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Marcos OKs 3-year food logistics agenda

BY ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. has approved the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) three-year Food Logistics Action Agenda aimed at revolutionizing the country's food distribution system, the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said.

According to the PCO, Marcos approved the plan during a sectoral meeting in Malacañang with secretaries from different government agencies on Tuesday, Aug. 29.

In a statement, the PCO said the creation of the three-year food logistics agenda was one of the directives of the President during the eighth Cabinet meeting in September 2022 to the Departments of Agriculture (DA), Trade and Industry (DTI), Transportation (DOTr), Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Information and Communications Technology (DICT), and the Interior and Local Government (DILG) to develop a food logistics chain, cold chain industry, ports infrastructure, and farm-to-market roads.

"The action plan's general objective is to ensure the availability, accessibility, and affordability of food for Filipinos and that consumers reliably get the right product at the right time," it said.

"It is committed to a whole-of-government approach where key agencies involved shall be required to prioritize, focus, and allocate funding on specific initiatives," the statement added.

The three-year Food Logistics Action Agenda contains six key strategies to ensure

success:

- Revolutionizing the Philippines' food distribution system
- Reducing transport and logistics costs and increasing investments in logistics infrastructure on transportation and storage
- Addressing other supply chain gaps

The plan also seeks to heighten enforcement against hoarding, smuggling, and overstaying food imports, monitoring warehouses or cold storage facilities, and using information and communications technology to improve logistics performance.

According to the PCO, the DTI has outlined efforts to integrate food terminals into the logistics framework by upgrading existing food terminals and building additional food hubs in Metro Manila and other areas in the country.

"By integrating food terminals, the supply chain from producers to consumers could be shortened, with standardized logistical processes and transportation systems directed towards specific destinations," it said.

"These hubs operate as central command centers for effectively supervising the balance between demand and supply, with the resulting synergy within these hubs amplifying the effectiveness of the action plan," it added.

During the meeting, Pascual said the DTI has a pilot project with Nueva Vizcaya Agricultural Terminal (NVAT) and the United States Agency for International Development-Strengthening Private Enterprises for the Digital Economy (USAID-SPEED) to help small and medium enterprises (SMEs) transition to mature e-commerce businesses.



Loui Sordiano
MANILA BULLETIN
AUGUST 31, 2023

Enforce an intense crackdown vs. rice smugglers and hoarders

One doesn't need to be an expert in economics to recognize that there is absolutely no benefit when it comes to rice smuggling and hoarding. These twin "evils" not only disrupt the agricultural market but also inflict severe hardship on the majority, particularly our farmers and producers. Only a select few — the greediest of the greedy — stand to profit.

For far too long, the shadows of rice smuggling and hoarding have loomed ominously, concealed inside seemingly legitimate warehouses. A closer inspection in some warehouses, however, reveals a different picture — towering stacks of rice sacks, numbering in the thousands and worth hundreds of millions, that are illegally sourced or hoarded for a certain time.

In response to this crisis of economic sabotage, the Bureau of Customs (BOC) has put forward a swift solution: the intensified inspection of warehouses suspected of harboring smuggled rice or facilitating hoarding. This measure is a direct response to the President's recent order to escalate efforts against these unlawful activities and perhaps also a proof of action when he warned these criminals in his second State-of-the-Nation Address: "Your days are numbered!"

"As per the directive of the President, we will be conducting more inspections of these warehouses, and the inspection and visitation will be coordinated with other agencies like the DA (Department of Agriculture) and DTI (Department of Trade and Industry)," said Customs Commissioner Bien Rubio during a Palace press briefing on Aug. 29, 2023.

The Customs chief also added that they will also coordinate with the Department of Justice (DOJ) to file charges against errant warehouse operators if necessary.

Recent news reports have revealed that the BOC inspected three warehouses located in Bulacan, which yielded ₱505 million worth of smuggled rice from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand.

While these endeavors against agricultural smuggling and hoarding are commendable, they must be supported by stronger legislation accompanied by stiffer penalties. In the legislative arena, a pending bill aimed at strengthening the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act has gained traction. The bill, filed by Agri Partylist representative Wilbert Lee, aims not only to penalize smugglers, hoarders, and price manipulators, but also government employees and officials implicated in these crimes.

"When these criminals hoard essential agricultural products like rice and onions to drive up prices and amass undue profits, they are capitalizing on the vulnerability of our less fortunate citizens," Lee said. "Such profiteers belong behind bars."

To support this move, Speaker Martin Romualdez pledged the House's commitment to prioritize the passage of proposed amendments to the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act during the second regular session of the 19th Congress.

Over the years, the menace of agricultural smuggling and hoarding has plunged our nation into economic turmoil, exacerbating the suffering of the impoverished. The time for decisive action should have happened years ago, yet it is not too late.

Let this generation bear witness to the dismantling of the grip held by these agriculture and rice cartels. The moment has come for hoarders and smugglers to feel the full force of the law and for them to know that their days are truly numbered.



BBM approves DTI's 3-year food logistics agenda

By ALEXIS ROMERO

President Marcos has approved the three-year food logistics action agenda of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), which seeks to ensure availability of affordable food, cut transport costs and address supply chain gaps.

The action agenda, which seeks to "revolutionize" the Philippines' food distribution system, was approved during a sectoral meeting last Tuesday at Malacañang, the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said yesterday.

"The action plan's general objective is to ensure the availability, accessibility and affordability of

food for Filipinos, and that consumers reliably get the right product at the right time," PCO Secretary Cheloy Garafil said in a statement.

The agenda involves six strategies, including revolutionizing the country's food distribution system; reducing transport and logistics costs;

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increasing investments in logistics infrastructure, transportation and storage and addressing other supply chain gaps.

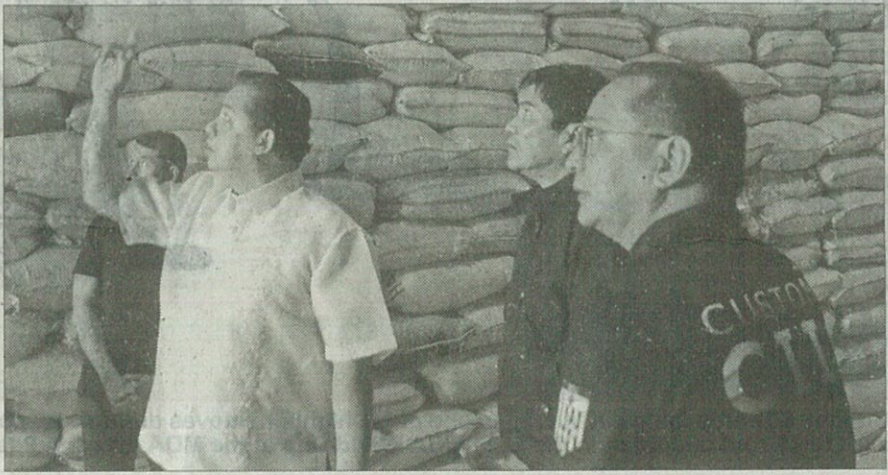
It also aims to heighten enforcement measures against hoarding, smuggling and overstaying food imports and monitor warehouses or cold storage facilities and use information and communications technology to improve logistics performance.

The logistics action agenda is in line with Marcos' goal to make the Philippines a logistics hub in Asia.

It was developed in collaboration with the agriculture, transportation, public works, interior and information and communications technology and other development partners.

The crafting of the agenda was one of Marcos' directives during a Cabinet meeting in September last year, wherein he ordered agencies to develop a food logistics chain, cold chain industry, ports infrastructure and farm-to-market roads.

Garafil said the DTI has outlined



Speaker Martin Romualdez, party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo and Bureau of Customs-Intelligence and Investigation Service chief Alvin Enciso inspect a warehouse where smuggled rice is reportedly stored, in Bulacan yesterday. EDD GUMBAN

efforts to integrate food terminals into the logistics framework by upgrading existing food terminals and building additional food hubs in Metro Manila and other areas.

"These hubs operate as central command centers for effectively supervising the balance between demand and supply, with the resulting

synergy within these hubs amplifying the effectiveness of the action plan."

Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual said his agency has a pilot project with the Nueva Vizcaya Agricultural Terminal and the US Agency for International Development to strengthen private enterprises and assist small and medium enterprises

transition to mature e-commerce businesses.

He said the project would help the agricultural terminal pivot from offline to online transactions, maximize the potential of e-commerce and increase market access for farmers' produce.

The DTI is also pushing for the inclusion of logistics-related measures in the administration's priority legislative agenda.

These bills include the proposed International Maritime Competitiveness Act, which seeks to empower the Maritime Industry Authority to regulate shipping lines and guard against excessive shipping charges.

Warehouses raided

Meanwhile, personnel of the Bureau of Customs (BOC) yesterday searched four warehouses in Bulacan that were reportedly used as storage facilities for P519 million worth of rice and palay believed smuggled from Vietnam and Pakistan.

