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NEWS

PSA reports 26% hike in palay price

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) on Wednesday said the farm-gate price of unmilled rice or palay averaged P22.16 per kilogram in August, an increase of 25.8 percent from the price of P17.61 per kg that was recorded in the same period last year. The Federation of Free Farmers, however, clarified that the price cited by the PSA was for the small volume of palay usually harvested in that month. —STORY BY JORDEENE B. LAGARE

AG

By Jordeene B. Lagare
@jordeenelagare

The farm-gate price of palay (unmilled rice) averaged P22.16 per kilogram in August, an increase of 25.8 percent from P17.61 per kg in the same period a year ago.

In a report, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said all regions registered year-on-year growth rates in average farm-gate prices.

On a monthly basis, the farm-gate price rose by 14.3 percent from P19.38 per kg in July.

"[This is] probably correct

but there would have been very little palay being harvested in August since the dry season harvest is between March to May, and then farmers start planting again when the rains come in June or July," Federation of Free Farmers national manager Raul Montemayor said when asked to comment on the PSA data.

"So the price estimate could have been for very limited palay that happened to be harvested in August," he added.

Montemayor said the group is monitoring the effect of the National Food Authority's

(NFA) palay purchases and the decision to maintain tariffs on rice imports.

"Hopefully, palay prices will rebound as farmers are starting to harvest; they went down early to as low as P20 per kg for dry and P16 to P18 per kg wet after the price ceiling was imposed and the economic managers floated their proposal to reduce rice tariffs," he added.

The PSA noted Central Luzon posted the largest increment at 56.2 percent to settle at P27.54 per kg while that of the Cordillera Administrative Region slightly rose to P19.48 per kg.

"Month-on-month, all regions recorded increases in the average farm-gate prices of palay," the report said.

Caraga reported the highest growth rate at 31.6 percent while Central Visayas logged the lowest increase at 2.1 percent.

The farm-gate price is the selling price between farmers and traders largely dictated by the latter. In the Philippines, the retail price of rice is double that of the farm-gate price.

In Metro Manila, regular milled rice produced locally ranged from P40 to P42 per kg

as of Wednesday compared to P38 per kg in the past year, according to the Department of Agriculture's price monitoring.

Local well-milled rice is sold from P45 to P48 per kg against last year's P41 per kg.

Regular milled rice sourced abroad is priced at P43 per kg, higher than P38 per kg last year.

Imported well-milled rice retailed from P45 to P48 per kg against P40 per kg previously.

At present, price ceilings of P41 per kg for regular milled rice and P45 for well-milled rice are in place by virtue of Executive Order No. 39 issued by

President and Agriculture Secretary Marcos earlier.

The said directive, which took effect on Sept. 5, was meant to arrest the skyrocketing price of rice and penalize hoarding.

The NFA also announced a higher price range of P19 to P23 for dry and P16 to P19 for wet palay to improve the income of farmers and ensure ample supply of this staple food.

Previously, the buying rate stood at P16 per kg for wet and P19 per kg for dry while the selling price ranged from P23 to P27 per kg. INQ

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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YEAR-ON-YEAR DATA

STATISTICS AGENCY REPORTS 26% HIKE IN PRICE OF UNMILLED RICE

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STIFFER PENALTIES

HOUSE BILL CRACKS DOWN ON AGRICULTURAL SMUGGLING

By Julie M. Aurelio
@JMAurelioINQ

The House of Representatives has passed on final reading a measure that pushed for harsher penalties and expanded the scope of economic sabotage to include the large-scale smuggling, hoarding, profiteering and cartelizing of agrifishery and tobacco products.

Past midnight on Wednesday, 289 congressmen unanimously voted to approve on third reading the "Agri-Fishery Commodities and Tobacco Economic Sabotage Act of 2023."

The bill's passage on final reading came hours after the House received an urgent certification from President Marcos on the immediate enactment of the measure.

It sought to amend Republic Act 10845, or the 2016 Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act by proposing harsh penalties against economic sabotage through agricultural smuggling.

In a statement on Tuesday night, House agriculture and food committee chair Rep. Mark Enverga said House Bill (HB) No. 9283 also pushed to improve law enforcement, case

buildup and prosecution of acts of market abuse considered as economic sabotage.

