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## Group: NFA must buy palay from farmers to beef up buffer stock

**T**HE National Food Authority (NFA) should use its allocation to procure unmilled rice from farmers to boost its buffer stock, according to a non-government organization.

The Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) said NFA's pronouncement that its buffer stock is good for only 1.56 days was "irresponsible" and caused panic among traders and millers.

"Instead of issuing such rash statement, the NFA should have

used the P8.5-billion budget provided by your administration to buy palay from our rice farmers," Sinag Chairman Rosendo So said in his letter to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.

"NFA did not buy rice so it has no buffer stock."

The group noted that the agency has a budget of P8.5 billion to buy palay from farmers. With the amount, the NFA would have been able to purchase 447,368.42 metric tons of palay at an average

farmgate price of P19 per kilo.

"It is very unfortunate that officials of the NFA have not heeded your marching order of prioritizing local production and supporting local producers," the group's letter read.

It also criticized the visit of the NFA chief to India to secure rice imports that will prop up domestic supply.

"It is for these reasons that we have called for the abolition of the agency, for its utter failure

to support our local farmers and the local rice industry in general."

Recently, the group proposed the abolition of the NFA over the agency's supposed preference for imported rice. It added that "the latest showcase of NFA's skewed preference for imported rice" is its ongoing negotiations with India for rice procurement.

"They're not buying from our farmers anymore. They're buying from Vietnam, India. They're negotiating on rice." **Raadee S. Sausa**



## MGA AGRI EXEC 'WAG IPAHAMAK SI BBM

Pinaalala ng isang mambabatas sa mga opisyal ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na hindi dapat sila sumablay sa kanilang mandato para sigurihin ang food security ng bansa lalo pa't mismong si Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ang namumuno sa ahensiya.

Ito'y matapos sabihin ni Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban na hindi kaya ng DA na tiyakin na magkakaroon ang bansa ng ganap na food security

sa pagtatapos ng termino ng Pangulo sa 2028.

Inihayag ito ni Panganib nang tanungin ni Manila Rep. Bienvenido Abante sa deliberasyon ng panukalang budget ng DA para sa 2024.

"The president mentioned that by 2030 there should be complete food security in our country. I'd like to ask from you is that possible, is that reachable, is that feasible?" tanong ni Abante.

Sagot ni Panganiban, "In all probability, it is possible."

Subalit nagpaliwanag si Panganiban na mayroong mga bagay na dapat din ikonsidera at binanggit nito ang irrigation system

sa bansa gayundin ang mga lupang sakahan na ginawa nang subdibisyon.

"However, there are instances in the past that had happened that we were not able to complete the irrigation system in the country, a lot of our rice land are converted into subdivisions. A lot of our facilities like farm-to-market roads equipment like harvesters, tracers and everything is not yet in full bloom. So these problems affected the achievement of food security of the country. On that basis we are not in the position to say that we shall be self-sufficient by the end of the Marcos term," paliwanag ni Panganiban.

Pero ipinunto ni Abante na hindi maiiwasan na magkaroon ng problema at ang ibang bansa ay may kinakaharap umanong katulad na suliranin.

"You might say its possible but it's not probable, you see. Let me remind our DA family that the Secretary of DA is the President himself and any mistake that you do will affect to the President. It will go to the President therefore in all of the agencies of the government the DA is the most important agency today in government because we are concerned about food security," giit ni Abante. (Billy Begas)





## SRA vows to use power to maintain sugar prices

By GILBERT BAYORAN

The **Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA)** will use its regulatory powers to maintain the price of sugar amid speculations that sugar prices will decrease in the coming milling season.

"The effort of the SRA is to peg the price of raw sugar at P3,000 per 50-kilo bag," SRA chief Pablo Luis Azcona said yesterday.

"This is to keep the price of retail refined sugar at P85 per kilo," he added, noting that the price is profitable for farmers.

Market prices in fact range from P90 to over P100 a kilo and even up to P156 a kilo in some supermarkets, refusing to come down from the record-high levels despite several harvests and tons of white sugar importations, including a controversial one awarded to just three favored importers at the start of the year.

The high prices have prompted institutional users to push for a permit to directly import their sugar needs.

Azcona said the country has enough stocks of refined and raw sugar.

Negros Occidental Gov. Eugenio Jose Lacson hopes the average price of sugar will remain at P3,000 per bag.

Sugar milling season will kick off in the first week of September in Negros Occidental.

### Rice and corn

The country's rice and corn inventory registered double-digit

reductions in May, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

In the PSA's latest rice and corn stocks inventory report, total rice stocks stood at 1.88 million metric tons (MT) as of May 1, which is 17.5 percent lower than the 2.28 million MT registered in the same period a year ago.

Rice stocks in the household sector saw a 19.9 percent year-on-year decrease from 1.24 million MT to 993,970 MT.

Inventory in the National Food Authority (NFA) depositories dropped by 37 percent to 100,120 MT from last year's 158,800 MT.

The PSA said rice stocks in both commercial and NFA depositories increased by 8.1 percent and 1.1 percent, respectively.

However, rice stocks in households were down 2.1 percent.

Corn stocks slipped by 14.2 percent to 668,700 MT as of May 1, compared to 779,790 MT recorded in the same period last year.

Corn stock inventory in commercial warehouses, wholesalers and retailers decreased by 13 percent while household stocks fell by 22 percent.

Over the last month, corn inventory grew by 34.6 percent from 496,740 MT.

Corn stocks in commercial warehouses accounted for 87.5 percent of the total inventory, while households accounted for 12.5 percent.

### Onion trader in contempt

Meanwhile, the House commit-

tee on agriculture and food cited in contempt businessman Eric Pabilona – cold storage facility owner – following his repeated refusal to attend hearings on overpricing and price manipulation of onions in the market.

"For the continuing defiance of Mr. Pabilona, the owner of Tian Long Corp., it would seem to be that this is an outright disrespect to the committee," Rep. Rodante Marcoleta said on Wednesday.

A motion seeking Pabilona's arrest has been approved.

Pabilona is reportedly a shareholder in PhilVieva Corp., a company allegedly owned by businesswoman Lilia Cruz. Cruz has been described by Marikina Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo as the so-called "sibuyas queen" at the center of the onion cartel, which Cruz has categorically denied.

Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez earlier commended Quimbo for unmasking key players in the onion cartel, and urged law enforcement authorities to build an airtight case against businessmen involved.

"The extensive hearings conducted by the House have already provided good leads which our authorities can follow to build an airtight case and prosecute those involved," he said.

### Swine, chicken

Swine and chicken production in the country increased in the second quarter of 2023, driving farmgate prices lower during the three-month

period, according to the PSA.

The PSA's report showed that hog production reached 422,719 metric tons liveweight from April to June this year, up one percent from 418,403 MT liveweight in the same period last year.

The growth during the quarter was slower than the three percent growth registered in the same period last year.

Among all regions, nine posted higher hog production.

Central Luzon recorded a 36.3-percent jump to 42,347 MT from 31,060 MT, while Central Visayas was the country's top hog producer with 54,444 MT, cornering 12.9 percent of the total production.

In terms of inventory, the country's total swine inventory reached 10.07 million heads as of end June, up 1.4 percent from 9.94 million heads a year earlier, according to PSA data.

Of the total, 67.5 percent of the swine population came from smallhold farms, while the remaining 29.2 percent and 3.2 percent were from commercial and semi-commercial farms, respectively.

Calabarzon recorded the highest swine population with 1.3 million heads, followed by Central Visayas (1.17 million heads) and Northern Mindanao (1.12 million heads).

The PSA said these three regions accounted for 35.6 percent of the country's total swine population during the period.

The average farmgate price of hogs for slaughter was P169.73 per

kilo liveweight during the quarter, a 5.1 percent decrease from P178.86 per kilo liveweight in the same period last year.

For chicken, production during the quarter reached 477,757 MT liveweight, an increase of 3.2 percent from 463,116 MT in the same period last year.

PSA data showed 13 regions registered higher output, with Calabarzon recording the highest growth in terms of volume with 93,900 MT from 86,190 MT.

Meanwhile, Central Luzon was the top producer of chicken with 154,124 MT, cornering a 32.2-percent share of the total chicken production.

Production during the quarter, however, fell by 2.4 percent year-on-year.

The country's total chicken inventory reached 200.21 million during the quarter, up 2.8 percent from 194.71 million a year earlier.

PSA data showed that the population of native/improved chicken and broiler chicken grew by 6.2 percent and 1.2 percent, respectively, while layer chicken stocks reported a decline of 0.9 percent.

Of the total inventory, native/improved chicken accounted for a 43.3-percent, followed by broiler chicken (34.5 percent) and layer chicken (22.2 percent).

Central Luzon had the highest inventory with 33.68 million chickens, followed by Calabarzon with 27.32 million and Northern Mindanao with 25.87 million. – With Danessa Rivera, Delon Porcalla





# DA budget slashed by over half to P167.5 B

By DANESSA RIVERA

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is seeking approval for its P167.46-billion budget next year, which was slashed by more than half from its original proposal of almost P400 billion.

In a Congressional hearing Tuesday, the DA said the proposed outlay exceeds this year's budget of P158.16 billion by 6.15 percent.