BOC Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio identified three of the warehouses as Gold Rush Ricemill in

Barangay San Juan, Balagtas town; JJS Rice Mill and Gold Rush Mill 2 both in Bocaue, Bulacan.

Present during the inspections were House Speaker Martin Romualdez, ACT-CIS Party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo, Quezon Rep. Wilfredo Mark Enverga and Bulacan Rep. Ambrosio Cruz Jr.

The warehouses reportedly contained 154,000 sacks of imported rice worth P431 million and 60,000 sacks of palay worth P88 million.

"If the owners of these warehouses fail to show proper documents that they rightfully paid the taxes and duties they owe to the government, we will take immediate legal action and confiscate the items here," Rubio said.

The warehouses were inspected almost a week after the inspection of three other warehouses in the same province on Aug. 24, which were also suspected to be storing illegally imported rice from Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

The warehouses were temporarily padlocked and sealed as BOC examiners conduct inventory of the goods.

— **With Evelyn Macairan, Ramon Efren Lazaro**



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Marcos OKs DTI's food logistics action plan

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has approved the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) three-year food logistics action agenda aimed at revolutionizing the food distribution system in the country, Malacañang said Wednesday.

According to Presidential Communications Secretary Cheloy Garafil, Marcos gave the go-ahead to the three-year food logistics agenda during a sectoral meeting in Malacañang on Tuesday.

Garafil said the creation of the plan was one of the directives of the President during the 8th Cabinet meeting in September 2022 to the Department of Agriculture, the DTI, the Department of Transportation (DoTr), the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) "to develop a food logistics chain, a cold chain industry, port infrastructure, and farm-to-market roads."

"The action plan's general objective is to ensure the availability, accessibility and affordability of food for Filipinos and [that] consumers reliably get the right product at the right time," Garafil said in a statement.

"It is committed to a whole-of-government approach where key agencies involved shall be required to prioritize, focus, and allocate funding on specific initiatives," she added.

Also, the Palace official said that the plan contains six key strategies to ensure success. These include "revolutionizing the Philippines' food distribution system, reducing transport and logistics costs, increasing investments in logistics infrastructure on transportation and storage, and addressing other supply chain gaps."

Further, she said, "The plan seeks to heighten enforcement measures against hoarding, smuggling, overstaying food imports, monitoring of warehouses or cold storage facilities, and resorting to using information and communications technology to improve logistics performance."

The DTI has outlined efforts to integrate food terminals into the logistics framework through upgrading of existing food terminals and building additional food hubs in Metro Manila and other areas in the country, Garafil pointed out.

CATHERINE S. VALENTE

REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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PBBM: Presyo ng bigas gawing abot-kaya

IPINAG-UTOS ni **Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.** sa lahat ng concerned government agencies na gamitin ang available na 'legal tools' upang gawing affordable ang presyo ng bigas sa lahat ng mga Filipino.

Ipinalabas ng Pangulo ang direktiba sa isinagawang pagpupulong kasama ang concerned sectors sa Palasyo ng Malakanyang para pag-usapan

ang update ukol sa inisyatiba ng pamahalaan na tiyakin ang suplay ng bigas at i-regulate ang presyo nito.

Inamin ng Pangulo na ang presyo ng bigas ay 'cause for concern' sa kabila ng kama-kailan lamang na pananaw ng Department of Agriculture na may sapat na suplay ng bigas.

Aniya, ang mga kaso ng hoarding, epekto ng tropical cyclones Egay at Falcon sa mga lugar na labis na naapektuhan

nito, rice-deficit regions, at presyo na pinost ng intermediaries ay ilan lamang sa mga dahilan sa pagtaas ng presyo.

Nauna rito, napaulat na ang mga retailers ay nagbebenta ng bigas sa piba't ibang presyo, may ilan ang nagbebenta ng P38 hanggang P40 kada kilo bilang pinakamura habang ang varieties naman ay P50 kada kilo.

Samantala, nagkaroon ng surprise inspection sina Speaker Martin Romualdez, House

Deputy Leader Erwin Tulfo, Committee on Agriculture and Food Chairman Mark Enverga at Bulacan 5th district Rep. Ambrocio Cruz Jr. at BOC Comm. Bienvenido Rubio sa mga rice warehouse sa Bocaue at Balagtas, Bulacan upang alamin kung ismagel o ligal ang milyon-milyong halaga ng bigas na laman ng mga ito.

Pinaniniwalaang nagmamahal ang bigas dahil sa rice hoarding.

KRIS JOSE

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Warehouse raid, pinaigting pa ng BOC

Kasunod ng marching order mula kay Pangulong **Ferdinand Marcos Jr.** na paigtingin pa ng Bureau of Customs (BOC) ang operasyon laban sa rice smugglers at hoarders.

Ito ay matapos ang kanilang pagkakasabat sa tinatayang P519 milyon halaga ng hinihinalang puslit na bigas sa ilang bodega sa lalawigan ng Bulacan.

Ayon kay Customs Commissioner Bien Rubio, nasa 154,000 sako ng imported rice grains at 60,000 sako ng palay ang nadiskubre sa ininspeksiyong na apat na warehouse sa lalawigan.

Bukod kay Rubio, ang inspection team ay binubuo rin nina Intelligence Group Deputy Commissioner Juvymax Uy, Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service (CIIS) Director Verne Enciso, mga elemento ng CIIS sa Manila International Container Port (MICP) at Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Task Force Aduana kasama sina House Speaker Martin Romualdez at Reps. Erwin Tulfo, Wilfrido Mark Enverga, at Ambrosio Cruz Jr.

Mismong si Commissioner Rubio ang lumagda at nag-otorisa ng inspeksiyon sa mga bodega sa Bulacan, na isinagawa isang linggo lamang matapos ang inspeksiyon sa isa pang batch ng mga bodega sa naturang lalawigan, kasama rin ang House Speaker at mga mambabatas.

Sinabi ni Uy na nakatanggap sila ng derogatory information hinggil sa mga bodega kaya't mabilis na umaksiyon para beripikahin ito para sa kaukulang paglalabas ng LOAs.

Para naman kay Enciso, ang kahanga-hangang resulta ng mga naturang operasyon ay higit pang magpapasigla sa ahensiya upang tuluyan nang matuldukan ang rice smuggling sa bansa. (Danilo Garcia)



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PBBM okays DTI's food distribution system plan

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. approved on Tuesday the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) Three-year Food Logistics Action Agenda aimed at revolutionizing the country's food distribution system, reducing transport and logistics costs, and ensuring food supply chain efficiency.

The President approved the plan during a sectoral meeting in Malacañang with Secretaries Alfredo Pascual

of the Department of Trade and Industry, Benjamin Abalos of the Department of Interior and Local Government, Ivan Uy of the Department of Information and Communications Technology, and Frederick Go of the Office of Presidential Adviser on Investment and Economic Affairs, Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban of the Department of Agriculture, Undersecretary Zeno Ronald Abenoja of the Department

of Finance, Undersecretary Elmer Sarmiento of the Department of Transportation, Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon of the National Economic and Development Authority and Director General Ernesto Perez of the Anti Red Tape Authority.

It is committed to a whole-of-government approach where key agencies involved shall be required to prioritize, focus, and allocate funding on specific initiatives. **PCO**



Agricultural smuggling

The sad plight of Filipino farmers will continue for as long as agricultural smuggling remains inadequately addressed. Just recently, a joint anti-smuggling operation by the **Department of Agriculture**, Bureau of Customs, and the Philippine Coast Guard seized 364,000 kilograms of frozen agri-fishery products in 13 cold storage facilities in Navotas City. This recent operation alone was estimated to be worth ₱86.8 million. Figures will surely rise to billions if data from other seizure operations will be added up.

Addressing agricultural smuggling is an urgent call as Philippine agriculture continues to struggle with many other crippling factors – natural disasters and calamities being one of these factors. While Republic Act 10845 or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016 has indeed improved our anti-agricultural smuggling systems and procedures, I believe that in order to multiply the impact of the foregoing legislation, complementary policies will have to be formulated in order to pin down big-time smugglers and bust cartels. The establishment of special anti-smuggling courts and the imposition of higher penalties for smuggling, most especially agricultural products, are seen to considerably improve our success in the campaign against agricultural smuggling and in our efforts to re-fire Philippine agriculture, so to speak.

The impact of agricultural smuggling on the economy and on the life of Filipino farmers should be emphasized. How this type of crime undermines the livelihood of farmers and how it increases the costs of food for consumers has been clearly seen and felt in the sugar and onion crises we experienced last year. Unfor-

tunately, we never really seem to learn from the past. Seized goods and apprehended smugglers often make it to the daily news. Sadly, however, they often don't reach courts and prisons. There are 158 smuggling cases filed by the Bureau of Customs and one case by the Department of Agriculture. Out of this number, 76 cases were dismissed for lack of supporting documents and evidence. Of the remaining cases, only nine made it to the courts. Sad indeed, but that's the awful truth.

