sure that all stakeholders will benefit from Sugar Order No. 7."

SO 6 allowed the importation of 440,000 metric tons of refined sugar.

EUGENE ADIONG



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31 Filipinos train on cage-free egg production

THIRTY-ONE participants representing 19 members of the State Universities and Colleges-Association of Colleges of Agriculture in the Philippines (SUC-ACAP) have undergone training in Yogyakarta, Indonesia on cage-free egg production.

The training was organized by the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) with the Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) Faculty of Animal Science offering the International Training on Cage-Free Innovation and Welfare Hub (ITCFIWH).

Glenn Gregorio, Searca director, said the weeklong training from July 9 to 15, 2023 was aimed at equipping attendees with knowledge on best practices for cage-free egg production, ensuring safety and nutritional quality, and promoting sustainable farming practices for environmentally responsible agriculture.

Gregorio said the program was developed in collaboration with Global Food Partners (GFP), a Singapore-based multinational consultancy firm that specializes in providing support and expertise to farmers and industry stakeholders

to transition to best-practices cage-free egg production in Asia.

The training consists of a comprehensive curriculum featuring theoretical and practical sessions to facilitate a thorough understanding and hands-on experience for the participants, he added.

Budi Guntoro, dean of UGM College of Animal Science, welcomed the participants during the opening ceremony and provided an overview of the training program.

Guntoro said the UGM Faculty of Animal Science is committed to staying abreast of the latest trends in the livestock industry.

GFP Chief Operating Officer Jayasimha Nuggehalli said the GFP is dedicated to establishing an ecosystem that supports the successful transition to cage-free production and sourcing in Asia.

According to Searca, the training is also aimed at fostering a network of regional experts trained in high-welfare cage-free production, and who will be instrumental in supporting local egg industries in implementing new learnings and accelerating the adoption of cage-free production and sourcing throughout the region.

Meanwhile, Blessie Saez, Searca Education and Collective Learning Department senior program associate, emphasized the significance of knowledge-driven growth, particularly for the sustainability and development of academic institutions.

"These types of learning events greatly contribute to the quality of teaching and learning, benefiting not only the students and the higher education institutions but the entire region as well," Saez said.

Gregorio said the International Continuing Professional Education grants from the Commission on Higher Education provided financial support for the delegates' participation in the training through Searca's Leveling-Up Philippine Higher Education Institutions in Agriculture, Fisheries and Natural Resources (LevelUPHEI AFAR) project.

The LevelUPHEI AFAR project focuses on enhancing the capacity of faculty and staff members in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and natural resources.

"This project involves connecting Philippine HEIs with international university networks through

various initiatives, including training programs, summer schools, fora, cross-visits, and faculty and student mobility," Gregorio said.

Among and foremost of these networks is the Southeast Asian University Consortium (UC) for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources in which UGM is a founding member while Searca serves as the consortium secretariat.

In addition to the ITCFIWH, Gregorio said Searca will continue to support SUC-ACAP member universities in their participation in upcoming learning events organized by UC members in August and September this year.

Gregorio said these events will cover specialized courses on topics such as the halal industry, bioinformatics skills for plant and animal whole genome sequencing data, natural resources and environmental management science, tropical agricultural environment toward regional sustainability, ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, and aquatic animal nutrition and feed manufacturing.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO



■ Photo shows the 31 participants from 19 state universities and colleges in the Philippines that have undergone training in Yogyakarta, Indonesia on cage-free egg production. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Malaya Business Insight

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Soybeans, corn rise

SINGAPORE- Chicago soybean and corn futures gained more ground on Wednesday, with forecasts of dry weather in the US Midwest supporting prices.

Wheat rose for a second session, as Russian air strikes damaged infrastructure at the Black Sea port of Odesa, a day after Moscow quit the export deal that facilitated Ukraine crop shipments.

"Forecasts of dryness for rest of July and early August for US for corn and beans is supporting prices," said one Singapore-based trader. "The situation in Russia and

Ukraine is expected to reduce grain and oilseed shipments."

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) added 0.3 percent to \$13.99-1/4 a bushel, and corn gained 1.4 percent at \$5.41-3/4 a bushel.

Wheat rose 1.2 percent to \$6.78-1/2 a bushel.

The market is worried about the potential for warmer, drier weather to trim yields in late July and in August, which are critical months for soybean and corn development. - Reuters



A 700% jump in tomato prices gives windfall to India farmers

AN eightfold surge in tomato prices is making some Indian farmers rich, although their windfall gains may be short-lived due to a likely rise in supplies in the coming weeks.

Retail prices of tomatoes were at 178 rupees (\$2.20) a kilogram in Delhi on Sunday, a jump of more than 700 percent from January 1, according to data compiled by the food ministry. The national average was almost 120 rupees that day.

The hike, caused by heavy rains disrupting supplies, has hit consumer nerves, with many households temporarily forgoing tomatoes—an essential element of mainstay Indian dishes. But growers are elated.

Ishwar Gaykar said he and his wife Sonali, who grow tomatoes on 12 acres (4.9 hectares) of land near Junnar in the western state of Maharashtra, have made a profit of about 24 million rupees so far in the current season, compared with 1.5 million a year earlier.

The couple, who employ 60 to 70 daily workers to manage the fields, have emerged as one of the biggest suppliers of tomatoes in the region. Ishwar has gained celebrity status as local media outlets are lining up for interviews.