"Public investments related to rice and fisheries production account for bulk of the increases," DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban said.

He said the budget proposal also includes "increased budgetary outlays for various activities that support the sustainable production of high value crops and corn."

However, the presented 2024 budget was 57 percent lower than the agency's total proposed budget of P396.04 billion.

In her report, DA Undersecretary for policy, planning, and regulations Mercedita Sombilla said the salient terms in the 2024 proposed budget include the P2.22 billion allocated for hog repopulation under the Integrated National Swine Production Initiatives for Recovery and Expansion (INSPIRE) Program; P9.55 billion for fertilizer assistance; P9.8

billion for hybrid seed assistance; P2.49 billion to implement the Yellow Corn Production Enhancement Program; P2.75 billion for the agricultural credit program; P1 billion for the Quick Response Fund.

In a statement, the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) said agriculture and food are not among the priorities of the Marcos administration in the proposed national budget for next year.

While the overall budget for, agriculture and agrarian reform increased by six percent to P197.84 billion, the group said it only covers 3.43 percent of the P5.768-trillion national budget requested by the administration.

The group also said the DA's budget proposal is "very meager compared to the budget allocation for military spending, debt interest payments, and infrastructure."

Agriculture is in the eighth place of the national government's priority sectors based on the proposed budget of national government agencies, the KMP said.

It noted that the budgets of P229.93 billion for the Department of National Defense, P195.73 billion for the Philippine National Police, and P821.10 billion for the Department of Public Works and Highways are "way much larger than the

budget earmarked for the domestic rice industry and food production."

"Contrary to the President's claim, agriculture, and food security are not real priorities of this administration," KMP secretary general Ronnie Manalo said.

KMP noted that only P30.9 billion is proposed for DA's National Rice Program while a whopping P1.246 trillion is requested for the Build, Better, More infrastructure program.

"Based on our computation, for every peso spent for local rice production, the government will spend a higher P40 for national roads, bridges, airports, and other infra projects," Manalo said.

"Even the entire proposed budget of the Department of Agriculture of P105.9 billion is lower than the budget allotted for the pension of uniformed personnel amounting to P129.8 billion. The total budget for confidential and intelligence funds amounting to P10.5 billion is higher than the NFA's Rice Buffer Stocking Program budget of P9 billion.

President Marcos' requested budget for travel and foreign trips amounting to P1.4 billion is higher than the P1 billion fuel subsidy allotted for corn farmers and fisherfolks. The skewed priorities in the proposed national budget are glaring and unacceptable,"

the group's leader said.

The KMP also noted the very limited beneficiaries of the DA's programs and projects compared to the millions of farmers and fisherfolk in need of urgent assistance and agriculture subsidies.



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## DA: Aurora, Quezon now bird flu-free

There are no more cases of avian influenza or bird flu in Aurora and Quezon provinces.

**Department of Agriculture (DA)** Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban issued Memorandum Order No. 39 certifying that Aurora is now free of highly pathogenic avian influenza subtype H5N1.

Panganiban said a case was detected in Barangay Dimanpudso in Maria Aurora town on Oct. 26, 2022, affecting chicken layers.

He said the provincial government of Aurora in coordination with the DA and Bureau of Animal Industry conducted immediate depopulation, cleaning and disinfection, movement restrictions as well as surveillance in the affected area.

Panganiban said continued disease monitoring within the one-kilometer and seven-kilometer surveillance zones yielded negative test results for influenza type A virus and avian influenza.

Under Memorandum Circular No. 38, Quezon was declared bird flu-free after two cases were detected in Barangay Pahinga Sur in Candelaria, which affected ducks and quails.

"More than 90 days have elapsed since the end of cleaning and disinfection operations," Panganiban said. "Surveillance activities yielded negative test results."

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said bird flu spreads among wild aquatic birds and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species.

Bird flu viruses do not normally infect humans.

— Bella Carias



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# Abolish NFA over rice debacle, Marcos urged

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**  
and **Nestor Corrales**  
@Team\_Inquirer

The Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) has formally asked President Marcos, also the country's agriculture secretary, to abolish the **National Food Authority (NFA)** for supposedly failing to support the local rice industry.

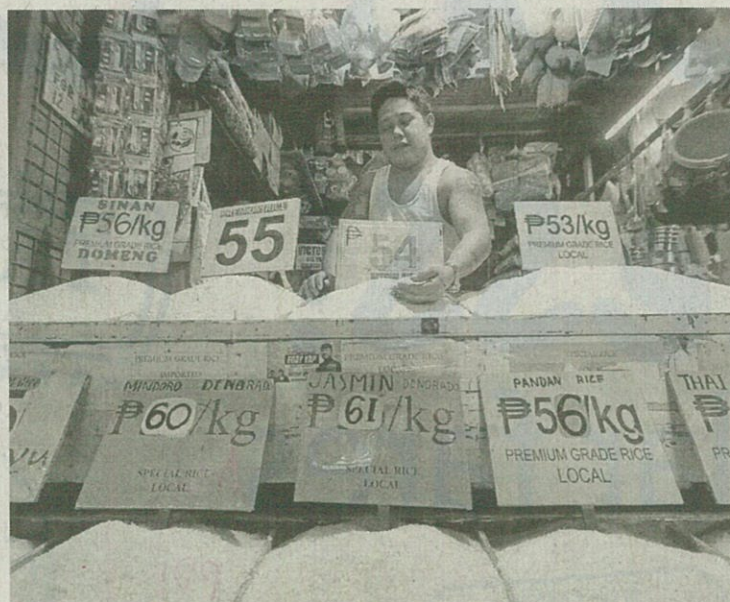
"It is very unfortunate that officials of the NFA have not heeded your marching order of prioritizing local production and supporting local producers," Sinag chair Rosendo So said in an Aug. 22 letter to Mr. Marcos.

"The NFA administrator even went to India to negotiate the importation of rice despite the NFA having no mandate on rice importations," he added.

So expressed "deep concern" about the NFA having a buffer stock of only 1.56 days, showing that it failed to build up the stock by purchasing local produce. This resulted in panic buying of palay (unhusked rice) among farmers, millers and traders.

Sinag claimed that had the NFA used its P8.5-billion budget properly, it could have secured 447,368.42 metric tons (MT) of palay, or about 290,798.47 MT of rice, equivalent to 5.8 million bags of rice.

So cited a DA data showing that the average farm-gate



**SIMULATED SHORTAGE?** A rice vendor at Kamuning Public Market in Quezon City tends to his produce as the government readies rice imports. —GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE

price of palay between last year and April this year was less than P19 per kilogram, well within the NFA allocation for palay procurement. "But there seems to be no intention from the NFA to buy palay and help our local farmers."

## Way off target

Last month, the Commission on Audit (COA) reported that the NFA maintained an average rice inventory of only 140,354 MT in 2022, good only for 4.18 days and way off the nine-day inventory target.

For 2022, the NFA was given a P7-billion subsidy so that it could maintain a stock of 300,000 MT.

The COA also blamed NFA's inability or unwillingness to purchase rice from local farmers.

The NFA has yet to issue an official response to Sinag's complaints or COA's audit report, but NFA Administrator Roderico Bioco said during a House budget hearing on Tuesday that the NFA needs a budget of P28.71 billion to come up with a stockpile of at least 15 days.

Bioco said the amount, if approved, would be used to purchase about 870,000 MT of palay from domestic producers.

But even Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said at a Palace briefing that "there's a lot of catching up" in the country's agriculture sector and attaining President Marcos' vow to bring down rice prices to P20 per kilogram won't be easy.

## 'Neglected for decades'

"Our position has always been that we need to increase productivity in agriculture, all right? What drives low prices are increases in productivity," Balisacan said.

He cited that the country's current yield is about 4 tons per hectare and the government needs to invest in irrigation, modern high-yielding varieties, and pest control to raise the production to 6 or 7 tons per hectare just like many other countries.

"We have neglected agriculture for decades and that's what we are trying now to reverse. We are putting a lot of resources into agriculture intended to create those productivity growth," he added.

Balisacan was hedgy when asked if rice prices could decrease to P20 a kilo and said "I can't say that, 'Oh, by next we should be able to.' That's asking for the moon." **INQ**



# Malaya Business Insight

Date: PM 6. 25, 2023 Page: B1 & B3



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## 'Smells like fertilizer fund scam 2.0'

**BY WENDELL VIGILIA**

A MAKABAYAN bloc lawmaker yesterday questioned the Department of Agriculture's (DA) use of P4.107 billion for fertilizer vouchers, saying it is illegal because the source of the fund cannot be used for such purpose.

Rep. Arlene Brosas (PL, Gabriela) said the amount was taken from the almost P13 billion excess revenues from rice tariffs in violation of Republic Act 11598 (Cash Assistance for Filipino Farmers Act) which "clearly stipulates

that rice import tariff revenues in excess of P10 billion should be used to directly provide cash assistance to farmers who are tilling two hectares and below."

"In fact, the DA then already under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. issued memorandum orders authorizing the use of unprogrammed funds worth P4.1 billion excess rice tariff revenues for fertilizer vouchers. Malinaw naman na hindi direct cash assistance ang fertilizer

.....  
See SMELLS ► Page B3

## SMELLS

vouchers. Labag ito sa batas (It's clear that fertilizer vouchers are not direct cash assistance. It's against the law)," Brosas said.