To curtail and gradually end agricultural smuggling remains a long journey, but action should be taken now while our agriculture industry can still be saved.

To curtail and gradually end agricultural smuggling remains a long journey, but action should be taken now while our agriculture industry can still be saved. We have long recognized the vital role that our farmers play in ensuring food security. What needs to be done, apart from building capacity through increased access to knowledge, equipment and technology, is for concerned government agencies to pull their acts together, put functional systems in place, and strengthen their will to truly protect the welfare and interests of Filipino farmers.



'TOL VIEWS

SENATOR

FRANCIS N. TOLENTINO



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LANDBANK-financed Batangas hog farm boosts local pork production

LIPA, Batangas – Spouses Jerome and Anna Trofeo were having trouble sourcing healthy hogs to meet their customers' requirements two years ago, with the African Swine Fever significantly affecting hog growers nationwide.

Determined to keep their "Annie & Jerome Trofeo" meat stall running, Anna decided to expand their business and establish their own commercial swine farm.

The couple turned to the Land Bank of the Philippines (LANDBANK) for financial assistance to make the business pivot that actually paid off.

"Nagkaroon ng time noon na hindi sapat ang supply ng baboy para matugunan ang orders ng aming customers. Kaya nag-desisyon kami na magtayo ng sarili naming piggery," said Jerome.

LANDBANK approved a P24-million loan line to finance the requirements of their start-up commercial swine farm, AJ Piggery Farm, under the Bank's SWINE (Special Window and Interim Support to Nurture Hog Enterprises) Lending Program.

Of the total amount, P20 million financed the construction of three piggery buildings to separately house nursery, farrowing and gestation pens, as well as support facilities that include an office and staff quarters.

The loan also covered the construction of a manure lagoon and waste water treatment facility to minimize the environmental impact of the farm, while the remaining P4 million financed the acquisition of young female hogs for breeding.

With the opening of AJ Piggery Farm, the couple's meat stall is able to sell around 900 kilograms of pork per day to accommodate the demand of meat retailers.

The stall is also able to supply around 1,650 kilograms of pork per week to two (2) local supermarkets in Laguna and Batangas, thereby increasing the meat shop's income to around P500,000.00 to P600,000.00 per month from the previous P300,000.00.

"Sa tulong ng LANDBANK, talagang lumago ang aming negosyo. Mula sa pagkakaroon ng isang stall sa palengke ay nagkaroon na rin kami ng sarili naming pig farm. Malaki ang aming pasasalamat sa kanila," said Jerome.

Supporting the local swine industry

In support of the National Government's efforts to re-populate and increase hog production, LANDBANK has approved a total of P8.05 billion in loans to 36 borrowers under the SWINE Lending Program as of end-June 2023.

The loans financed projects for swine production, including the purchase of hogs and feeds, construction and expansion of facilities such as piggery buildings, and working capital, among others.



Turning challenges into opportunities. Amid the African Swine Fever outbreak, Jerome Trofeo successfully expanded his meat shop business into a commercial swine farm through a P24-million loan from LANDBANK, and has helped strengthen local swine production to meet the demand for pork in the country.



The AJ Piggery Farm produces healthy hogs for the 'Annie & Jerome Trofeo' meat stall in Lipa City Public Market, which caters to the pork requirements of meat retailers and two local supermarkets.

Commercial hog raisers registered as cooperatives or farmers' associations, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and large enterprises or corporations may borrow up to 80% of the total project. Start-up commercial swine farms may likewise avail of loans under the SWINE Lending Program.

Loans for working capital and permanent working capital are payable up to one year and five years, respectively, while loans for fixed assets and construction of facilities are payable based on project cash flow but not more than its economic useful life.

LANDBANK launched the SWINE Lending Program in partnership with the Department of the Agriculture, designed to provide timely financial assistance to hog raisers towards sustaining and increasing pork production.



PH eyes tie-ups with Brazil on sugar production

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) through the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) anticipates continued collaboration with Brazil on projects that will boost both countries' sugarcane and ethanol industries.

DA said delegates from the Brazilian Cooperation Agency and the Embassy of Brazil in Manila met with its officials on Tuesday, to discuss partnerships.

The Brazilian delegates recommended bringing in a team of ex-

perts to the Philippines to facilitate knowledge-sharing initiatives that are geared towards the expansion of sugarcane plantations, the promotion of farm efficiency, enhancing meal conversion, improving production chains and lowering production costs.

Brazil also offers academic programs related to the sugarcane industry and the incorporation of ethanol in the national energy grid.

Laverne Olalia, SRA research

development and extension department manager, said the Philippines can learn from Brazil's best practices on soil development and management as well as from its meal processing practices and farm technologies to improve local production.

Olalia said based on the SRA's observations during its visit to Sao Paulo last January, Brazil's best practices and innovations can be used in the Philippine setting. - **Jed Macapagal**



New raid yields P519M rice, palay

BOC padlocks 4 Bulacan rice mills

BY ANGELA CELIS
and WENDELL VIGILIA

THE Bureau of Customs (BOC) yesterday padlocked four rice mills in Bulacan where an estimated P519 million worth of rice grains and palay (unhusked rice) were discovered, just days after a raid of four warehouses also in the province yielded P505 million worth of imported rice.

Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio said 154,000 sacks of imported rice grains and 60,000 sacks of palay were discovered at the following Bulacan rice mills:

Gold Rush Rice Mill in San Juan, Balagtas; JSS Rice Mill in Wakas, Bocaue; Gold Rush Rice Mill 2 also in Wakas; and another one with a gray gate located inside the Intercity Industrial Complex in San Juan, Balagtas.

The BOC raiding team was joined by a contingent from the House of Representatives led by Speaker Martin Romualdez.

The random inspection comes a day after President Marcos Jr. directed the BOC to continue raiding warehouses and other storage facilities to address the persistent problem of hoarding, illegal im-

portation and smuggling of rice in the country.

"We have ordered the Bureau of Customs to continue the hunt for illegal importers and hoarders of rice and agricultural goods. The illicit trade of our most precious agricultural commodities shall never prosper," the President said on Tuesday on his official Facebook account.

The President issued the directive during a sectoral meeting in Malacañang attended by officials from the BOC and the Department of Agriculture (DA), among others.

Last August 24, a team led by Rubio, together with operatives from the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service (CIIS), CIIS-Manila International Container Port (CIIS-MICP), and the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Task Force Aduana, inspected the Great Harvest Rice Mill Warehouse, San Pedro Warehouse, and FS Rice Mill Warehouse and found over 200,000 sacks of imported rice grains from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand worth P505 million.

The BOC said the 154,000 sacks

See BOC > Page B2

Inspection. Speaker Martin Romualdez, accompanied by Anti-Crime and Terrorism Community Involvement and Support partylist Rep. Erwin Tulfo and Alvin Enciso, chief of the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service, conducts a surprise inspection of alleged smuggled and hoarded rice in warehouses in Balagtas and Bocaue, Bulacan Wednesday.

PHOTO BY RHOY COBILLA



Malaya Business Insight

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BOC

of imported rice grains came from Vietnam and Pakistan and have an estimated value of P431 million, while the 60,000 sacks of palay are valued at P88 million.

"Yesterday (Tuesday), we had a sectoral meeting with the President, who gave a clear directive about how we can help stop the rising cost of rice in the market. So, this is our answer to that order. We have just discovered four warehouses storing rice grains and palay, and if the owners of these warehouses fail to show proper documents that they legitimately imported the subject sacks of rice and paid correct duties and taxes thereon, then we will take immediate legal action and confiscate the items here," Rubio said in a statement.

The warehouses were temporarily

padlocked and sealed as inventory of the goods was immediately conducted by assigned Customs examiners and witnessed by agents from the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service (CIIS), the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), and warehouse representatives.

The BOC's inspection authority is in accordance with Chapter 2, Section 224 of Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA).

Rubio signed and authorized the inspection of the Bulacan warehouses.

"Hoarders need to understand that the government led by President Marcos Jr. is serious in flushing out the people behind the price manipulation of rice. Kung hindi makukuha sa simpleng pakiusap, baka magtanda sila kapag nakulong (If they can't be persuaded to stop, maybe they'll learn when they're jailed," said Romualdez,

who joined the raid with fellow lawmakers upon the BOC's invitation.

Aside from Rubio, the inspection team was composed of Intelligence Group Deputy Commissioner Juvymax Uy, CIIS Director Verne Enciso, elements of the CIIS at the Manila International Container Port (MICP) and the PCG Task Force Aduana.

Romualdez was accompanied by Reps. Erwin Tulfo (PL, ACT-CIS), Mark Enverga of Quezon, who chairs the House Committee on Agriculture and Food, and Ambrosio Cruz Jr. of Bulacan.

Romualdez, who ordered the Enverga panel to probe the hoarding of rice and other agricultural products like onions, has assured Filipino consumers that the surprise inspection at warehouses holding rice stocks last week "was not a one-hit wonder."