"Through HB 9284, increasing the certainty of being arrested, prosecuted, tried and convicted would be the best deterrent and adversely impact against the operations of smugglers, hoarders and profiteers. We have improved the chances of finally convicting smugglers," Enverga said.

Speaker Martin Romualdez said the bill "will help realize the President's aspirations of affordable produce and food self-sufficiency" and that "its unanimous

passage speaks volumes."

In a statement on Wednesday, Romualdez told smugglers, hoarders and those involved in cartels that their days "are numbered."

The bill set the new minimum threshold for hoarding, profiteering, cartels and other acts of market abuse involving agrifishery products at P2.5 million.

HB 9284 proposed to amend RA 10845 by including large-scale smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, cartelizing and other acts of market abuse as acts of economic sabotage. INQ



BBM to DA: Prioritize farm-to-market road projects

The Department of Agriculture (DA) should coordinate with other agencies to expedite the construction of farm-to-market roads (FMRs), including those damaged by recent flooding, to ensure a smooth flow of goods and services, President Marcos said.

"We'll have to assess it in terms of need. Where do we need the roads most? For example, roads that are heavily used that are not in good condition but where most goods are passing need to be fixed immediately," Marcos, who is concurrently DA secretary, said during a sectoral meeting at Malacañang on Tuesday.

He said FMRs in areas that grow high-value crops should be included in the priority.

As of October last year, the DA and other government agencies had completed 67,255.46 kilometers or 51 percent of the 131,410.66-km target FMR projects, according to the Presidential Communications Office.

The PCO said 64,155.20 kms of FMRs have yet to be completed, with investment requirements of P962.325 billion.

It said there are only 46,937.1 kms of proposed FMR projects from local government units as of Aug. 1. — **Helen Flores**



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DA urged to prioritize farm-to-market roads

President Marcos has ordered the Department of Agriculture to prioritize farm-to-market road (FMR) projects based on utility and development aspects.

Marcos issued the directive when he led a sectoral meeting on the updates on the imple-

mentation of the Farm-to-Market Roads National Plan (FM-RNP) in Malacañan on Tuesday, Sept. 26.

The President, the agriculture secretary in concurrent capacity, gave the order to the DA to ensure that initiatives remain

on track under the national plan.

"We'll have to assess it in terms of need. Where do we need the roads most?" he said. "For example, roads that are heavily used that are not in good condition but where many products pass by need to ► 8

DA urged to prioritize farm-to-market roads 1◀

be fixed," he added.

President Marcos also told DA officials to coordinate with other concerned agencies to identify areas that need development and the construction of FMRs to ensure the smooth flow of goods and services.

He likewise noted that the rehabilitation and repair of FMRs damaged by flood and other natural disasters should also be considered.

"We have to be in coordination with other departments as to where are the areas that we want to improve, [where we want] to start planting high-value crops in this area. We need an FMR there because we want to improve it," he said.

Data cited by the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) showed that as of October 2022, the DA and other government agencies had completed 67,255.46 kilometers of FMR projects or 51 percent of the 131,410.66-kilometer target.

"This is necessary to service 14 million hectares of the country's

production areas for agriculture and fisheries, it said.

A total of 64,155.20 km of FMRs have yet to be completed, requiring an investment cost of ₱962.325 billion.

Agri initiatives

President Marcos said the latest developments in the agriculture sector are meant to promote the welfare of Filipino farmers.

"To prioritize our farmers, we've decided not to lower tariffs and instead develop or repair crucial farm-to-market roads where needed," he wrote on his Facebook page on Wednesday.

Marcos was referring to his decision to reject the proposal to temporarily implement rice tariff reduction to address the surge in rice prices in the market.

"It is not the right time to lower the tariff rates because the projection of world rice prices is that it will go down," he said during the meeting.

"Tariffs are generally lowered when the price is going up."

Food security

To continue to achieve food security, Marcos said the government will improve the National Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization and Industrialization Plan (NAFMIP) 2021-2030.