She cited a memorandum order issued on October 17, 2022 where the DA said the "fund shall be used by beneficiaries as a discount on the retail price of urea fertilizers" to help rice farmers meet the recommended urea fertilizer usage and increase rice production

in the country.

Brosas, however, said the question that should be asked is how the DA really spent the P4.1 billion fund: "Sinong supplier ng fertilizer ang nakinabang? Nangangamoy fertilizer fund scam version 2.0 ito. Nakakagalit malaman ito sa harap ng unli-importasyon ng bigas (Who was the fertilizer supplier who benefited from this? It smells like fertilizer fund scam version 2.0. It's infuriating to know this in the face of the unlimited importa-

tion of rice)."

During the Arroyo administration, then Agriculture Undersecretary Jocelyn "Jocjoc" Bolante was accused of masterminding the alleged diversion of P728 million in fertilizer funds to the 2004 presidential campaign of then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who is now a deputy speaker for Pangpanga.

When pressed on the details of the fertilizer voucher program during the budget hearing at the

House last Tuesday, agriculture officials said they will provide a report on the utilization of funds under the program.

Brosas said the funds were part of the P13.9 billion transferred to DA from the controversial Support for Infrastructure Projects and Social Programs or SIPSIP, or roughly 99 percent of the total P13.19 billion SIPSIP budget under the unprogrammed appropriations (UA) in the 2022 national budget.

"In short, sinipsip ng DA sa ilalim ni Marcos Jr. ang buong SIPSIP pagkaupo nya sa pwesto. Nakakabahala kung ganito pa rin ang mangyayari sa susunod na taon (In short, the DA under Marcos Jr. siphoned off the whole SIPSIP budget when he assumed power. It's worrisome if the same thing will happen again next year)," Brosas said.

Under the unprogrammed funds in the proposed 2024 national budget, the SIPSIP, which has been re-

named as Strengthening Assistance for Government Infrastructure and Social Programs, will have an allocation of P50.03 billion.

"DA's admission that unprogrammed funds (UA) were used for fertilizer vouchers is proof that UA is a form of discretionary pork barrel funds. Kaya dapat kilatisin ang P281 billion na UA para sa susunod na taon (That's why we have to scrutinize the P281 billion UA funds for next year)," the lawmaker said.





Date: **AUG. 25, 2023** Page: **A18**

## Congress to work closely with DA on rice price policies

BY JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ  
@joveemarie

CONGRESS will work closely with the Department of Agriculture to develop new policies or laws to ensure the price stability of rice, the chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations vowed on Wednesday, as lawmakers said the DA should work towards delivering the President's campaign promise to lower the price of rice to P20 per kilo.

Ako Bicol Rep. Elizaldy Co, the panel chairman, recalled that as early as March or April of this year, they had been conducting meetings with Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, DA Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian, and other DA officials to find solutions to the looming rice price surge.

Co added that they were also assured by Sebastian that the rice price surge would never happen this year.

"We know it's coming, that the price will go up to P60, and we don't want it to happen because this happened the last time during the administration the rating fell. We don't want it to happen, and you assured us up to May. You said it was impossible for that to happen," Co said.

Co also expressed his disappointment with Sebastian for giving false assurances.

"How come that happened? I really don't understand, and the President said we should file economic sabotage [against agricultural smugglers]. Officials who contribute to the economy of sabotage must be included," said Co.

During Tuesday's budget hearing of the DA, Sebastian said he could not have predicted the Indian ban on rice exportation, which affected the pricing of rice on the international market.

In response, Co explained that it is just a matter of supply and demand: "If we have enough supply, then the price will not go up even though the world market is very high."

"There must be a mechanism and proactive measures; we can't just let the price fly. Our President first promised that the price would be P20 per kilo of rice. We need to make some recommendations for that because it can't be like that again next year," he said.

Co also proposed using Speaker Romualdez's associations with speakers from Vietnam and Thailand to get a good deal on government-to-government importation.

He said that Congress is ready to work with the agency to develop new policies or laws to ensure price stability and assist the poor, as this was a campaign promise of the President.

### Plan

DEPUTY Minority Leader and Basilan Rep. Mujiv Hataman said reducing the cost of rice to somewhere near P20 per kilo should be a staple in the DA's rice sufficiency plan, especially if it will inch closer to Marcos's campaign promise.

He also urged the DA to go back to the drawing board and "complete" its Masagana Rice Industry Development Program (MRIDP) to include a reduced target price for rice by 2028.

"The targeted reduced price cannot be out of the plan, even if it can be lowered close to the P20 per kilo promised by the President. The DA has to work hard to make rice affordable for a majority of the population," Hataman, former governor of the now-defunct ARMM, said.

"For me, if we are funding the rice development program of the DA with taxpayers' money, we should be able to see how they intend to reduce the price of rice and at what price they are targeting," he added.

If the DA's target is to reduce the price of rice to anywhere between P27 and P32 by 2028, like what DA Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla said during the budget hearing, they should put it in writing and include it in the Masagana rice program, he said.

Under the DA's MRIDP, the agency targets 97 percent rice self-sufficiency by 2028 through projects aimed at improving agricultural production in the country but not a projected reduction in the price of rice.

Hataman raised rice sufficiency concerns during the DA budget briefing for members of the Committee on Appropriations at the House of Representatives, where members of the agency said that a P20 per kilogram price is unachievable.

Sombilla said the reduction of the price of rice is indeed included in the rice sufficiency plan, but no figure has been mentioned as a target.



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## 'Cold storage owners, govt should join forces'

**O**WNERS of local cold storage facilities must help the government prevent the hoarding of agricultural products, such as onions, according to a lawmaker.

Cold storage owners must cooperate with the government and not hoarders, Rep. Rodante Marcoleta of Sagip Partylist said during a House Committee on Agriculture and Food hearing on Tuesday.

Marcoleta issued the statement after lawmakers cited in contempt the owner of a cold storage facility for purportedly refusing to comply with the panel's order to hand over documents related to the facility's operations.

"The House will cite in contempt

Eric Pabilona of Tian Long Corp. for openly defying the orders and authority of this committee in finding out the truth. What we need is the cooperation of cold storage [owners]," he said.

"If [owners] don't submit what we want, and we don't finish our duty, we will put a lot of people in jail."

The lawmaker said storage owners have to submit documentation, such as electricity bills as this will help the panel determine if certain

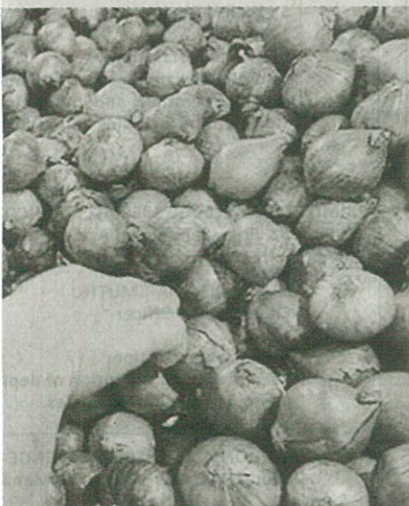


BUSINESSMIRROR FILE PHOTO

entities are hoarding food items.

"All the data will speak for themselves, you [cold storage owners] have to cooperate with the government. You are not our enemy, but you cooperate with hoarders; that's the problem."

For instance, Marcoleta said



that when a cold storage facility is empty, its electricity bill would be much lower.

But when it's full and is trying to maintain a certain temperature, you will be paying P50,000 per month.

Prices of onions skyrocketed to

more than P700 per kilogram in December 2022. This despite the fact that the government had set a suggested retail price of P170 per kg for red onions in October.

Latest data available from the **Department of Agriculture** showed that prices of onions in Metro Manila ranged from P140 to P190 per kg for the local red variety, P120 to P170 per kg for the local white variety, and P120 to P160 per kg for the imported white variety.

Last week, the government appealed to traders to refrain from hoarding red onions as this can lead to an artificial shortage and high prices.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Rex Estoperez also said the government would be forced to import onions if traders will not release their stocks.

"If the red onions will not be released from cold storages, that will

be to their [traders] disadvantage," he told reporters in an interview.

"They should not force us to import red onions as it is detrimental to them. We are appealing to traders to cooperate with the government."

He also said the government would have to allow the importation of white onions because of the increasing demand for it among restaurants and institutional buyers.

Based on the inventory of the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), the country's stock for white onions would only last for 30 days.

Stocks of red onions in cold storage facilities are good for 100 days, according to BPI.

BPI Director Gerald Glenn Pangniban said at least 4,000 metric tons of imported white onions are expected to arrive in the country this week. **Raadee S. Sausa**



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## Cooperative to manage dairy facility in Negros Occidental

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

[@jonlmayuga](#)

**T**HE Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) has entrusted the operation of a P3.7-million dairy processing plant in Victorias, Negros Occidental to a group of dairy farmers.

The San Antonio Farmers Multi-Purpose Cooperative (SAFMPC), an organization of agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) assisted by DAR was selected to manage and

operate the city's Dairy Box.

The construction of the dairy processing plant located at the Bangga Daan Satellite Market will also be a one-stop product marketing outlet for carabao dairy products.