LANDBANK-FINANCED BATANGAS HOG FARM BOOSTS LOCAL PORK PRODUCTION

LIPA, Batangas – Spouses Jerome and Anna Trofeo were having trouble sourcing healthy hogs to meet their customers' requirements two years ago, with the African Swine Fever significantly affecting hog growers nationwide.

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With the opening of AJ Piggery Farm, the couple's meat stall is able sell around 900 kilograms of pork per day to accommodate the demand of meat retailers.

The stall is also able to supply around 1,650 kilograms of pork per week to two (2) local supermarkets in Laguna and Batangas, thereby increasing the meat shop's income to around P500,000.00 to P600,000.00 per month from the previous



Turning challenges into opportunities. Amid the African Swine Fever outbreak, Jerome Trofeo successfully expanded his meat shop business into a commercial swine farm through a P24-million loan from LANDBANK, and has helped strengthen local swine production to meet the demand for pork in the country.



The AJ Piggery Farm produces healthy hogs for the 'Annie & Jerome Trofeo' meat stall in Lipa City Public Market, which caters to the pork requirements of meat retailers and two local supermarkets.

P300,000.00.

"Sa tulong ng LANDBANK, talagang lumago ang aming negosyo. Mula sa pagkakaroon ng isang stall sa palengke ay nagkaroon na rin kami ng sarili naming pig farm. Malaki ang aming pasasalamat sa kanila," said Jerome.

Supporting the local swine industry

In support of the National Government's efforts to re-populate and increase hog production, LANDBANK has approved a total of P8.05 billion in loans to 36 borrowers under the SWINE Lending Program as of end-June 2023.

The loans financed projects for swine production, including the purchase of hogs and feeds, construction and expansion of facilities such as piggery buildings, and working capital, among others.

Commercial hog raisers registered as cooperatives or farmers' associations, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and large enterprises or corporations may borrow up to 80% of the total project. Start-up commercial swine farms may likewise avail of loans under the SWINE Lending Program.

Loans for working capital and permanent working capital are payable up to one year and five years, respectively, while loans for fixed assets and construction of facilities are payable based on project cash flow but not more than its economic useful life.

LANDBANK launched the SWINE Lending Program in partnership with the Department of the Agriculture, designed to provide timely financial assistance to hog raisers towards sustaining and increasing pork production.



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Prices of tomatoes soar to P230 per kilo

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The retail prices of tomatoes reached P230 per kilo or P13 per piece based on the latest monitoring of the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** amid the vegetable supply shortage in Luzon following

the devastation of Super Typhoon Egay.

According to the DA, the retail prices of tomatoes jumped by P60 per kilo compared to its previous price of P170 per kilo a week ago in Metro Manila markets.

But the farmgate prices of to-

mato dropped to P3 to P5 per kilo amid the oversupply particularly in Cagayan Valley and Central Luzon.

In a radio interview, Nueva Vizcaya Agricultural Terminal (NVAT) general manager Gilbert Cumila said there is a Luzon-wide shortage in the supply of vegetables amid

the damage caused by Egay to the agriculture sector.

"The buyers are competing by offering higher prices just to get vegetables since they know they can still sell in Metro Manila at even higher prices," Cumila said.

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Prices From Page 1

According to Cumila, the tightness in the supply of vegetables is still due to the effect of Egay, which entered the Philippines on July 21.

Based on the monitoring of the DA, the retail price of *ampalaya* (bitter gourd) was as high as P140 per kilo; string beans, P130 per kilo; *pechay tagalog*, P100 per kilo; squash, P60 per kilo; eggplant, P120 per kilo; cabbage, P180 per kilo; carrots, P200 per kilo; Baguio beans, P220 per kilo; potato, P160 per kilo; *pechay* Baguio, P170 per kilo; *sayote*, P130 per kilo; and chili, P600 per kilo and ginger, P150 per kilo.

Rice

Farmers' group Federation of Free Farmers national manager Raul Montemayor yesterday said that Typhoon Goring will further affect the rice supply as the palay plantations in Nueva Ecija were affected by rains.

"The palay crops can still survive but the harvest will be delayed. We hope that the extent of the damage is not that big," Montemayor said.

At the same time, Montemayor expressed doubt whether concerned agencies will be able to address the spike in the retail prices of rice following the order of President Marcos to use all available legal tools to control the cost of the grains.

According to Montemayor, the raid of warehouses

in Bulacan will also further diminish the supply of rice in the country.

"The owners of the warehouses were given 15 days to prove that the rice stocks were not smuggled. In the meantime the stocks were not allowed to be released, the supply in the market will be further affected, the more our problem on the supply will worsen," Montemayor said.

The Bureau of Customs previously raided FS Rice Mill, San Pedro Warehouse and Great Harvest Rice Meal Warehouse in Bocaue and Balagtas towns in Bulacan and recovered about 202,000 sacks or at least P505 million-imported rice from Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

Montemayor said there is an issue on the rice supply as only 200,000 metric tons of imported rice arrived compared to the expected 600,000 metric tons of imported grains from July to September 2023.

He noted that many traders did not import because of the high prices of rice in the world market.

"We became dependent on importation as the situation now is different from the last three years where there was over importation of rice, causing the farmgate price of palay to go down. As a result, many farmers were discouraged to plant," he said. — With Ramon Efren Lazaro



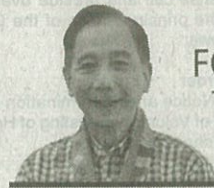
More recommendations to avoid a rice crisis

I AM deeply bothered by the headlines I read of rice supply shortages in some parts of the globe, including here in our very own country.

But I believe that a possible rice supply shortage in the Philippines can be avoided over the short to long term, with various measures that, however, will need a concerted effort among the government, private sector, the academe, civil society and the farmers to successfully carry out or implement.

For the **Department of Agriculture (DA)**, there is a need for the agency to hire more technically competent managers and staff who will fully utilize technology and innovation to level up the production of palay (unmilled rice) and other crops. This measure will also minimize opportunities for graft and corruption within the agency.

Also, one of the DA's hardworking agencies, the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech), should also have stations in every province to ensure the delivery of equipment, training and other related assistance to beneficiaries



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**WILLIAM
D. DAR**

of the government's rice programs, like those under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Program. The station should operate like a one-stop shop where organized farmers can register and undergo qualification assessment for programs under PHilMech.

PHilMech currently has three Regional Technology Management and Demonstration Centers, and more of these should be established.

Research for development (R4D) to further level up rice production should be ramped up, including the development of rice varieties for cultivation in flood-prone areas. During the wet season planting, a greater percentage of rainfed and irrigated areas are very prone to waterlogging. Hence, the need for the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Laguna to focus

their R4D efforts in developing rice varieties that could withstand flooding. Bangladesh and Vietnam already have rice varieties that can adapt to flood-prone farms and can be the basis for the R4D of both PhilRice and IRRI.

PhilRice and IRRI can also develop super-early maturing varieties to increase cropping intensity from two to three per year in irrigated areas and from one to two in rainfed farms.

Another measure is to plant at least 1 million hectares of farmland with hybrid rice, with the ultimate aim of covering at the most 2 million hectares. This will also help rice farmers earn more from the proven higher yields of hybrid rice.

To enable the technology transfer for the cultivation of better rice varieties like the hybrid types and those that can withstand waterlogging, consolidating and clustering farms will be a prerequisite. This measure will also help attract private food companies to partner with farmers producing rice. In turn, the private companies can help level up the production system of clustered rice farmers with

their proven technologies.

Digital technology application

While mechanization of rice farms is ongoing, thanks to the RCEF-Mechanization Program of PHilMech, the next set of technologies that farmers must adopt should be from the digital sphere. And with artificial intelligence (AI) developing at a very fast pace, the government and private sector should start studying how AI can be applied to increasing local rice production. Long-term planning is essential here.

In developed countries, satellite technology is already being employed to monitor progress right at the field or farm, enabling farmers and agribusiness companies to precisely determine the optimum level of inputs they should apply on their crops. The Philippines should not be left behind in this.

NFA's role

As for the National Food Authority (NFA), it should be given more funds or a higher budget so it can perform better its role as a buffer

stocking agency. Also, the NFA must modernize or keep up-to-date its drying and milling, and trucking facilities. This will also allow the agency to also buy wet palay from farmers, and I must state the NFA do that to aid farmers who still do not have or have inadequate drying facilities.

When it comes to procuring rice or palay for buffer stocking, the NFA must buy part of the output of organized farmers who are beneficiaries of the government's rice programs, including those under RCEF.

And I must state that it is necessary that the NFA must have a buffer stock of at least 30 days or one month.

Use the Pafes

The DA during my watch pushed for the institutionalization of the Provincial Agricultural and Fisheries Extension Systems (Pafes) to bring extension services to the grassroots level amid the challenges of devolution.

Through Pafes, the initiatives of various stakeholders from the academe, cooperatives, government and nongovernment entities

in delivering agricultural extension services are harmonized, resulting in more targeted and efficient delivery of those services to farmers and food producers.