The decade-long plan aims to steer sector-wide growth and guide the trajectory of more detailed and operations-oriented agri-fishery development plans such as the commodity system roadmaps, Provincial Commodity Investment Plans (PCIPs), and Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUP).

It also aims to inspire the full range of private and public stakeholders to take coordinated, cohesive, and determined actions to achieve a shared vision and objectives and galvanize sector-wide public and private investments and resources. (Argyll Cyrus Geducos)



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MARCOS TO DA:

Prioritize farm-to-market roads

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered the Department of Agriculture (DA) to give priority to the construction and repair of farm-to-market road (FMR) projects to help farmers.

Marcos, who also serves as the DA secretary, issued the directive during a sectoral meeting in Malacañang on Tuesday.

The President said he wants government initiatives to remain on track with the Farm-to-Market Roads National Plan.

"To prioritize our farmers, we've decided not to lower tariffs and instead develop or repair crucial farm-to-

market roads where needed," Marcos said in a Facebook post on Wednesday.

During the meeting, the President told DA officials that the government must prioritize projects based on utility and development aspects.

"We'll have to assess it in terms of need. Where do we need the roads most? For example, roads that are heavily used that are not in good condition but so many are using it need

to be fixed," he said.

He directed DA officials to coordinate with other concerned agencies to identify areas for the development and construction of FMRs to ensure the smooth flow of goods and services.

"We have to be in coordination with other departments as to where are the areas that need to be prepared, that we want to start planting high-value crops in this area, for example, we need to put an FMR there because we need to improve it," he said.

Marcos also said the rehabilitation and repair of FMRs that were damaged by floods and other natural disasters should also be considered.

"To continue to achieve food security, we will improve the National

Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization and Industrialization Plan," he added.

As of October 2022, the DA and other government agencies have completed 67,255.46 kilometers (km) of FMR projects, 51 percent of the 131,410.66 km target.

"This is necessary to service 14 million hectares of the country's production areas for

agriculture and fisheries," Presidential Communications Secretary Cheloy Garafil said.

A total of 64,155.20 km of FMRs have yet to be completed, requiring an investment cost of P962.325 billion, the Palace official said.

"Of these, there are only 46,937.1 km of proposed FMR projects from the local government units, as of Aug. 1, 2023," she added.



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House OKs bill amending law vs agri smuggling

THE House of Representatives approved, on third and final reading, the proposed "Anti Agri-Fishery Commodities and Tobacco Economic Sabotage Act."

House Bill 9284 hurdled the final reading early Wednesday, with over 280 lawmakers voting in the affirmative, none in the negative, and no abstention.

If passed into law, the bill will amend the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. had certified the measure as urgent.

"This landmark legislation aims to boost the productivity of the agricultural sector and protect Filipino farm-

ers and agricultural enterprises from unscrupulous entities that exploit the current legal framework," said Rep. Wilfrido Enverga of Quezon province's first district in a statement on Tuesday.

Enverga is the chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food.

"House Bill 9284 seeks to improve law enforcement, case buildup, and prosecution of the range of crimes covered in the amendments. All these will make sure the heavier penalties are meted out," Enverga said.

Gabriela Women's Party-list Rep. Arlene Brosas voted yes with reservations.

REINA C. TOLENTINO



'Expanding FMR network will hike farm output'

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

[@sam_medenilla](#)

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. wants to increase the production of high-value crops by expanding the Philippines's farm-to-market road (FMR) network.

During a sectoral meeting in Malacañang last Tuesday, the chief executive ordered the Department Agriculture (DA) to coordinate with concerned government agencies and local government units (LGU) to come up with a list of areas that will be prioritized under the government's Farm-to-Market Roads National Plan.

"We have to be in coordination with other departments as to where are the areas that we want to develop and where we will start planting high-value crops in this area, for example," the chief executive said partly in Filipino.

Agriculture products in the High Value Crops Development Program include mango, banana,

coffee, cacao, and onion.

The top producing provinces in 2020 for high-value crops are Pangasinan (mango), Masbate (jackfruit), Bukidnon (pineapple), Davao Del Norte (banana), Davao City (cacao), Davao City (durian), Davao Del Sur (coffee), Sulu (coffee), Sultan Kudarat (coffee), Cotabato (saba banana).