The SAFMPC will manage the Dairy Box with assistance from the Department of Agriculture-Philippine Carabao Center and the Office of Senator Cynthia Villar.

The project is part of the P10 million Carabao-Based Business Improvement Network [CBIN]

project of the city government of Victorias.

It has also provided 64 dairy carabaos, training, capacity development, and a milk processing center.

The SAFMPC will develop and sell carabao dairy products under the brand name Victorias Dairy (ViDa).

The Dairy Box is targeted to be completed in four months or by December of this year.

In March, DAR said the Llano Farmers Multi-Purpose Cooperative (LFMPC), located in Brgy.

Bayugo, Jalajala, Rizal opened its Dairy Box, the first in Calabarzon.

"The Dairy Box will be the center not only of the LFMPC's delicious buffalo milk products, but also of various products made by nearby cooperatives and associations in the province."

Included among the products offered by the Dairy Box are flavored milk, pastillas de leche and other pasalubong products, all made with 100 percent buffalo milk.





# 6% GROWTH DOABLE, IF PRICES STABILIZE-NEDA

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

**T**HE National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) on Wednesday said a 6-percent economic growth target this year remains achievable, but it will be no easy task, and the first order of the day is fighting inflation.

In a press briefing in Malacañang, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan, who is Neda director general, laid out the conditions for the government to meet the "lower end" of its 6- to 7-percent gross domestic product (GDP) goal this year.

He noted it will involve stabilizing inflation amid rising fuel and rice prices.

"Well, the downside risk [for our GDP growth target] is the inflation, especially that the oil prices are picking up again, the global oil prices; the staples like rice in the global market, prices are also...they are also, you know, rising," Balisacan said.

Transport groups are now demanding for a P2 fare hike after oil companies hiked the prices of gasoline by P1.10 per liter and P0.20 per liter for diesel.

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture (DA) reported the price for rice in Metro Manila now ranges between P43 and P65.

The Palace earlier said the government is trying to cushion the impact of higher prices on consumers through fuel subsidies, as well as increasing farm production and rice importation.

## Higher spending

ANOTHER condition for achieving their GDP target, he said, is addressing government underspending during the second half of the year when the election ban for the 2023 Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan polls takes effect.

The ban will cover social welfare projects and barangay-funded roads and bridges will kick in from September to October.

"We have identified the sources of the [spending] slowdown and we think that we can speed up the implementation of projects and programs to benefit

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## 6% Growth

CONTINUED FROM A1

the economy for the second half of the year," Balisacan said.

The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said underspending agencies have already created their catch-up plans to boost their fund uses in the second half of the year.

The Neda chief made the statement after the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said in a report that the government is likely to miss its 6 to 7 percent GDP growth targets from 2023 to 2025 due to prevailing global economic conditions, which includes high crude oil prices.

### Not the right time

WITH the high food prices, Balisacan currently supports maintaining the Most Favored Nation (MFN) tariff rate for essential commodities under Executive Order No. 10.

He is referring to the reduced MFN tariff rates for meat of swine (fresh, chilled or frozen) at 15 percent (in-quota), 25 percent (out-quota); corn at 5 percent (in-quota) and 15 percent (out-quota); rice at 35 percent; and zero duty for coal.

The rates will expire by December.

"I would think that when it comes to now lifting those low tariffs for those essential commodities, my position is, probably not the right time," Balisacan said.

But he noted his position on the matter may change depending on the economic conditions in the coming months.

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## Region 2 crafting rice industry development program

CAGAYAN Valley is crafting its Masagana Rice Industry Development Program (MRIDP) spearheaded by the Department of Agriculture (DA)-Cagayan Valley (Region 2) office.

The regional office led a convergence planning workshop with the different national agencies in Ilagan City on Aug. 16, 2023.

Ferdinand Cortez of the DA-Cagayan Valley Office of Agriculture and Fisheries Information Section said the meeting was attended by municipal agriculturists

of Isabela, and officials and representatives of the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization, Philippine Rice Research Institute, Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center, Philippine Crop Insurance Corp., National Food Authority and Isabela State University.

Cortez said that the MRIDP seeks to create a rice industry in the region that is thriving, resilient and sustainable while boosting the productivity of farmers into high gear.

He explained that as a contemporary iteration of the Masagana 99 program in the 1970s, the MRIDP aims to achieve the highest possible level of rice sufficiency by 2028 while ensuring the welfare of Filipino farmers.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., in his capacity as Agriculture secretary, said the program has four strategic planks: increasing rice productivity, reducing risk and increasing resilience through climate change adaptation; attaining economies of scale and more

efficient operations through farm clustering; accelerating digital transformation for rice agriculture; and pursuing a holistic "Triple A" approach through agricultural productivity, agribusiness and agro-industrialization.

Alex Rigor, MIRD Northern Luzon rice focal person, said the DA has only regional offices and that a stronger extension support system for the MRIDP is needed in the provinces.

Hence, Rigor said the meeting where he presented the guidelines

in the crafting of the provincial MIRD was to strategize how the program will be implemented in Isabela province.

DA-Cagayan Valley Officer in Charge Executive Director Rose Mary Aquino said provinces, compared to municipalities, have economies of scale and resources lately boosted by the Mandanas ruling.

"We have now operable provincial-led Agriculture and Fisheries Extension Systems and can better mobilize public-private people

partnerships along the agriculture value chain," Aquino said.

She also noted that modern technology covering water, nutrient and pest management with cutting-edge support systems will tremendously boost rice productivity.

However, Aquino explained that "these will not happen unless utilized by a critical mass of farmers through widespread scaling by a stronger extension and related support systems."

LEANDER C. DOMINGO





# Caraga gets P64-M coconut facility



■ Photo shows the groundbreaking ceremony for one of the shared coconut processing facilities in Caraga (Region 13). PHOTO FROM THE OFFICIAL FB PAGE OF DA-PHILMECH



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BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

## CARAGA (Region 13) will get its first coconut processing facility under the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan worth P64 million to be located in Agusan del Sur and Agusan del Norte.

The Philippine Center for Post-harvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) under the Department of Agriculture said two cooperatives from Agusan del Norte, namely the Jagupit Coconut Farmers Agricultural Cooperative and Libas Farmers Multi-Purpose

Cooperative, will each receive more than P34 million worth of facilities.

PHilMech said Jagupit will have a white copra processing center, while Libas will have a coconut water processing facility.

In Agusan del Sur, the Dependable Agriculture Cooperative will also re-

ceive a white copra processing center with P30.1 million in funding.

"The groundbreaking ceremonies on August 8 and 9, 2023 marks the allocation of these coconut processing facilities which are expected to benefit over 1,000 coconut farmers from the two provinces," said PHilMech Director Dionisio Alvindia.

In a video message, Alvindia expressed the agency's commitment to providing all the necessary support to ensure the project's success in Caraga.

Local officials and representatives from Caraga expressed their appreciation and hope for the

project during the ceremonies with Agusan del Norte provincial administrator Elizabeth Marie Calo, who highlighted the significance of the event for coconut farmers in the region.

Mayor Frederick Mark Mellana of Prosperidad in Agusan del Sur also thanked PHilMech for the project. Also, Armando Valiente, Agusan del Sur provincial agriculturist, said the project will benefit coconut farmers in the province who have been facing challenges due to low coconut prices.

"But with these facilities, we believe that the project would

improve the lives of our farmers, particularly those in the coconut industry," Valiente said.

Giving full support to the project, Jessie Beldia, Agricultural Training Institute Caraga Region Center director, mentioned the agency's role in providing training courses for the cooperatives while Philippine Coconut Authority Director Pepito Capangpangan for Mindanao also expressed hopes for the continuous improvement of the coconut industry in the south.

In video messages during the groundbreaking ceremonies, Sen. Cynthia Villar, chairman of the

Senate Committee on Agriculture, congratulated the project beneficiaries through a video message.

Providing an overview of the shared processing facilities to be given to the cooperatives, Andres Tuates Jr., PHilMech Coconut Trust Fund-Facility Management and Field Operations Division interim head, expressed optimism on farmers improving their source of livelihood.

"We are hoping that within three years, the white copra processing central will be converted into an integrated coconut processing enterprise," Tuates said.





## Creating a robust agribusiness ecosystem

**W**E at the Go Negosyo Kapatid Angat Lahat Agri Program (Kalap) strongly believe that a robust agribusiness ecosystem is a key component to unlocking the potential of agriculture and propelling the sector forward amid numerous challenges, particularly globalization and climate change.

And it is important that the government provides the nurturing environment for the private sector to actively participate and to be its partner in creating the robust agribusiness ecosystem.

One way to create a robust agribusiness ecosystem is to forge mutually beneficial partnerships between major or large agribusiness companies with smallholder farmers. As for the latter, they and their lands need to be clustered or consolidated to create economies of scale.

At present, small land holdings dominate the country's agricultural landscape, making it difficult or impossible to attain economies of scale. Also, small land holdings and fragmented or disorganized farmers makes it impossible for them to enter into agreements or joint ventures with major or large agribusiness companies.



MOVING  
FORWARD

WILLIAM  
D. DAR

### Farm clustering

Farm clustering is the way forward where farmers are also organized into cooperatives. This fundamental strategy will encourage the private sector to do business with them, as they will have to deal with a set of officers or representatives instead of numerous individual farmers.