My dream is for Pafes to be institutionalized in all provinces, most especially those that need a boost in rice production so their areas will at least attain local food self-sufficiency. And as I have stated in an earlier column, provinces that are insufficient in rice production are given assistance like loans to establish their own buffer stocking system. This can also be done through Pafes.

Unless we take honest to goodness concerted action to avoid a rice crisis, the reality of long lines at rice retail outlets will hit the headlines anew. For sure, no government official wants this to happen, and it is not too late to act.

Finally, at this point where the country's rice inventory is too little, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. exercised his special powers to lower the tariffs on rice from the current 35 percent to 10 percent up to the end of December 2023. This will encourage the private sector to import rice and sell them at affordable prices.

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Searca, partners push agribiotech among youth

THE Philippine government-hosted Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) recently held a forum on Breeding Innovations for Increasing Productivity and Climate Resilience in Crops and Livestock as part of Searca's efforts to expand the knowledge of the youth on agricultural biotechnology (agribiotech).

Held on August 15 at Searca's headquarters on the campus of the University of the Philippines Los Baños, the public seminar was conducted together with the United States Department of Agriculture-Foreign Agricultural Service (USDA-FAS) Manila and the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (Isaaa) Inc.

Glenn Gregorio, Searca director, said the forum aimed to create an interactive platform of engagement with key stakeholders to discuss the

latest updates, emerging issues and concerns for an improved understanding and acceptance of biotechnology in the country.

As part of the Searca Agriculture and Development Seminar Series, the hybrid event that gathered more than 200 participants online and onsite was livestreamed and may be reviewed through Searca's Facebook Page.

Gregorio said the discussions during the forum were led by international and local experts on agribiotech.

Nur Azura Binti Adam, Searca's deputy director for programs, noted that agribiotech has been viewed unfavorably at times and hoped that the forum would open the public's minds about the technology.

Nur's suggestion of inviting farmers to similar forums in the future so they can share their success stories and convince other farmers to use biotech crops was concurred by Isaaa

Executive Director Rhodora Aldemita, noting that the forum is different from the previous ones since it is geared toward students who are future technology developers.

"We would like to encourage students to go for agribiotech in their career because we need new ideas and new people in the field," Aldemita said.

Mark Hanzel, agricultural attaché of the USDA-FAS from the US Embassy Manila, also noted that the Filipino youth represent the future of agricultural innovation in the country, and misunderstanding and misinformation hinder developments in agribiotech.

Hanzel noted that even if people truly understand science and how it works, and things have been tested for decades and have been proven safe and effective, "we still see policies succumbing to the pressures of misinformation view."

"It's important that we take the

knowledge, and we go out there with it and help people understand these things better," he added.

During the forum, Aldemita presented the crop innovations in the pipeline for productivity and climate resiliency, while Claro Mingala, director of the Philippine Agriculture and Fisheries Biotechnology Program, spoke about livestock innovations.

Joining the discussion was Huw Jones, professor of Translational Genomics for Plant Breeding from Aberystwyth University, Wales, who presented the global regulatory landscape for new breeding innovations.

Encouraging the youth

One of the questions raised during the open forum was how to encourage the youth to get involved in agribiotech aside from the usual forums.

Aldemita noted that with a curricu-

lum already in place in the University of the Philippines system, they can encourage the youth to get involved in agribiotech aside from the usual forums.

She added that while other schools still want to improve their curriculum and include agribiotech as a major in their agricultural course, several like-minded agencies in the country have also been working together to conduct activities and produce knowledge products for the youth.

While suggesting that education and understanding on the topic should start much younger in the school curriculum, Jones pointed out that the concept of plant breeding is something that younger children need to understand.

Mingala also shared that the Department of Agriculture-Biotechnology Program Office offers scholarships for undergraduates and higher studies.

Whether the current regulations could keep up with new developments

in the field, Aldemita also explained that regulators are always future-proof regulations so they can be adjusted whenever there are new innovations.

"If some aspects need to be changed, it will always be science-based," she said.

Associate professor Joselito Florendo, Searca deputy director for programs, noted that he may have a different background, but he, too, has a role in advancing the country's agriculture sector.

"I have a part in advocating for modern biotechnology as an important innovation that we can use," Florendo said, adding that one option is to accelerate agricultural transformation in the Philippines and beyond.

"We may all be different, but all of us can have a valuable contribution. Food security is everyone's business," he added.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO



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HDPE fish cages pushed in Region 2

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

IN an effort to boost fisheries production in Region 2 (Cagayan Valley), the **Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)** in the region and the local government unit of Allacapan in Cagayan province is promoting the use of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) in building fish cages.

The HDPE fish cages are installed in Barangay Silagan's Small Water Impounding Project (SWIP).

BFAR Region 2 Director Angel Encarnacion said they have started promoting the use of HDPE, which is a solid and strong plastic, as building materials for fish cages.

"Having proven its efficiency, the HDPE fish cage is unlike any other. This fish cage does not corrode as opposed to traditional fish cages made of wood or bamboo," he said.

The Silagan SWIP has an area of 65 hectares and supplies irrigation water to agricultural lands near the area and is used for aquaculture

purposes.

Encarnacion explained that one unit of HDPE fish cage occupies 1 hectare of water area and can hold about 12,000 pieces of fish stocks.

The fish cage project will be managed and operated by the members of the Nappuaran Small Water Irrigation System Association led by its president Gilbert Talana.

The BFAR Region 2 office said the fisherfolk beneficiaries also received a similar project from the bureau in 2018.

■ Photo shows the expanse of the fish cage made from high-density polyethylene. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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Brazil wants to help PHL boost sugar, ethanol output—DA

OFFICIALS from the Department of Agriculture (DA) have met with delegates from the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) and the Embassy of Brazil in Manila last August 29 to discuss areas for cooperation that will increase the Philippines's sugarcane and ethanol production.

As one of the leading countries in sugarcane and ethanol production, Brazil offers academic programs related to the sugarcane industry and incorporating ethanol in its national energy grid, the DA said in a statement.

Engr. Laverne Olalia, Research Development and Extension Department Manager of the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA), said the Philippines can learn from Brazil's best practices on soil development and management, mealing practices, and farm technologies to

improve local production.

He added that based on the SRA's observations during its visit to the country last January, Brazil's best practices and innovations can be adapted to the Philippine setting.

The Brazilian delegates recommended bringing in a team of experts to the Philippines to facilitate knowledge-sharing initiatives that are geared towards the expansion of sugarcane plantations, the promotion of farm efficiency, enhancing meal conversion, improving production chains, and lowering production costs in the Philippines.

DA Assistant Secretary for Policy Research and Development Noel Padre and ABC Technical Cooperation with Africa, Asia, and Oceania Manager Antonio Junqueira said Manila will strengthen the forged partnership between the

Philippines and Brazil for the benefit of the sugarcane and ethanol industry players.

Both countries are now in talks regarding the possible development of the sugar and ethanol industries.

Also present during the visit were DA Assistant Secretary for Regulations Paz Benavidez II and Dr. Octavio Valsechi, an Agroindustrial Technology professor at Federal University of São Carlos.

Data released by the SRA in January showed that the Philippines's total sugar production in the current crop year which will end on August 31 would still be below 1.84 million metric tons (MMT), the second-lowest output in the past 22 years.

Total raw sugar output in crop year 2022-2023 was pegged at 1.833 MMT, about 100,000 MT

higher than previous crop year's output of 1.82 MMT.

The SRA's production forecast in January was lower than the 1.876 MMT it projected before the start of the crop year in September 2022.

The lower raw sugar output was attributed to the decline in the volume of sugarcanes that will be milled this crop year. SRA's latest forecast showed that total sugarcanes to be milled would be at 20.857 MMT, 1.77 percent lower than the 21.234 MMT recorded in the previous crop year.

SRA data showed that total sugarcane area in the current crop year would be below 400,000 hectares for the fifth consecutive year. Total sugarcane area in crop year 2022-2023 would be at 384,987 hectares, the smallest in at least five years.



Rice, corn crops bear brunt of typhoon Egay

THE most important staple crops in the Philippines—rice and corn—have borne the brunt of typhoon Egay, according to an official of the **Department of Agriculture (DA).**

U-Nichols Manalo, director of the DA's Field Operations Services office also said the typhoon destroyed farm infrastructure, such as irrigation.

"In terms of value, rice lost was larger, but in terms of volume, corn losses were higher," he said.

He said the typhoon affected 67,528 metric tons (MT) of rice valued at P3 billion while corn losses reached 124,576 MT valued at P2.3 billion.

Raul Montemayor, national manager of Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) told the BUSINESS-MIRROR on Wednesday that Egay and Goring could also affect the quality of rice that will be

harvested in the coming weeks.

"If more palay was soaked in water, the quality of the grains might not be so good," he said.

Montemayor also expressed concern over the National Food Authority's (NFA) buffer stocks.