Among those to be prioritized for FMR initiatives are roads that are heavily used, but not in good condition, as well as those damaged by flood and other natural disasters.

"We'll have to assess it in terms of need. Where do we need the roads most," Marcos said.

The government is targeting to construct 131,410.66 kilometers



BUSINESSMIRROR FILE PHOTO

(km) of FMRs, which are expected to benefit the country's 14 million hectares of agriculture and fisheries production areas.

As of October 2022, the DA and other government agencies have completed a total of 67,255.46 km or 51 percent of the said FMR projects.

A total of 64,155.20 km of FMRs has yet to be completed, requiring an investment of P962.325 billion.

Of these, only 46,937.1 km

overseas funding to construct more FMRs.

"FMR is the first step to solve some of the supply chain problems. So let us prioritize those who are producing these [food items]," Marcos said.

In 2021, food security advocacy group Tugon Kabuhayan urged LGUs to allocate at least 10 percent of their budget starting 2022 for food production programs and postharvest investments.

The group said 10 percent or about P23.4 billion of the additional P234.6 billion funds of the LGUs due to the Mandanas ruling should be allocated for improving local food systems.

It added that 60 percent of the allocation or about P14.04 billion should be invested in post-harvest infrastructure to cut the country's food waste while the remaining fund could be used to bankroll productivity enhancement programs.

"We suggest that 10 percent of the funds or P23.4 billion be allocated for this annually, especially in the countryside where most production is happening. The allocation can be adjusted once LGUs reach the desired production and post-harvest losses targets," the group said.

of proposed FMR projects were from the local government units (LGUs), as of August 1.

Also discussed in the sectoral meeting are the details of the National Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization and Industrialization Plan 2021-2030.

The initiative aims to make the country "food-and-nutrition secured" and empower local farmers and fishers.

Last July 2022, Marcos said the government will seek additional



Rejection of rice-tariffs cut seen to spare small farmers

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ [@joveemarie](#)

ALAWMAKER has strongly supported the President's decision to reject proposals on temporarily reducing tariffs on imported rice as this would spare small farmers "an act of grave cruelty" amid the peak season for harvesting.

While the government's ultimate goal is to lower rice prices, Bicol Saro Partylist Rep. Brian Raymund S. Yamsuan said this should not be done at the expense of the country's 2.4 million rice farmers, who are expected to harvest over 5 million metric tons of palay in the peak months of September and October alone.

"The decision of our president is right. It is easy to say that we should lower tariffs to bring in more imported rice and pull down rice prices in the market. But who will suffer the loss? Our farmers who toiled hard to plant but would not profit from it will be the ones to suffer," Yamsuan said.

While the lawmaker admitted as

having no expertise in economics, "common sense tells us that if you flood the market with imported rice, this would lead to depressed farmgate prices at a time when our farmers are in the midst of the harvest season."

"The band-aid solution of lowering rice tariffs at this time would be an act of grave cruelty to our farmers," added Yamsuan, whose partylist organization represents the Bicol Region, which accounts for close to 7 percent of the country's total rice production.

The solon added that lowering rice import tariffs would deprive farmers of a major source of assistance they

badly need to modernize their sector and raise their incomes.

Under Republic Act (RA) 11203 (Rice Tariffication Law), tariff collections from rice imports will go to the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF). Money in the RCEF must be used to finance the modernization of the rice sector and provide farmers with wider access to credit, training, mechanization, and technology, along with extending direct assistance to them.

Citing government data, Yamsuan said almost P23 billion was collected in import duties from rice shipments entering the country last year. In the first eight months of 2023, the Bureau of Customs has already collected P17 billion in rice import tariffs.

"That's P40 billion in 20 months, or an average of P2 billion a month. Hence, the proposal to cut rice import tariffs would starve farmers twice over—of income, which they will lose because of competition from imported rice, and of assistance and benefits they will not get because of lower tariff collections," Yamsuan said.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., who is the concurrent secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), thumbed down recommenda-

tions to cut import tariffs on rice to help stabilize the prices of the Filipino food staple. The proposal was being pushed forward by the Department of Finance. **(Story here: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/09/19/rice-tariff-cut-a-tool-vs-shortage-inflation/>)**

The Chief Executive pointed to projections that global rice prices would decrease soon, which meant this was not the right time to lower import tariffs on the grain.