There are two ways to engage clustered farmers in agribusiness with the private sector: inclusive contract arrangement; or joint venture. These types of arrangements were also meant to facilitate the entry of clustered farmers into the value chain of private sector agribusiness companies.

The partnership of clustered smallholder farmers and big agribusiness firms can definitely boost the productivity of the former, as the latter always introduce systems to improve productivity. We at Go Negosyo Kalap also push for this,

or for private sector companies to help improve the productivity of their farmer-partners through the introduction of technology and conduct of training, among others. Digitalization is also one of the technologies we at Go Negosyo Kalap can level up productivity and profitability at the field level.

Also, the private companies have incorporated sustainability in their operations, or they ensure that the partnership will be sustained and will also incorporate green measures.

Overall, with the nurturing set up and environment to create a robust agribusiness ecosystem, the approximately 23 percent of the country's labor force in the farming and agribusiness sector can have ensured sustained income, and more jobs inside and outside the sector can be created.

The multiplier effect on the local and national economy of farmers and farmworkers who earn must also be emphasized and appreciated. For example, farmers and agricultural workers whose earnings are improved and are sustained over the long term will definitely spend more for themselves and their families,

which drives the demands for various products and services in their localities. This improves the gross domestic product (GDP) of a locality, especially at the provincial level, that subsequently boosts the country's overall GDP.

### Thirty companies with more to come

Currently, Kalap has 32 big brother companies that are helping the government build a robust agribusiness ecosystem, and there is room for even more participants. These companies have partnered or formed joint ventures with clustered smallholder farmers for what I would call mutually beneficial business arrangements.

Among the big brother companies already involved in this initiative of Go Negosyo Kalap are: Universal Leaf Philippines and LT Group for tobacco; Central Azucarera de Tarlac for sugarcane; Kennemer for cacao; Dizon Farms, Profoods, Harbest, AgBen, Hi Las, Kita and Sakahon for fruits and vegetables; Bounty Fresh, Vitarich, Cargill, CPF, Pafimi and Feedmix for livestock, feeds and corn; AgraBah Platform and W

Group for seaweed; Yovel East Agriventures, SL Agritech, Nature Tech and Philippine Rice Industry Stakeholder Movement for rice; Lionheart Farms and Metro Pacific Agro Ventures for coconut, and the latter also for dairy; and Nestlé Philippines for coffee.

We intend to expand the number of companies involved, and Go Negosyo Kalap with our president, Jose Maria "Joey" Concepcion 3rd, had a productive meeting with Agrarian Reform Secretary Conrado Estrella 3rd last week to discuss details on who attain economies of scale in agrarian reform communities through our framework.

My dream is for the number of partnerships forged between big brother companies and clustered smallholder farmers in the Philippines to reach the hundreds in the next two to three years. Definitely, that will contribute greatly to creating a robust agribusiness ecosystem in the Philippines.

But much more needs to be done, like getting more actors into the convergence of efforts to forge more such partnerships like more local government units (LGUs),

state universities and colleges, and private business groups, among many others.

On the part of the government, there are several agencies already involved like the Department of Agriculture and several of its attached agencies; Department of Environment and Natural Resources; Department of the Interior and Local Government; Department of Trade and Industry; Cooperative Development Authority; National Commission on Indigenous Peoples; Development Bank of the Philippines; and Land Bank of the Philippines.

Also, kudos goes to Joey Concepcion, founder of Go Negosyo, for initiating Kalap, and we thank President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for strongly supporting farm clustering as a way forward for Philippine agriculture.

And with the sustained effort of the private sector led by Go Negosyo Kalap, the aforementioned government agencies and more LGUs, we can create a robust agribusiness ecosystem to propel forward the country's agriculture sector, and have a countryside teeming with wealthy agricultural and food producers.





## Artificial shortage sanhi ng mataas na presyo ng bigas

WALANG ibang nakikitang sanhi kung bakit tumaas ang halaga ng bigas sa bansa, kundi ang artificial shortage na minamanipula ng importer at trader, ayon kay Senador Cynthia Villar.

Sa interview, sinabi ni Villar, chairman ng Senate committee on agriculture, food and agrarian reform

na palaging may sapat na suplay ng bigas sa bansa.

"Kasi wala pa namang shortage eh, ba't tumataas na? They foresee a shortage but we don't know yet because they're going to harvest September to November. Hindi pa namin alam kung ilan ang iha-harvest ba't magsasabi silang may shortage. Lagi namang meron eh," ayon kay Villar.

Aniya, isang taktika ng trader ang kakapusan ng bigas upang payagan ang pag-aangkat ng butil kahit hindi kailangan.

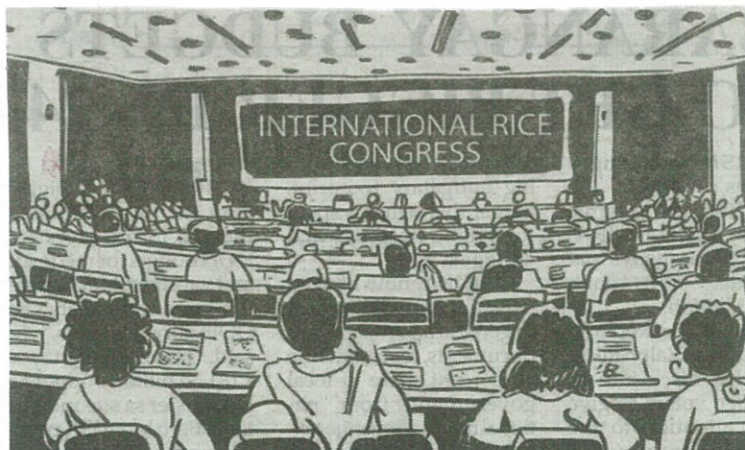
"The rice miller and the trader, iisa naman 'yan at 'yung private sector. Iisa sila, parepareho sila. 'Yung iba may milling, 'yung iba trader lang. 'Yung iba trader and miller," aniya.

Hindi rin suportado ni Villar ang panawagan ng SINAG na buwagin ang National Food Authority dahil sa kawalan ng pagkilos upang bumili ng palay mula sa lokal na magsasaka.

Sinabi pa ni Villar na bukas siya sa planong pagrerebyu at pagpapalawig ng Rice Tariffication Law na naisabatas noong 2019 at magtatapos sa 2024 na ipapatupad sa loob ng limang taon. Aniya, kinuwestyon ng ilang rice stakeholders ang pangako ng RTL sa agriculture sector sa nakalipas na taon. Naniniwala si Villar na magdudulot ito ng mas malaking productivity sa hinaharap.

ERNIE REYES





## EDITORIAL

### '23 Rice Congress

LEADING scientists, experts and decision-makers from around the world are meeting in the Philippines next month for the sixth International Rice Congress (IRC).

Reports said that every four years, the famous International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), which is located in Los Banos, Laguna, convenes the vital rice congress.

Hosted by IRRI and the Department of Agriculture (DA), this year's gathering will be held at the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) in Pasay City.

Here, the delegates from across the world will try to formulate evidence-based solutions to some of the biggest challenges now confronting the global rice sector.

A rice exporter during the incumbency of the late President Ferdinand E. Marcos, the Philippines now imports rice to bring down the cost of the cereal in the local market.

"Ang masakit sa atin ay bumibili tayo ng bigas sa mga bansang ang namamahala sa kanilang rice production ay dito nag-aral sa IRRI," an Ilocano farmer lamented.

However, the elderly farmer is hopeful that with President Bongbong Marcos in Malacanang, the Philippines is seen to regain its status as one of the world's rice exporters.

The previous rice congresses were held in Beijing, China (2002); New Delhi, India (2006); Hanoi, Vietnam (2010); Bangkok, Thailand (2014); and Singapore (2018).

To be attended by delegates from various countries, IRC is a platform for rice-based food systems innovators to work towards shaping a food and nutrition secure future.

Like other Filipinos, we salute the participants of the 2023 International Rice Congress.





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## DA prodded on bringing down rice prices

**LAWMAKERS urged the Department of Agriculture (DA) to do its best to fulfill the administration's goal of reducing the price of rice to P20 per kilo.**

In separate statements, Basilan Rep. Mujiv Hataman and Ako Bicol Rep. Elizaldy Co said the DA should have rice sufficiency plan to ensure the cheaper price. The House committee on

appropriations has started deliberating on the proposed budget of DA for 2024 amounting to 197.84 billion or six percent higher than this year's budget of P186.54 billion.

During the budget hearing, DA officials admitted that P20 per kilo of rice is not achievable in the next two years. *Jester Manalastas*



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## DA, kinastigo sa Kamara sa pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas

Mariing kinastigo ni Ako Bicol Partylist at House Committee Chairman on Appropriations Rep. Elizaldy Co ang mga opisyal ng Department of Agriculture (DA) hinggil sa hindi makontrol na pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas sa bansa.

Sinabi ni Rep. Co na noong nagdaang Marso o Abril ay nakipagpulong sa kanya at kay Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez si DA Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian at iba pang opisyal ng DA para humanap ng solusyon sa posibleng pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas at dito ay nangako si Sebastian na ngayong 2023 ay hindi mangyayari ang rice price surge.