"The typhoons will affect the incoming supply starting mid-September, in terms of volume and quality. But our problem really is the period between now and mid-September when the available stocks are fast running out."

Jayson Cainglet, executive director of Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) said he does not expect rice prices to increase because of the damage caused by Egay.

Goring's track

THE DA has yet to release a report on the impact of Goring on agri-fisheries. The agency



RESCUERS carry pigs inside boats along floodwaters caused by Typhoon Egay (international name Doksuri) as they evacuate them to safer grounds in Laoag city, Ilocos Norte province, northern Philippines, Wednesday, July 26, 2023. AP/BERNIE SIPIN DELA CRUZ

said it continues to monitor the storm's track.

The agency said in its latest bulletin that the Cordillera Autonomous Region and Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 will likely be struck by the typhoon.

It said Goring could affect 2.1 million hectares of farmland, including those planted with rice and corn.

Manalo said, however, that Goring's impact on crop output may be minimal as farmers in areas struck

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by Egay have yet to replant crops.

Crops and poultry were the top performers in the agri-fisheries sector in the second quarter, according to a report released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) last August 9.

In terms of value, crop production went up by 1.2 percent to P240.83 billion, according to data from the PSA. The crops subsector accounted for 56.3 percent of the total value of farm output.

"The value of palay production increased by 1.1 percent, while corn declined by -0.8 percent."

The livestock subsector also saw a slight increase at 0.7 percent in April to June. Its output was valued at P63.5 billion or 14.8 percent of the total value of agri production.

"Hog, the major contributor to the value of livestock production, increased by 1 percent."

Poultry production was also higher by 1.5 percent during the period. It accounted for P64.54 billion or 15.1 percent of the total value of production in agriculture and fisheries.

The increases recorded in these subsectors, however, were not enough to offset the 14.2-percent contraction in the fisheries subsector in April to June.

PSA said the value of agriculture and fisheries production at constant 2018 prices fell by 1.3 percent year-on-year to P427.69 billion.

According to the agency, the fisheries subsector recorded a 14.2-percent contraction in the value of its output which reached P58.81 billion in the second quarter. It contributed 13.8 percent to the total value of production in agriculture and fisheries.

Raadee S. Sausa

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GET THE RICE PRICE 'RATS'

**By Jester
Manalastas**

GOVERNMENT officials made another surprise inspection of rice warehouses in Bulacan, in a bid to address hoarding and smuggling.

Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez is among the officials who has joined the Bureau of Customs in a new round of inspection.

Romualdez asked BOC Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio to send rice smugglers and hoarders to jail.

He noted that unscrupulous traders deserves such punishment for inflicting what he described as a "heinous crime" against the poor for keeping this Filipino

food staple out of reach through price manipulation.

Romualdez warned rice traders and importers to immediately release their supply to the market at fair prices or face possible confiscation of their rice stocks as well as prosecution in accordance with due process of law.

"Rice found to be smuggled or hoarded should be forfeited in favor of the government, in favor of the people's interest, for distribution or sale at a very low price," he said.

It could be recalled that President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. on Tuesday ordered government agencies to exhaust all legal tools to control the rising prices of rice, likewise direct-

ing the Bureau of Customs (BOC) to inspect more rice warehouses.

"Hoarders need to understand that the government led by President Marcos Jr. is serious in flushing out the people behind the price manipulation of rice. Kung hindi makukuha sa simpleng pakiusap, baka magtanda sila kapag nakulong," Romualdez said.

In line with the directive of Marcos, Romualdez and several other lawmakers joined the team led by Commissioner Rubio in conducting the surprise inspection of Gold Rush Rice Mill 3, Dinorado Rice Mill, and JSS Rice Mill, all in Bulacan.

The BOC team also conducted a separate inspection of an-

other rice warehouse with no signage or marking within Inter-city Industrial Complex.

Joining Romualdez are House Deputy Majority Leader Erwin Tulfo, committee on Agriculture and Food Chairman Mark Enverga, and Bulacan Rep. Ambrosio Cruz, Jr.

According to Romualdez the inspection showed an adequate supply of rice so the continuing increase in rice prices indicates efforts to withhold stocks to reap windfall profit. He noted that some of the rice stocks in the inspected warehouses were over three months old.

He commended the BOC for making headway in its efforts to stamp out rice hoarders by con-

ducting surprise warehouse raids and vowed to support any or all action against price manipulation of agricultural products.

"Rice hoarding is a heinous crime because it victimizes poor families who barely have enough money to put food on the table and pay for everything else that will uplift their quality of life. Hoarders profit from the misery of others, and for that they deserve to be in jail," Romualdez said.

Romualdez, upon the invitation of Rubio, led a team of lawmakers from the House of Representatives on a fact-finding mission recently to ascertain if rice hoarders were indeed behind the sudden spike in prices of rice in the market.

Lawmakers also joined BOC in inspecting FS Rice Mill, San Pedro Warehouse, and Great Harvest Rice Meal Warehouse located in the boundaries of Bocaue and Balagtas towns in Bulacan.

The initial BOC raid on three warehouses in Bulacan yielded about P500 million worth of imported rice. BOC operatives raided the Great Harvest Rice Mill Warehouse, the San Pedro Warehouse, and the FS Rice Mill Warehouse, which were found out to be storing 25,000, 167,000 and 10,000 sacks of imported rice, respectively. Their respective owners have already been instructed to submit proof of tax and duty payments.

MANILA BULLETIN

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RICE INSPECTION — Speaker Martin Romualdez (third from left), Anti-Crime and Terrorism Community Involvement and Support (ACT-CIS) party-list Representative Erwin Tulfo (second from right), and Bureau of Customs (BOC)-Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service (CIIS) chief Alvin Enciso (right) conduct surprise inspections of allegedly smuggled and hoarded rice kept in warehouses in Balagtas and Bocaue towns in Bulacan on Wednesday, Aug. 30, 2023. Story on Page 9. (Ali Vicoy)



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PHILSTAR/EDD GUMBAN

Rice inspection

SPEAKER Martin Romualdez, Party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo and Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service chief Alvin Enciso conducted a surprise inspection of allegedly smuggled and hoarded rice in warehouses in Bulacan on Wednesday.



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Paper helps farmers grow Bolinao chicken

A PAPER authored from the Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU) has become a valuable tool in helping farmers produce true-to-type Bolinao chicken through breeder and multiplier farms.

The paper titled "Sustaining True-to-Type Bolinao Chicken through Multiplier Farms" was co-authored by Marilou Lucas, MMSU Extension Directorate director; Bella Gervacio, training and continuing education chief; Jerold Labii, educational technology demonstration chief; and professors Armie Sabugo and Jeffrey de Vera, faculty members of the MMSU-College of Business, Economics and Accountancy.

"This project was instrumental in capacitating Ilokano farmers and growers, and in forging ties with the provincial government of Abra and the Abra State Institute of Technology," Gervacio said.

Bolinao chickens are predominantly found in the province of Pangasinan, particularly in and around the municipality of Bolinao, a coastal region north of Manila. This breed shows great potential either as a broiler or layer stock. Plumage color varies widely, but reds and browns are the norm, with the occasional jet-black bird cropping up.

According to Lucas, the project is an offshoot of the project on "Sustainable Production, Marketing and Utilization of True-to-Type Bolinao Chicken in the Ilocos Region" funded by the Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development.

Through the Ilocos Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Develop-

ment Consortium from 2018 to 2021, it was collaboratively implemented by MMSU, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College and Pangasinan State University, and was turned over to MMSU to sustain the promotion, dissemination and demonstration of the technology upon its completion.

Recently, Gervacio said the Bolinao chicken project, that exemplifies a high-impact and transformative extension initiative, also bagged the second-best paper award in the eighth Biennial Convention of the Philippine Association of Extension Program Implementers Inc. (Paepi).

Paepi is a professional association for research-based extension programs in the Philippines. This year's biennial convention was themed "Empowering Extension Professionals toward Social Transformation and Food Security."

Lucas and Gervacio received the award for winning under the agriculture, fishery and extension category during the event's closing ceremonies held on August 18 at the Metro Center Hotel in Tagbilaran City, Bohol.

During the national event, other MMSU extension personnel also presented other papers.

Mercy Gano, applied communication chief, presented the MMSU's School-on-the-Air Program, while Sherlyn Nicolas, monitoring and evaluation chief, presented the Bio-Intensive Gardening Project of the university.

Richard Guinsatao, Ma. Constanza Yap, Rolando Rabanal and Romielyn Ibe were also part of the MMSU delegation at the national convention.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO

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PSA: Agri census to include culturing worms, insects

By CAI U. ORDINARIO

[@caiordinario](#)

FOOD produced in urban gardens and relatively new businesses like culturing worms and insects are just some of the new developments that could be covered by the 2022 Census of Agriculture and Fisheries (CAF), according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The survey, which will be conducted between September 4 and October 25 this year, will be the first CAF conducted by the PSA using the Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The CAPI allows enumerators to input respondents' answers using

a tablet that records and processes their answers reducing the time needed to complete surveys. AI, meanwhile, will be used in the CAF to estimate land area, which is part of the data that the survey collects.