Yamsuan said that on top of these projections, the DA had also reported earlier that farmers are expected to harvest 2.3 million MT of palay in September and another 2.9 million MT in October, or over 5 million MT, which would help stabilize rice prices in the market.

Along with the harvests since July, the DA expects the total local rice production to reach more than 11 million MT in the second semester of the year.

"If we lower rice tariffs in the middle of an abundant harvest season, our farmers will ask why they would still work hard when this would only lead to financial suicide. To encourage them to continue planting, they need to see that the government is implementing the right measures and cares for them," he added.



DA told to prioritize farm-to-market roads

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Tuesday directed the Department of Agriculture (DA) to ensure construction of farm-to-market road (FMR) projects is on track.

Marcos also told the DA to prioritize FMR projects based on their usefulness and development aspect, and to make sure these comply with the Farm-to-Market Roads National Plan.

"We'll have to assess it in terms of need. Where do we need the roads most? For example, roads that are heavily used, that are not in good condition but (where) many products pass through ... should be fixed," Marcos said during a sectoral meeting in Malacañang.

The DA was tasked to coordinate closely with other departments to build or repair FMRs where they are most needed.

He noted the need for FMR in areas with high value crops, while roads damaged by flood and other natural disasters should also be prioritized.

Data from the DA showed that as of October 2022, a total of 67,255.46 kilometers of FMR projects were completed. Around 64,155.20 km of FMRs have yet to be completed and require P962.325 billion to finish.

The DA said 131,410.66 km of FMRs need to be built to be able to serve 14 million hectares of the country's production areas for agriculture and fisheries.



Marcos to hear data-based arguments on rice price cap

By Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson Reporter

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. will meet next week with the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) to discuss the possible lifting of the price ceiling on rice, NEDA Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said.

"We'll more likely meet again next week because (Mr. Marcos) did say he wants us to meet again and see the numbers, see the indicators, see the outcomes versus the objectives of the price cap and then we'll make a decision," Mr. Balisacan said in chance remarks to reporters in Manila on Wednesday.

"But we all recognize there are so many moving parts, and this price cap could not be expected to last very long because that creates a lot of problems," he added.

Price caps on rice have been in force since Sept. 5 to address rising prices. The ceiling has been set at P41 per kilo for regular-milled rice and P45 per kilo for well-milled rice.

"What we want to see now is the lifting soon of the price cap. The President will announce that once we have all the information that he is asking us to show (and) to study the indicators that would be useful to inform that decision, hopefully in the next, in a week or so, maybe we can come up with those indicators and the President can make a decision," he added.

Separately, Mr. Balisacan said that the proposed tariff cut on rice imports is no longer needed amid improving market conditions.

"The risk of further price increases on the world market seems to be diminished compared to the situation we were looking at a month or two ago. So that is the context" behind the President's decision not to consider a reduction in the tariff, he said.

"Again, what you would want to do is reduce the tariff when world rice prices are increasing; increase the tariff when the world prices are decreasing to stabilize local prices and... protect our local producers, rice farmers in this particular case, and also protect our consumers, particularly the

poor, and also address inflation," he added.

Mr. Marcos late Tuesday announced that he rejected proposals to temporarily reduce rice tariffs.

"We decided with the agriculture and economic managers that... it was not the right time to lower the tariff rates because the projection of world rice prices is that it will go down. So, this is not the right time to lower tariffs," Mr. Marcos was quoted as saying in a statement.

NEDA and the Department of Finance (DoF) earlier proposed the temporary reduction of rice import tariffs to lower domestic prices. The DoF in particular proposed to slash the 35% rice import tariff to zero percent or maximum of 10%.



High prices to continue as Palace rejects tariff cuts on rice imports

THE administration's rejection of a proposal to lower tariffs on imported rice will keep the commodity expensive, with the government dependent on foreign rice to stabilize the domestic supply of the staple, a government researcher said.

Roehlano M. Briones, a senior research fellow at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), said the rejection of lower tariffs "will make imported rice more expensive."