"We know it's coming, that the price will go up to 60 pesos and we don't want it to happen because this happened the last time during the administration bumagsak yung rating. We don't want it to happen and you assured us up to May. Sinabi mo imposibleng mangyayari 'yan, How come ganyan ang nangyari," sabi ni Rep. Co.

Binigyang diin ni Rep. Co na kung may sapat na suplay ng bigas sa bansa ay hindi tataas ang presyo nito kahit na may kamahalan ang bigas sa world market.

Anyang kailangang may mekanismo na dapat gawin ang pamahalaan dito upang hindi patuloy ang pagtaas ng halaga ng bigas sa bansa.

Maaari ring bumili ang bansa ng bigas na mura

at iimbak muna para magamit sa panahon ng pangangailangan upang hindi maapektuhan ang mamamayan sa sobrang taas ng presyo.

Inerekomenda rin ni Co sa Kongreso na makipag-ugnayan sa Vietnam at Thailand para makakuha ng murang bigas sa pamamagitan ng government-to-government importation para maibebenta ito ng mura sa mamamayan. (Joy Cantos)



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## Ito ang real talk

SA mga patuloy na umaasa na maibababa pa sa P20 ang kilo ng bigas, basahin ito at ang Department of Agriculture na mismo na pinamumunuan ni Presidente Marcos ang nagsalita: Hindi makakayanan ng DA na ipatupad ang campaign promise ni Marcos na gawing P20 ang kilo ng bigas.

Ayon kay **DA Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian**, kahit pa marating ng pamahalaan ang tinatarget na 95 porsiyentong rice sufficiency, imposibleng bumaba sa ganoong antas ang presyo ng bigas. Aniya, nakasandal ang presyuhan ng bigas sa dikta ng merkado. Ibig sabihin, matatapos ang termino ni Marcos na hindi matatamo ang inaasahan ng mga naghihirap na P20 na bigas.

Sa mga marunong magsuri, alam nila na suntok sa buwan ang pahayag ni Marcos at isa lang campaign pitch. Ngunit para sa mga mararalita, Ito'y promesang inaasahan nila. Ano man ang gawin, hindi na maibababa sa dating antas ang halaga ng lahat ng bilihan.



Ang solusyon lang talaga ay palusugin ang ekonomiya. Nangyayari ito kapag dumami ang mga negosyo sa bansa at lumakas ang produksyon.

Kasabay nito, tataas din ang sahod ng mga manggagawa upang makaagapay sa tumaas na halaga ng bilihan. Lalakas ang purchasing power ng ating salapi. Madaling ipaliwanag pero mahirap ipatupad iyan. Kahit ang mga dati nang mauunlad na bansa ay nahihirapan ngayon dahil sa krisis sa daigdig.

May long term plan naman ang pamahalaan ngunit hindi maaaring apurahin. Ang aral na natamo natin sa pag-amin ng DA na wala itong kakayahang ibaba ang halaga ng bigas ay—huwag paniwalaan ang lahat ng ipinangako ng isang pulitikong kumakandidato.

Kagaya kasi iyan ng isang persistent suitor na ipapangako ang langit at lupa, pati na ang mga bituin sa nililigawan.



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## P20/kilo rice still possible – NEDA chief

By HELEN FLORES

Bringing down the price of rice to P20 per kilo remains possible within President Marcos' term, but the country's agriculture sector has "a lot of catching up" to do to achieve that goal, according to National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio Balisacan.

In a press briefing at Malacañang yesterday, Balisacan said Marcos, concurrently agriculture secretary, is putting a lot of resources into the sector to boost rice production, including

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## P20/kilo From Page 1

investing in post-harvest facilities.

"Our position has always been that we need to increase productivity in agriculture... What drives low prices are increases in productivity," Balisacan added.

He did not give a timeline on when the target to lower the price of rice to P20 per kilo could be achieved.

"I can't say that, 'Oh, by next ... we should be able to...,' that's asking for the moon, you know... That's not going to happen because as I said, there's so much catch-up thing to do, so much constraints that we are now addressing," he said.

During a hearing of the House of Representatives appropriations committee on the Department of Agriculture's proposed budget of P167.5 billion for 2024, DA Undersecretary for policy, planning and regulations Mercedita Sombilla said that Marcos' 2022 election campaign promise to bring down the price of rice to P20 per kilo is unlikely to see fulfillment in the next two years.

Rice prices currently range from P38 to P50 or P60, according to the DA.

"Our President made a promise to reduce the price of rice, that has to be taken in the context that what we will do is to increase productivity, because if we reduce the prices of rice at that level without commensurate increase in productivity, who will suffer? It's the farmers that we are trying to protect, right?" Balisacan said.

He added that the country must invest in durable and

resilient irrigation system, modern and high-yielding rice varieties, pest control and post-harvest facilities, among other initiatives.

"Unfortunately, those cannot be done overnight ... but if we can do this and if we can do that, we should be able to reduce prices substantially. Prices need not this be high as you can see it from other countries – you look at Thailand, you look at Indonesia, Vietnam ... their prices are much lower than (ours) because their productivity is high, farm productivity is high," Balisacan said.

He said the construction of infrastructure to boost agricultural productivity will be completed beyond the Marcos' term.

"But that progress has to be sustained over the next two more administrations after the Marcos administration," Balisacan said.

### Realistic

For former agriculture secretary Leonardo Montemayor, DA officials "are just being realistic" after admitting that the P20 per kilo rice is not achievable in the next two years.

"Consumers may enjoy the P20 rice if the government is willing and able – budget-wise – to provide huge subsidies to them," Montemayor told **The STAR** yesterday.

"Besides, at P20, farmers may find themselves receiving a palay farmgate price of around P10 per kilo, very much below their production costs," he added.

– With Bella Cariaso





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BUT OTHER FOOD COMMODITIES CHEAPER IN JULY

## RICE PRICES RISE DUE TO BAD WEATHER, COSTLIER INPUTS

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**  
@jordeenelagare

Rice prices around the country continued to creep higher as of early July, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed, while other food commodities surveyed

during the period have become slightly cheaper.

Based on the PSA's latest price situationer report, the retail price of well-milled rice averaged P45.56 per kilogram during the first phase of July (between July 1 and July 5). This represents an uptrend for two

consecutive periods after its average retail price inched up by 0.4 percent from P45.37 per kg in the second phase of June.

Likewise, it is 0.5 percent higher than the price level of P45.35 per kg recorded in the first phase of June.

For regular milled rice, the

average retail price reached P41.23 per kg during the reference period.

This was also higher than P41.03 per kg in the second phase of June and P40.95 per kg in the first phase of June.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. chief economist Michael

Ricafort said rice prices have risen following the storm damage suffered by the rice sector, especially northern and Central Luzon, the country's biggest rice producers.

"Higher Asian and world rice prices among 15-year highs recently amid reduction in rice ex-

ports by India, Thailand due to dry spell/drought that reduced rice production and exports also partly led to higher local rice prices," Ricafort said in a message.

"Higher prices of inputs also increased the production cost of rice, thereby leading to higher local rice prices," he added. INQ





## Philippines, Brunei agree to share info on halal industry development

THE PHILIPPINES and Brunei have agreed to continue sharing expertise on the production of halal products, Senate President Juan Miguel F. Zubiri said late Tuesday.

In a statement, the lawmaker said he met with Brunei Ambassador to the Philippines Megawati Manan on Tuesday to discuss measures to improve the country's halal certification system and make it more accessible to Muslim Filipinos.

"While Halal products have increasingly become popular

among Filipinos due to the growing awareness that these are safe, healthy and high quality and not just as products which fulfill the religious requirements of Muslim consumers, there is a need to harmonize Philippine government agencies' halal certification system," Mr. Zubiri said.

He added that the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) could also become Brunei's partner in rice production.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) on Aug. 10 signed a deal with the Bangsamoro region to promote Halal business in the region.

Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual said during the signing ceremony the Philippines should explore opportunities in the \$2.3-trillion (P131 trillion) global halal food industry, which is expected to grow by about 50% to \$3.4 trillion next year.

Acquiring "even a tiny bit of this cake" would still greatly con-

tribute to Philippine economic recovery and growth, the Trade chief said.

The DTI in April said halal products would expand opportunities for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises.

Last month, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. discussed boosting Philippine-Malaysia ties in the halal industry with Malaysian Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Malaysian King Al-Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah. — **John Victor D. Ordoñez**



FREPIK





## Inflation remains risk to PHL's growth targets, Balisacan says

THE GOVERNMENT needs to address elevated inflation to achieve its 6-7% growth target for this year, National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said, noting that domestic demand is being dampened by high prices.

Mr. Balisacan also expressed support for extending the reduced tariffs for pork, rice, corn, and coal to keep inflation contained.

"Inflation has always been a major concern because when high inflation persists, that discourages or depresses domestic demand," he said at a Palace briefing.

If the government succeeds in bringing down inflation, "that will be a big boost to our domestic demand and to our growth," he added.

Gross domestic product rose 4.3% year on year in the three months to June, the weakest reading in over two years, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. It was weaker than the 6.4% growth posted in the first quarter and the 7.5% from a year earlier.