"Very flexible *ang ating* instrument; *puwede 'yung mga bago*. So in addition to what you mentioned (culturing worms and insects), *kasama din dito yung* urban farming for example *kasi may mga barangay tayo na nasa* urban areas. So *isa sa mga tinitignan natin yung* practices sa urban farming *at ano 'yung* volume of production *kung meron man*," National Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

PSA Deputy National Statistician Minerva Eloisa P. Esquivias

told the BUSINESSMIRROR on the sidelines of the briefing that urban garden produce will only be included in the CAF results if these products are consumed and/or sold by households.

Esquivias also said plants that are used for decorative purposes only, a favorite among the "plantitos" and "plantitas," would not be included unless they are being sold by households.

Culturing worms and insects will also be included in the data to be collected on livestock and poultry raised. It will fall under contract growers and integrators of livestock and poultry.

The CAF will gather information on the farm and fishery sector through "objects of focus,"

such as palay, sugarcane, mango, coconut, fish ponds, fish pens, and fish cages.

The survey will collect data on areas planted, kinds of livestock, agriculture lands, demographics, and data needed to monitor the country's progress in the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 as well as data needed by the United Nations on food security.

The survey will be conducted by 15,841 enumerators nationwide. The preliminary results of the survey will be released in March 2024 while the final results will be released by July 2024.

The CAF is conducted every 10 years. The last was conducted in 2012 while the first was done in 1960.



Investments in poor small-scale farmers benefit climate, environment—report

JOINT investments in small-scale farming in developing countries not only increase rural people's capacity to cope with the climatic and economic shocks, but also benefit the environment and climate.

A new joint report launched recently by the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) found that investments in poor farmers will help reduce greenhouse gases emissions, recover degraded land and curb biodiversity loss.

"IFAD's partnership with GEF benefits 78 million people across 100 countries, improving their livelihoods and delivering resilience-building solutions across food systems, climate and nature," said Jyotsna Puri, Associate Vice-President of the Strategy and Knowledge Department at IFAD.

"Together our organizations assemble finance to have a catalytic impact on rural communities across the globe and facilitate a multiplier effect on the systems and institutions they are critical to," added the Associate Vice-President of IFAD, the only UN specialized agency and international financial institution that focuses exclusively on reducing poverty and improving food security in rural areas in developing countries.

The partnership with GEF enables IFAD to boost its work to support sustainable land and water management, climate-smart agriculture, agroecology, biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation, and resilience building, according to the new IFAD-GEF Advantage III Report.

For instance, one project aimed at developing family farming, co-funded by IFAD and GEF, restored 30,000 hectares of degraded land in Niger. In doing so, this program prevented the emission of 5.25 million tons of CO₂, while recovering nearly 190,000 hectares through "farmers managed natural regeneration" practices, which foster regrowth of trees to increase woody vegetation.

IFAD-GEF collaboration has also helped unlock innovation at country level,

highlights the report. In Cambodia, "testing grants" de-risked the adoption process of Renewable Energy Technologies (RET) by supporting the proofing and validation by small-scale farmers and small and medium enterprises.

These grants were followed by other "roll-out grants" through a co-financing approach with companies to establish local supply chains, training and after-sales services. As a result, nearly 18,000 small-scale farmers have adopted different RET, such as solar dryers for food processing, portable solar water pumps to irrigate crops, biochar briquettes to heat newly hatched chicks, solar poultry incubators to heat eggs, and solar hydroponics to grow vegetables with less water.

"IFAD's ability to bundle different sources of development finance unlocks new possibilities to address pressing global challenges such as transforming the way we produce, transport, store and consume food," the UN agency said.

Together with its sister agency, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), IFAD co-leads the new Food Systems Integrated Program of the GEF, whereby an estimated \$230 million—to be complemented by additional co-financing—will be directed through grants to support countries working to transform their agrifood systems to be more sustainable and to deliver global environmental benefits.

The currently active portfolio of IFAD-GEF operations represents a total investment of nearly \$200 million in 35 global projects on agriculture and rural development across all world regions.

Recent project approvals in 2022 and 2023 alone represent more than \$64 million in GEF grants, with significant co-financing of over \$347 million. Moreover, 13 projects in 18 countries and totaling almost \$100 million are at the design stage in the IFAD-GEF pipeline and a "soft pipeline" of projects being scoped out comes to almost another \$100 million.



MGA RICE HOARDER IPAKULONG NA!

Iginiit ni House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez ang kahalagahan na maparusahan ang mga rice hoarder dahil sa ginagawang pahirap sa mga Pilipino, lalo na sa mga mahihirap.

"Rice hoarding is a heinous crime because it victimizes poor families who barely have enough money to put food on the table and pay for everything else that will uplift their quality of life. Hoarders profit from the misery of others, and for that they deserve to be in jail," sabi ni Romualdez.

Ipinahayag ito ni Romualdez matapos sumama sa Bureau of Customs (BOC) nitong Miyerkoles sa pagsasagawa ng surprise inspection sa Gold Rush Rice Mill 3, Dinorado Rice Mill, at JSS Rice Mill sa Bulacan.

Kasama ni Romualdez sina House Deputy Majority Leader Erwin Tulfo, House committee on agriculture and food chairperson Mark Enverga, at Bulacan Rep. Ambrosio Cruz Jr.

"Kaya ang panawagan natin sa BOC, pag-ibayuhin

pa ang pagsisikap na mahuli itong smugglers at hoarders na ito. I believe that by sending them to jail, we will send a clear message to other hoarders to stop what they are doing under pain and penalty of jail time," sabi ni Romualdez.

Sinabi ni Romualdez na dapat kumpiskahin ang mga bigas na mapapatunayang smuggled at sinadyang itago ng mataagal para maging mahigpit ang suplay sa merkado at tumaas ang presyo.

"That is why we are urging BoC chief Rubio to follow through their efforts during their raids. This should result in the filing of criminal cases of economic sabotage against

these opportunists. Sila ang yumayaman sa paghihirap ng mga tao," dagdag pa ni Romualdez.

Higit P500 milyong halaga ng mga nakaimbak na bigas at palay ang namsam ng BOC sa serye ng operasyon sa apat na warehouse sa Bulacan nitong Miyerkoles, Agosto 30.

Ayon kay BOC Commissioner Ben Rubio, matapos na makakuha ng intelligence report tungkol sa ilegal diumano na nakaimbak na libo-libong sako ng bigas sa Bocaue at Balagtas ay agad siyang nag-isyu ng Letter of Authority (LOA) para sa inspeksiyon sa mga warehouse.

"We have just discov-

ered four warehouses storing rice grains and palay, and if the owners of these warehouses fail to show proper documents that they rightfully paid the taxes and duties they owe to the government, then we will take immediate legal action and confiscate the items here," babala ng BOC chief.

Sa pag-inspeksiyon ng mga ahente ng mga awtoridad, umabot sa 145,000 sako ng imported na bigas mula sa Vietnam at Pakistan na nagkakahalaga ng P431 milyon, at 60,000 sako ng palay na may halagang P88 milyon ang nadiskubre sa mga nasabing warehouse. (**Billy Begas/Eralyn Prado/Edwin Balasa**)

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Personal na sumama si House Speaker Martin Romualdez sa isinagawang sorpresang pag-inspeksiyon ng Bureau of Customs sa mga bodega ng bigas sa Bulacan. Kasama niya rin sina House Deputy Majority Leader Erwin Tulfo, Committee on Agriculture and Food Chairman Mark Enverga, Bulacan 5th District Rep. Ambrosio Cruz Jr. at Alvin Enciso, hepe ng Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service. (Edd Gumban)

Romualdez nagbabala vs rice smugglers/hoarders, ipinakakalaboso

Binalaan ni House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez nitong Miyerkules ang mga rice smugglers at hoarders na ilabas sa merkado ang kanilang mga nakaimbak na bigas sa mga bodega kung hindi ng mga ito nais na makalaboso sa pananabotahe sa ekonomiya ng bansa.

Ito'y matapos na muling sumama si Romualdez sa mga opisyal ng Bureau of Customs (BOC)

sa pagsasagawa ng mga sorpresang pag-iinspeksiyon sa mga bodega ng bigas sa Bulacan.

Kasabay nito ay sinabihan ni Romualdez si BOC Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio na tiyakin na makukulang ang mga rice smugglers at hoarders na nasa likod ng pagmanipula ng presyo na maituturing umanong "heinous crime" laban sa mga mahihirap na Pilipino.

"Rice found to be smuggled or hoarded should be forfeited in favor of the government, in favor of the people's interest, for distribution or sale at a very low price," ayon kay Romualdez.

Noong Martes ay inutusan ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. ang mga ahensya ng gobyerno na gawin ang lahat upang mapigilan ang tumataas na presyo ng bigas at inatasan ang BOC na ipagpatuloy ang pagsasagawa ng inspeksiyon sa mga warehouse.