"The tariff keeps the already elevated price of foreign rice high," he said via phone, noting that the Philippines now has "narrower options" in terms of mitigating the shortage in domestic rice.

He said the government needs to focus on "more innovative and productivity-improving agriculture and value chain intervention" to ultimately lower costs.

Instead of incentivizing farmers to make themselves more competitive in world markets, "we are conditioning them to expect increasing protection and increasing subsidies," he added.

Leonardo A. Lanzona, who teaches economics at the Ateneo de Manila, said the existence of price controls at both the retail and farmgate level makes the proposed reduction of tariffs irrelevant.

"In fact, the huge harvests now mean that none of these government regulations was needed in the first place," he said in a Facebook Messenger chat. "They should just have left the market alone, and there would not have been any dilemma about the tariff rates."

Mr. Lanzona noted that "in the guise of populism," the government has just "gone back to the inefficient system of reinstating the National Food Authority," whose power had been reduced by the Rice Tariffication Law of 2019, and "promoting extensive government interference, institutions that were dismantled after Martial Law."

Dante B. Canlas, a former chief economic planner for the Arroyo administration, said lowering the duties on rice imports throws Philippine rice farmers under the bus twice: "cheap imports put local farmers at a disadvantage (while)

duties on rice imports under the law finance Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF)," referring to the tariff-funded program to modernize farming practices.

"If RCEF declines, that's putting rice farmers at a disadvantage again," he said in a Viber message.

Farmers said they recognize the rejection of the tariff cuts as a win for the industry.

Raul Q. Montemayor, national director of the Federation of Free Farmers, rejected the need to cut tariffs or to import large volumes of rice at the moment because "the harvest is about to peak."

"We are happy about the decision," he said in a Viber message, after the Palace ruled out the tariff reduction proposal put forward by economic managers.

Even if the Philippines does not import rice until the end of December, "we will still end up with about 65 days' equivalent of stocks for carryover to next year," he said.

Mr. Montemayor said the more immediate concern now is the possible move of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s economic advisers to extend or make permanent the tariff cuts on non-ASEAN rice, corn and pork under Executive No. 10, which will lapse at the end of the year.

"And we will still have to prepare for the effects of El Niño and possible supply tightening again come July-September next year, through a combination of expanded local production and managed imports," he noted.

The President's economic team had proposed to cut the tariff on imported rice to as low as 0% from 35%.

But Mr. Marcos, according to a Palace statement issued on Tuesday night following a meeting with Cabinet officials said, "it was not the right time to lower the tariff rates because the projection of world rice prices is that it will go down."

The Palace said National Economic and Development Authority Secretary Arsenio A. Balisacan and Agriculture undersecretaries Leocadio Sebastian and Mercedita Sombilla support the President's decision. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

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Bawas-buwis sa imported bigas, tablado kay PBBM

Tablado kay Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. ang mungkahi na pansamantalang bawasan ang buwis sa inaangkat o imported na bigas.

Ito ang naging desisyon ni Marcos sa sectoral meeting sa Malakanyang kung saan iprinisinta ng National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) ang mungkahing rice tariff reduction.

Sinabi ni Marcos na napagdesisyon nila ng Department of Agriculture (DA) at economic managers na hindi napapanahong bawasan ang buwis dahil ang projection sa pandaigdigang presyo ng bigas ay pababa.

Idinagdag pa ng Pangulo na ang taripa ay ibinababa lang kapag pataas ang presyo ng produkto.

Matatandaan na inirekomenda ng NEDA ang pagbabawas sa taripa sa imported na bigas para mapababa ang presyo sa mga pamilihan.

Subalit mariin itong tinutulan ng ilang grupo ng mga magsasaka dahil pakikinabangan lang umano ng importers habang lalong babagsak ang presyo ng palay. (Gemma Garcia)



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PBBM SAYS NO TO RICE TARIFF CUT

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. bucked on Tuesday the proposal to temporarily implement rice tariff reduction in a bid to address the surge of rice prices in the market.

"We decided with the agriculture and economic managers that ... It was not the right time to lower the tariff rates because the projection of world rice prices is that it will go down. So, this is not the right time to lower tariffs. Tariffs are generally lowered when the price is going up," President Marcos said.