In its monetary policy report for August, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Eli M. Remolona, Jr. said growth could settle below the 6-7% target in 2023 and below the 6.5-8.0% target for 2024 and 2025 due to economic headwinds as well as the impact of cumulative monetary policy adjustments.

The economic growth target for this year remains achievable, but inflation, which could

increase due to rising prices of food and oil, remains a risk, Mr. Balisacan said.

"The downside risk is inflation, especially that oil prices are (rising) again," he said. "For staples like rice, prices on the global market are also rising."

The government needs to ensure that it is "in good command of our policy tools," he added. "For example, looking at enhancing the availability of (commodities) so that we can prevent untoward increases or upward pressure in prices in the near term."

Inflation slowed for a sixth consecutive month to 4.7% in July, but economists said rising prices of oil and rice and other food items might affect the trajectory of the price index.

The central bank still expects inflation to come in within the 2-4% target range by the fourth quarter.

"And as we have seen, we have made significant progress since January in slowing down inflation," Mr. Balisacan said, "and we would want to continue moving in that direction."

The government's chief economic planner also said improving business conditions and boosting the quality of jobs in the country are also necessary if growth targets are to be met.

"We are keeping watch on agencies and putting pressure on each other to ensure that we are making progress in easing business conditions," he said. "This we have to address."

"Remember that our goal, first and foremost, is massive invest-

ment to improve the quality of jobs," he said, "because as an economist looking at the problem, it's not so much anymore the jobs per se that are the problem, but the quality of the jobs."

In July, Ibon Foundation Executive Director Sonny Africa said that of the 1.7 million jobs created since President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. took office in June 2022, "1.4 million are part-time jobs."

Mr. Balisacan said there is a need to extend the executive order that reduced tariffs on key commodities, which is set to expire in December.

He said it is "probably not the right time" to allow tariffs to revert to their former levels.

"We will have to review if the circumstances today still warrant further extending those tariff rates," he said. "And given the situation now, as we actually see it, the world prices of rice have been rising."

Mr. Balisacan also cited the impact of typhoons on agriculture, saying, "We have to be careful about reversing the gains."

"The tariff reductions have been in place for almost two years now, but retail prices have not gone down proportionately," Federation of Free Farmers National Director Raul Q. Montemayor said in a Viber message.

"It is the traders who benefit with little gain for consumers and large losses for producers."

Mr. Montemayor also cited billions worth of foregone government revenue in the form of lower tariff collections.

"We are becoming even more dependent on imports for our basic needs," he said. "The proposal is also a direct contradiction of the assurances given during the hearings on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) that they will not touch the tariffs on sensitive products."

Meanwhile, Mr. Balisacan said bringing the price of rice down to P20 per kilo — a campaign promise of Mr. Marcos — is impossible without boosting farm productivity.

"What drives low prices are increases in productivity," he said.

Mr. Balisacan said the government and the private sector need to invest in irrigation, logistics, and other means of enhancing yields in the face of the changing climate. "Unfortunately, those cannot be done overnight," he added.

"Prices need not be this high as you can see in other countries. Look at Thailand, Indonesia, (and) Vietnam, their prices are much lower than ours because their productivity is high," he said. "We have neglected agriculture for decades and that's what we are trying now to reverse."

Mr. Balisacan said farmers will suffer if the government reduces rice prices to P20 per kilo without a corresponding boost in farm productivity.

"We should be very careful," he said, noting that the government should look at rice market conditions as comprehensively as possible. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**





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## Chicken, hog output rise in Q2; farmgate prices decline

CHICKEN and hog output rose in the second quarter, accompanied by declining farmgate prices, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

Production of chicken during the three-month period rose 3.3% year on year to 477.76 thousand metric tons (MT) on a liveweight basis.

Central Luzon was the top producer at 154.12 thousand MT, followed by Calabarzon (93.90 thousand), Northern Mindanao (39.08 thousand), Western Visayas (32.22 thousand), and Central Visayas (29.67 thousand).

The five regions accounted for 73% of national production for the period.

As of June 30, the PSA estimates the national chicken inventory at 200.21 million birds, up 2.8% from a year earlier.

Of the total broiler chicken inventory, native/improved chicken accounted for 43.3%, followed by broiler chicken with a 34.5% share, and layer chicken with 22.2%, the PSA said.

In the three months to June, the farmgate price of chicken averaged P134.13 per kilogram, down 2.4% from a year earlier.

The PSA also reported a 1% year on year rise in hog production during the quarter to 422.72 thousand MT.

The top producer during the period was Central Visayas with 54.44 thousand MT, followed by Calabarzon (53.84 thousand), Northern Mindanao (50.98 thousand), Central Luzon (42.35 thousand), and Western Visayas (42.03 thousand).

These regions accounted for 57.6% of the country's total hog production during the period, the PSA said.

As of June 30, the national hog inventory was up 1.4% year on year at 10.07 million head.

About 67.5% of the swine population is grown by smallhold farms, while the remaining 29.2% and 3.2% are grown by commercial and semi-commercial farms, respectively, the PSA said.

The average farmgate price of slaughtered hogs declined 5.1% to P169.73 per kilogram.

Meanwhile, the production of chicken egg and cattle for the April to June period, fell by 2.1% and 1%, respectively.

Chicken egg production dropped to 81.74 thousand MT from 185.58 thousand a year earlier.

Calabarzon remained the top producer of eggs with 59.86 thousand MT during the period, followed by Central Luzon (33.34 thousand), Central Visayas (19.97 thousand), Northern Mindanao (15.94 thousand), and Western Visayas (9.71 thousand). These top producers accounted for 76.4% of the national total.

As of June 20, the layer chicken flock declined 1.4% year on year to 66.96 million birds.

Cattle production edged lower to 60.95 thousand MT from 61.54 thousand a year earlier.

The top five producers of cattle for the period were Northern Mindanao with 9.56 thousand MT, Calabarzon with 8.24 thousand, Bicol with 6.28 thousand, Ilocos with 5.76 thousand, and Central Visayas with 5.76 thousand.

These regions accounted for 57.5% of the national cattle output for the quarter. —

**Adrian H. Halili**





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## LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION UP IN Q2

THE government reported that livestock output rose between April and June 2023, the government said.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed that the total chicken production in the second quarter was at 477.76 thousand metric tons (MT) liveweight.

This indicated an annual growth of 3.2 percent from the 463.12 thousand MT in the same period of 2022.

As of June 30, the total chicken inventory reached 200.21 million birds, 2.8 percent higher than the previous year's same period count of 194.71 million.

The average farmgate price of broiler chicken was

P134.13 per kilogram (kg) liveweight, lower by 2.4 percent from previous year's price level of P137.39 per kg.

Meanwhile, hog production in the same period went up by 1.0 percent to 422.72 thousand MT liveweight, compared to the 418.40 thousand MT output a year earlier.

About 67.5 percent of the country's swine population came from small-hold farms while the remaining 29.2 percent and 3.2 percent were from commercial and semi-commercial farms, respectively.

The average farmgate price of hogs was at P169.73 per kg liveweight for this quarter.

Michael Ricafort, chief economist at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., attributed the increase in production of chicken and swine as a response to higher demand as the economy reopened toward greater normalcy.

Ricafort also cited the pickup in demand during the vacation season and the seasonal increase in travels around the country that also led to higher demand.

Meanwhile, carabao production in the country also increased by 0.5 percent to 33.72 thousand MT compared to the 33.57 thousand MT posted last year.

The carabao inventory was estimated at 2.73 million heads, a decrease of 1.2 percent from the previous year's same period count of 2.77 million.

The average farmgate price of carabao was at P144.56 per kg for this quarter.

On the other hand, cattle production was registered at 60.95 thousand MT, an annual decline of 1.0 percent from 61.54 thousand MT in the same period in 2022.

Ricafort said that the decline in cattle output was due to higher input costs such as feed, which also narrowed the profit margins of producers.

Duck egg production also fell by 8.6 percent to 14.26 thousand MT. This was lower from 2022's same month output of 15.60 thousand MT.

The total duck laying flock inventory was estimated at 8.02 million birds, 1.4 percent higher than the previous year's count of 7.90 million.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL





# Onion, rice prices soar

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE AND JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

**T**HE average retail price of red onions soared to P206.59 per kilogram in July based on Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data.

The cost of rice also increased, although at a "minimal" rate.

The average price of onion reached P206.59 per kilogram on July 1 to 5, up by 2.0 percent from its average retail price of P202.63 per kilo during the second phase of June 2023.

The highest price — P270 a kilo — was recorded in Eastern Samar. Among the regions, Mimaropa (Region 4B) logged the highest average price at P242.23 a kilo.

During the period, the lowest average retail price was registered in the Ilocos Region (Region 1) at P167.50 per kilogram.

Meanwhile, the movement in the prices of well-milled rice was minimal at P45.56 per kilo, up slightly by 0.4 percent from the P45.37 per kilogram price level in the second phase of June 2023.

"In addition, an increment of 0.5 percent was observed relative to its average retail price of PhP 45.35 per kilogram during the first phase of June 2023," PSA said.

The highest price of well-milled rice was seen in Batanes at P67 per kilo in the said period. By region, the highest average retail price of a kilogram of well-milled rice

was reported in Central Visayas at P48.25,

The average retail price of special rice, meanwhile, was P54.22 per kilo, with the highest price reaching P90 as seen in Cebu City.