Alinsunod sa direktiba ng Pangulo, sumama

si Romualdez at ilang pang kongresista kay Commissioner Rubio sa pagsasagawa ng inspeksiyon sa Gold Rush Rice Mill 3, Dinorado Rice Mill, at JSS Rice Mill, na matatagpuan sa Bulacan. Nagsagawa rin ng inspeksiyon ang BOC sa isang rice warehouse na walang signage sa loob ng Intercity Industrial Complex.

Sumama rin sa nasabing inspeksiyon sina House Deputy Majority Leader Erwin Tulfo, Committee on Agriculture and Food Chairman Mark Enverga, at Bulacan 5th District Rep. Ambrosio Cruz, Jr.

Ayon kay Speaker Romualdez pinapaturan ng mga nakita nilang imbak ng bigas na mayroong sapat na suplay at ang pagtaas sa presyo nito ay posibleng dahil hindi inilalabas ang bigas.

Sinabi ni Romualdez na mayroong mga bigas na mahigit ng tatlong buwang naka-imbak. (Joy Cantos)



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Wheat edges higher

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat prices inched higher on Wednesday, snapping a four-day run of declines, after a survey showed a sharp fall in Canadian production that could curb global supplies.

Soybean and corn prices stabilized after falling on Tuesday, when US government data showed that hot and dry weather had not damaged US crops as much as thought.

"Wheat futures have firmed today but the wheat market is focused on record supplies from Russia," a Singapore-based trader said. "It is difficult for prices to rally given the supplies from Russia."

The most active wheat contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 0.2 percent at \$6.01-1/2 a bushel. Soybeans lost 0.3 percent to \$13.88-3/4 a bushel and corn added 0.3 percent at \$4.88-1/4 a bushel.

Wheat production in Canada fell by 14.2 percent in 2023 compared to 2022, a Statistics Canada survey showed on Tuesday, due to lower-than-average precipitation and high temperatures.

However, Chicago wheat prices are down nearly 10 percent this month, with the market well supplied by cheap Russian grain. - *Reuters*



From rice to palm oil, Asian crops output seen lower

SINGAPORE- An unusually dry August has taken a toll on cereal and oilseed crops in Asia as El Nino intensified, and forecasts for lower rainfall in September are further threatening to disrupt supplies.

While wheat output forecasts are being revised lower due to dry weather in Australia, the world's second largest exporter, record-low monsoon rains are expected to reduce the volume of crops, including rice, in India, the world's biggest shipper of the grain, meteorologists and analysts said.

Insufficient rains in Southeast Asia, meanwhile, could dent supplies of palm oil, the world's most widely used vegetable oil, while extreme weather in top corn and soybean importer China is putting food output at risk.

"We are in full-blown El Nino weather in several parts of the world and it is going to intensify towards the end of the year," said Chris Hyde, a meteorologist at US-based Maxar Technologies, a climate data analytics platform.

"The weather pattern in Asia will correlate with dry El Nino conditions."

El Nino is a warming of Pacific waters which typically results in drier conditions over Asia and excessive rains in parts of North and South America.

India's monsoon rains, crucial for summer crops such as rice, sugarcane, soybeans and corn, are poised to be the weakest in eight years.

"The impact of El Nino is



Children play with a ball after rice is spread for drying at a rice mill on the outskirts of Kolkata, India. (Reuters Photo)

much greater than we had anticipated," said a senior India Meteorological Department official. "This month is going to end with a deficit of over 30 percent, marking it as the driest August on record. El Nino will also affect September's rainfall."

India, which accounts for 40 percent of global rice exports, has curbed shipments, lifting prices to 15-year highs.

Australia's wheat output estimates are being revised lower by analysts for the first time in four

years as key growing areas have had insufficient rain in August.

"Wheat production is going to be three million (metric) tons lower than our initial estimate of 33 million tons," said Ole Houe, director of advisory services at agricultural brokerage IKON Commodities. "If the dryness continue in September, we are looking at an even lower crop."

Australia has had three straight years of bumper wheat output, boosting supplies for importers such as China, Indonesia and Japan.

Rice, palm oil, sugarcane and coffee crops have received lower-than-usual rainfall in Southeast Asia, with Indonesia and Thailand the worst hit.

"Eastern parts of Indonesia and much of Thailand has had very little rain in the last 30 to 40 days," Maxar's Hyde said.

"In these areas, precipitation has been 50 percent to 70 percent of average. Most of September is going to be largely below normal rains in Thailand and Indonesia."

- Reuters

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ITC chair hopes India food export bans are short-lived

INDIA'S decision to ban exports of wheat and rice should be short-lived once food supply stabilizes in the country, said Sanjiv Puri, chairman of ITC Ltd.

The company, a major wheat exporter, saw its agriculture business revenue decline 25 percent in the April-June quarter, hit by the export bans, according to its quarterly earnings presentation.

Puri spoke to Bloomberg News on the sidelines of the B-20 Summit in New Delhi. The excerpts are lightly edited for clarity:

Outlook on India economy

BUSINESSES that are indexed to Indian consumption are fairly resilient. Anything that is more integrated with global supply chains, whether it's exports or certain commodities, there is volatility and some weakness there. What we are growing at without exports firing is a decent number.

The impact on consumption has been more inflation-led and inflation has actually been mostly imported. The second factor is climate emergency because it's led to crop failures. As inflation is moderating the latest Nielsen numbers also show some green shoots of pick up in the rural economy. What is to be monitored is the El Nino bit and the global dynamic is still uncertain, but as the inflation is cooling off consumption is picking up.

Impact of export bans

IT is impacting us. As businesses we have to be also responsible. People have to have food in the country. So we have to understand that and people have to be able to afford it. These are realities we must recognize.

I obviously hope that it is short lived. And what will enable us to export is our crops doing well, our agriculture producing more than is required so that we have the surpluses. As a

responsible corporate this is what I would like to work with the farming community on and see how we can improve the produce.

Viability of agri business

MY focus at this point of time is on value addition (rather than pure output growth that could impact prices and overall profitability). For example, we inaugurated the spices facility and we are now going to inaugurate the nicotine derivative products facility.

That's the path we are on—building capacity in medicinal and aromatic plants, horticulture and aquaculture. These are the areas of value add we are focusing on as a company. And this is more value accretive than the commodity business in any case.

Brazil's beef giant

BRAZIL's Minerva SA agreed to buy some assets from rival Marfrig Global Foods SA

for \$1.5 billion, a "pricey" deal that will create a South American beef giant. Minerva shares slumped.

The agreement to acquire 16 plants in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile will boost Minerva's cattle slaughtering capacity by 44 percent and expand its market share in the export market, the company said in a statement on Monday. While the deal could be "transformational," Morgan Stanley analysts labeled the acquisition as "pricey."

The deal comes at a time when Minerva is outperforming its larger and more diversified rivals Marfrig and JBS SA, which have been hit by a number of setbacks including high grain prices and a glut of chicken and pork. Still, shares slumped as much as 16 percent, its biggest loss since pandemic lockdowns curbed demand in March 2020.

"In the long run, it may end up positioning Minerva as a major leading South American

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force in the global trade of beef," said Morgan Stanley analysts Ricardo Alves and Lucas Mussi. "However, at least for now, given valuation, capital discipline/leverage concerns, lower carry, we think investors may be willing to ask longer-term questions later."

Minerva has already paid 1.5 billion reais for the acquisition, and JPMorgan Chase & Co. has committed to a bridge loan for the rest of the transaction, the Sao Paulo-based company said. In a presentation on Tuesday, the company added the acquisitions will expand its share of beef shipments in South America to as much as 35 percent from 20 percent now.

Increased scale will improve access to cattle and boost Minerva's power in global meat trading, Chief Executive Officer Fernando Galletti de Queiroz said in a call with analysts on Tuesday.

Topshareholders—the family holding VDO Holdings SA and the Saudi Agricultural and Livestock Investment Co.—have committed to approving the deal, which is expected to be completed within a year, Minerva said.

The acquisition, which includes 15 beef plants and one lamb, will also boost sales by nearly 80 percent to about 52 billion reais by 2024, and will immediately generate cash, Chief Financial Officer Edison Ticle said in the investor call. The deal will be fully funded by debt, fueling investor skepticism.

For seller Marfrig, offloading the plants was a way to speed up founder Marcos Molina's strategy to focus on more value-added products and processes foods. Shares surged more than 15 percent in Sao Paulo, the biggest gain in more than three years.

The transaction "came in at an attractive valuation for Marfrig" and should help in its deleveraging process, Bradesco BBI analyst Leandro Fontanesi wrote in a note.

The deal will reduce the number of Marfrig's cattle slaughtering plants in South America to four, with revenues in the region set to decline by 43 percent to 15.8 billion reais, according to a company presentation. Marfrig also expects to see higher margins as more of its sales will be tied to value-added products. *Bloomberg News*