The President made the remarks shortly following the sectoral meeting on Tues-

day in Malacañang where NEDA presented updates on the proposed rice tariff reduction with inputs from the Department of Finance (DOF), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

Some farmer groups raised concern over some negative effects should rice tariff reduction be adopted such as that importers would mostly stand to gain with the proposal "because they are already undervaluing rice" and will only "further depress" palay prices and discourage farmers from expanding their future produc-

tion.

The NEDA earlier recommended a reduction in the tariff imposed on imported rice in a bid to help lower local rice prices in the market, which will eventually lead to the simultaneous lifting of Executive Order (EO) No. 39, imposing the mandated price ceilings on regular and well-milled rice in the market.

Under EO 39, which took effect on September 5, the mandated price ceiling on regular rice is at P41.00 per kilogram while the mandated price cap on well-milled rice is at P45.00 per kilogram.

PCO



MARCOS URGES FOCUS ON PRIORITY FARM TO MARKET ROADS

THE President led a sectoral meeting on the updates on the implementation of the said national plan, where he emphasized the need to prioritize projects based on utility and development aspects.

"We'll have to assess it in terms of need. Where do we need the roads most? For example, roads that are heavily used that are not in good condition pero andaming dumadaan na produkto ay ayusin natin," the chief executive said during a sectoral meeting on Tuesday in

Malacañang.

President Marcos also told DA officials to coordinate with other concerned agencies to identify areas for development and construction of FMRs to ensure smooth flow of goods and services.

"We have to be in coordination with other departments as to where are the areas na gusto nating pagandahin, na gusto natin we will start planting high-value crops on this area, for example, Kailangan lagyan natin ng FMR yan kasi gusto talaga

nating pagandahin," he said.

He also noted that the rehabilitation and repair of FMRs that were damaged by flood and other natural disasters should also be considered.

A total of 64,155.20 km of FMRs have yet to be completed, requiring an investment cost of P962.325 billion. Of these, there are only 46,937.1 km of proposed FMR projects from the local government units (LGUs), as of 01 August 2023.

PCO



PBBM to NFA: Follow my lead on agriculture modernization program

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. called on the National Food Authority (NFA) to follow his lead on prioritizing agricultural modernization as he acknowledged the initiatives of the agency in stabilizing the country's staple food supply.

In a message read by Department of Agriculture (DA) Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban during the NFA's 51st anniversary celebration, the President hailed the NFA for its modernization program and expressed hope that it would complement the Smarter Approaches to Reinvalidate Agriculture as an Industry in the Philippines Project, or Project SARAI.

"I share with you our high hopes in the success of Project SARAI, or the Smarter Approaches to Reinvalidate Agriculture as an Industry in the Philippines Project. Through this, we will be intensifying our efforts in providing smart and sustainable solutions for a more productive and proactive farming," the President said in his message.

"I am optimistic in the positive impacts that will be carried out by the NFA Modernization Program," he added.

Project SARAI aims to develop a national crop forecasting and monitoring system for nine priority crops, which are: rice, corn, banana, coconut, coffee, cacao, sugarcane, tomato, and soybean. It also serves as a source for the measurable, verifiable, and



connected gathering of procurement data to improve NFA warehouse management and accounting.

With the NFA Modernization Program, the agency plans to build facilities and pursue developments, including post-harvest storage and processing facilities towards a 100-day buffer stock target, rice fortification, and non-grains supply chain support facilities. The NFA also intends to transition to renewable energy sources, such as biomass and solar batteries, for enhanced power generation.

During the event, the President

acknowledged the NFA for faithfully serving the country by assuring stability, affordability, and safety of staple food supplies for over five decades.

"I extend my warmest congratulations and greetings to the officials and employees of the National Food Authority as we commemorate your 51st Anniversary," President Marcos said.

During the event, the NFA also conducted a ceremonial signing of the NFA's credit lines with the Land Bank of the Philippines and the Development Bank of the Philippines. PCO



Gov't support for aggie sector assured

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. assured the Filipino people on Tuesday that the administration is working hard to boost the agricultural sector in the Philippines and increase the local production and supply of the staple food in the country.