The price of other agricultural commodities such as tomatoes also went up to P76.27, or 19.84 percent higher, from P63.64 per kilo logged in the second phase of June. Puerto Princesa City in Palawan recorded the highest price of tomatoes at P141.17 a kilo.

Prices of carrots also rose by 24.2 percent to P131.65 during the period, in comparison to the average retail price of P106.63 in the latter phase of June.

By region, the highest average retail price of a kilogram of carrot was recorded in Bicol Region at P162.30. The highest price for carrots was P195.83 per kilo in Puerto Princesa.

A kilogram of brown sugar had an average retail price of P83.32 during the first phase of July 2023, a slight movement of 0.2 percent compared with the average retail price of P83.17 per kilogram in the second phase of June 2023.

Calabarzon (Region 4A, or

Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon) registered the highest average retail price of a kilogram of brown sugar at P90.36.

Prices of brown sugar during the period reached as high as PP102.50 per kilo, as reported in Batanes.

On the other hand, the price of galunggong (round scad) went down by 1.1 percent to P197.85 per kilo at the national level during the same period.

Moreover, its average retail price declined by 4.4 percent in comparison to its average retail price of P206.92 in the first phase of June 2023.

## Possible

National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said on Wednesday that it was still possible to bring down the price of rice to P20 per kilo, as promised by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., if the agricultural sector increased its productivity.

"Our position has always been that we need to increase productivity in agriculture. All right? What drives low prices are increases in productivity. If you can increase substantially, the productivity of our farms — for example, our current yield per hectare is about 4 tons per hect-

are," Balisacan told Palace reporters, adding that when prices of goods are lower, Filipinos will have better purchasing capability regardless if the price of rice is P20 per kilo or not.

"You know what's important for the farmers, for the poor is their purchasing power. So, if we can prevent the purchasing power of every Filipino from being eroded by inflation, that is a good direction to take 'no,' he said.

"Our President [made] a promise to reduce the price of rice. That has to be taken in the context that what we will do is increase productivity, because if we reduce the price of rice at that level without commensurate increase in productivity, who will suffer?" Balisacan added.

The NEDA chief said the government must invest in irrigation, modern high-yielding varieties of rice, pest control, and logistics to increase productivity.

"Unfortunately, those cannot be done overnight — you need investment; you need the private sector to invest in logistics, to invest in post-harvest facilities. We need government to build more irrigation systems, durable and resilient irrigation systems. We need to develop varieties that are resilient to climate change, to floods. You know, those cannot happen overnight," he said.



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### **P20/kilo ng bigas posible pa rin - NEDA**

Posible pa rin umanong maabot ang P20 kada kilo ng bigas sa ilalim ng administrasyong Marcos.

Subalit ayon kay National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio Balisacan sa pulong balitaan sa Malakanyang, kailangan pa munang palakasin ang produksyon ng palay sa bansa.

Iginiit pa ni Balisacan na hindi rin kakayanin ng isang

gabi lang o overnight na agad maibaba ang presyo sa P20 kada kilo ang presyo ng bigas at magagawa lamang ito kung bibigyan ng sapat na ayuda ang mga magsasaka, maayos na irigasyon at iba pa.

Partikular na iniha-imbawa ng kalihim ang mga bansang Thailand, Indonesia at Vietnam na mataas ang produksyon ng palay at mababa ang presyo ng bigas.

Dapat ay noon pa umano ginawa ng gobyerno ang pagtulong sa mga magsasaka para hindi nahuhuli ang Pilipinas.

Bagamat posible at binubuhusan na umano ng gobyerno ngayon ang resources at panahon ang agrikultura para mapaanat ang produksyon ay hindi pa rin masabi kung kailan makakamit ang inaasam na P20 na kilo ng bigas. (Gemma Garcia)



# Malaya Business Insight

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## Soybeans down, wheat up

SINGAPORE- Chicago soybean futures lost more ground on Wednesday as early promising results from a US crop tour eased some of the earlier supply concerns over dry weather conditions.

Wheat ticked higher amid strong global demand and an unexpected decline in US spring wheat conditions.

"Reports from the Pro Farmer Midwest crop tour for corn and soybean look promising," ING said in a note.

Nebraska corn yield prospects and soybean pod counts are higher than last year, but below their three-year averages, scouts on an annual tour of top US production

states found on Tuesday.

Indiana corn yield prospects are higher than last year, but below the three-year average, while soybean crop potential in the state is the strongest in five years, scouts on an annual tour of top US production states found on Tuesday.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was down 0.1 percent at \$13.45 a bushel. Corn added 0.3 percent to \$4.80-3/4 a bushel and wheat rose 0.4 percent to \$6.30 a bushel.

The US Department of Agriculture's crop ratings, released after Monday's close, fell below expectations. - *Reuters*





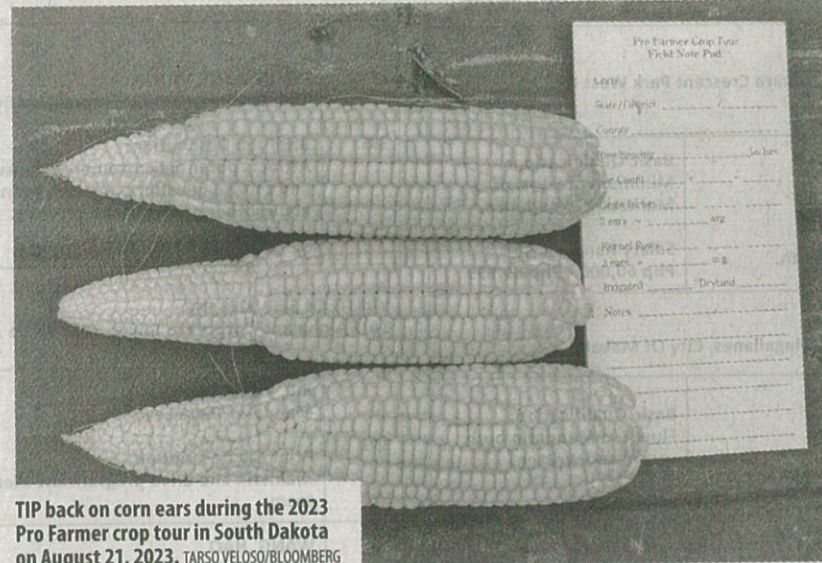
## Midwest braces for 115-degree heat, renewing crop worries

A HEAT wave sweeping the Midwest is threatening to dry out grain crops in the final few weeks of the growing season, putting at risk a bumper harvest in the United States that's key to keeping global food inflation in check.

Temperatures are forecast to reach as high as 115 degrees in parts of the Midwest this week, renewing worries from earlier in the season when drought drove crop conditions to their worst since the late 1980s before they improved significantly with the return of rain.

Now, excessive heat is jeopardizing what is expected to be the second largest US corn crop on record, at a time when the global market is looking to the US for supply certainty. The last few months saw military escalations in the Black Sea contribute to one of the most volatile periods in the history of grain trading.

Signs of dryness known as "tip back," where tops of the corn ears are lacking kernels, were widely reported in South Dakota when scouts visited fields on the first day of the Pro Farmer Crop Tour. And this week's heat could exacerbate yield loss as many plants are still immature.



TIP back on corn ears during the 2023 Pro Farmer crop tour in South Dakota on August 21, 2023. TARSO VELOSO/BLOOMBERG

"The upcoming heat wave will shrink some kernels. It is not in the bag yet, especially given different growth stages we have seen," said Iowa farmer Marty Tegtmeier.

In Ohio, while fields looked lush and green from the road, it was common to see gnarled ears of grain with missing kernels that pointed to less-than-ideal conditions during the yield-setting pollination phase. "Hopefully this week of drier and hotter weather won't be a problem," said Thiago Oliveira, portfolio manager at BTG Pactual in Brazil.

Soybeans are even earlier in

their growth stage, with plants still setting pods. Most fields seen in the South Dakota leg of the tour were too dry for pod development. "If it rains we will see more pods out, but it doesn't look good for that," said Brad Feckers, an Iowa farmer and crop scout.

### Soybean demand

CHINESE soybean demand growth is expected to wane in the next few years amid slower population growth and a change in the nation's consuming habits, according to meat producer Wellhope Foods Co.

Soybean purchases by the

world's largest importer should stabilize at roughly 100 million metric tons at least for the next five years, Vice President Sun Lige said in an interview during a US Soybean Export Council conference in New York. That's 1 million metric tons more than the US Department of Agriculture's projection for the 2023-24 season.

Chinese imports of soybean, a key ingredient to animal feed, soared roughly fivefold since the early 2000s as rapid economic growth created an expanding middle class that can afford more protein in their diets. But China's \$18-trillion economy is now slowing, with JPMorgan Chase & Co., Barclays Plc and Morgan Stanley downgrading their projections for economic growth this year to below the government's 5-percent target.

What's more, consumers are gradually shifting their meat consumption from pork to alternative proteins such as fish and chicken, which require less feed to grow, according to Lige.

"White meat is typically seen as cheaper, healthier and easier to cook," Lige said. The shift is driven by consumer preferences rather than government policy, he added. *Bloomberg News*