"About one and a half months ago, tomatoes were fetching barely 2.5 rupees a kilogram," said Ishwar, who suffered a loss of about 2 million rupees in the same season of 2021. "Supply is thin, while demand remains strong."

The couple have supplied about 350 tons in recent weeks, and expect to sell

another 150 tons soon, provided the weather condition doesn't deteriorate. They reap three harvests every year, with the current crop being 120 to 140 days old.

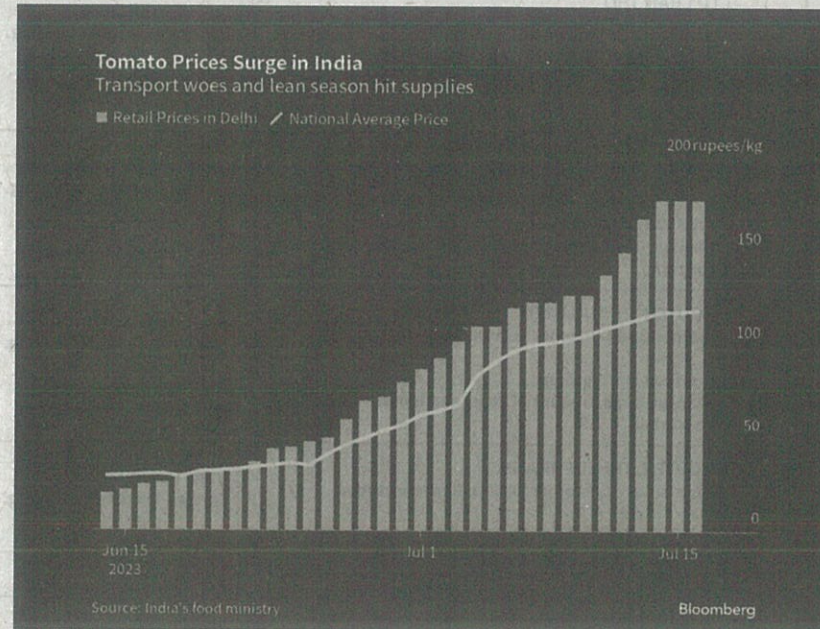
Supplies have been hit by transport disruptions following heavy monsoon rains and floods in some regions, and inflation is set to increase as other vegetables have also become more expensive. The issue has become front-page news, and is being hotly debated on social media, with consumers blaming the rain god and the authorities alike for the situation.

The government has started selling tomatoes at subsidized rates at many locations, deploying mobile vans. It's showing some impact, but prices are still very high for consumers in a country of 1.4 billion people. Tomatoes generally cost more in the rainy months of July and August, but the spike has been unusual this year.

While prices are expected to fall in the coming weeks with an improvement in truck movements, growers are rejoicing in their current good fortunes.

"I have never seen my produce getting this high a rate," said Mahendra Nikam, whose tomatoes fetched as much as 130 rupees per kilogram in Surat, a city in the state of Gujarat. "Less than two months ago, farmers were literally forced to throw away tomatoes or feed the fruit-bearing plants to the cattle."

Deepak Chavan, a Pune-based independent analyst, said that nurseries were witnessing a big demand for tomato plants because of the recent surge in prices. "No doubt this is a



short-lived fortune, but I won't be surprised if we witness a glut-like situation in September," he said.

Britain's food inflation

FOOD inflation in Britain appears to be past its worst after producers and grocers cut prices and raw material costs stabilize or come down.

In the first sign that the country's lengthy cost-of-living crisis could be easing, grocery price inflation dropped 1.6 percentage points to 14.9 percent in the four weeks to July 9, according to market research firm Kantar. That's down from a high of 17.5 percent in March.

Food and drink manufacturers cut their prices in June for the first time in three years, according to Lloyds Banking Group.

The reduction will come as a relief for households struggling with their budgets, although there could still be a time lag before a positive effect is seen as rising interest rates continue to bump up mortgage costs and inflation remains more than four times its target at 8.7 percent.

Britain is "definitely over the worst" of food price inflation, according to Tim Steiner, CEO of online grocer Ocado Group Plc. Still, he warned Tuesday that until interest rates steady, there will be pressure on home loans

and wage demands.

"We need to see interest rates ideally stabilize and come down before I think we can start to see this inflation actually start to go back down," said the former Goldman Sachs Group Inc. banker.

Steiner said grocers haven't been profiteering from inflation, an allegation made by some Members of Parliament.

"When there's excess demand for toilet paper or water, the grocers ration it," he said. "As opposed to when there's more demand for taxis or theater tickets or airline tickets, they just put the price up and take the profit."

Ocado has been reducing prices on more than 100 products from branded goods such as Lurpak garlic butter to salmon fillets and avocados. All the big grocers have been doing the same and frozen food specialist Iceland Foods announced price cuts Tuesday on 500 essential household products. Deals include £2 for 15-piece packs of fish fingers and £3.60 chicken-breast fillets.

The Kantar survey showed that more than a quarter of sales in the four-week period were made through promotions as shoppers try to save money. Retailers are shifting efforts from everyday low pricing, including on store-brand products, to loyalty programs such as Tesco Plc's Clubcard or J Sainsbury Plc's Nectar card.

The search for cheaper prices means discount grocer Aldi was again the fastest-expanding retailer, with sales up by 24 percent, while Lidl recorded a 22-percent annual jump in sales. **Bloomberg News**