In his speech during the 51st anniversary of the National Food Authority (NFA), President Marcos said that the government will not falter in finding solutions to the country's agricultural issues without hurting the needs of Filipino farmers and retailers.

"The recent months have truly been challenging. However, we continue to find the best solutions to the issues that we face without compromising the needs of our farmers and retailers," President Marcos said in his speech delivered by Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban.

"We continue to relentlessly strive to bolster the agriculture sector to increase our local food production and supply. We also conducted outreach activities and extended food relief assistance to the underprivileged members of our society," he added.

President Marcos recently issued Executive Order 39, imposing the mandated PhP41.00 price cap on regular milled rice and the mandated PhP45.00 price ceiling on well-milled rice to address the recent surges of rice prices in the market.

The chief executive emphasized that the government also conducted outreach activities and extended food relief assistance to the less fortunate Filipinos and provided PhP15,000 cash

assistance to small rice retailers affected by the rice price caps.

Aside from this, President Marcos said that the government is now undertaking aggressive steps against rice smugglers and hoarders to ensure stable prices of basic commodities in the market.

"The government is also undertaking aggressive steps to mitigate matters pertaining to price stability of basic commodities, especially rice, by strengthening our law enforcement activities against smugglers, hoarders, and those who undermine our efforts to ensure food security," President Marcos said.

The chief executive extended his warmest congratulations and greetings to the officials and employees of the NFA as he lauded the agency's exceptional services in assuring the stability, affordability, and safety of the staple food supplies over the last five decades.

"I am delighted that in line with the celebration of your 51 years of service, you are launching an array of programs and projects which will definitely boost the delivery of food services for the general public," President Marcos told the NFA.

President Marcos also expressed optimism about the positive impacts that will be carried out by the NFA Modernization Program along with the agency's signing of a credit line with the Landbank and the Development Bank of the Philippines, which is "a huge leap" in the tried, tested and trusted partnership. PCO

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P15,000 aid mulled for El Niño-hit farmers

By **DELON PORCALLA** and **SHEILA CRISOSTOMO**

After *sari-sari* store owners and rice retailers, President Marcos is not discounting the possibility of granting P15,000 in cash aid to farmers gravely hit by El Niño, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) said yesterday.

"We are coordinating with the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** to make sure the intervention will arrive in the coming days. Right now, we are finishing with the small rice retailers. I am a hundred percent sure the President will want to see the shortlist with the department," Social Welfare Secretary Rex Gatchalian said.

The DSWD chief said they, along with the DA, are discussing other interventions after the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) payout of cash aid to micro rice retailers and *sari-sari* store owners selling rice.

Gatchalian said the SLP payout for *sari-sari* store owners will start on Sept. 29, following Malacañang's imposition of a price cap on regular and well-milled rice through Executive Order 39.

The DA will be the one to identify the SLP farmer-beneficiaries who will be most affected by the El Niño phenomenon.

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Gov't eyeing ₱15,000 El Niño subsidy for farmers

By ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) confirmed that the Marcos administration plans to provide a cash subsidy of ₱15,000 each to farmers that may be severely affected by El Niño.

DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian said the agency is in talks with the Department of Agriculture (DA) for additional inter-

► 9

Gov't eyeing ₱15,000 El Niño subsidy for farmers 1◀

ventions following the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) payout for micro rice retailers and "sari-sari" storeowners.

"We are coordinating with the Department of Agriculture to make sure the intervention will arrive in the coming days. Right now, we are finishing the payout for small rice retailers. I am 100 percent sure President Marcos will want to see the shortlist with the department," Gatchalian said in a television interview on Sept. 26.

He said the DSWD can implement an SLP-cash aid payout mechanism, similar to the subsidy for small and micro rice retailers, with the list provided by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Gatchalian said the DA will be responsible for the identification of

SLP farmer-beneficiaries who will be most affected by El Niño.

Likewise, the DSWD initiated Project LAWA, or Local Adaptation to Water Access, in Davao de Oro, Ifugao, and Antique on Aug. 31, which aims to enhance community resilience against El Niño.

Project LAWA is a government initiative aimed at reducing drought and dry spell impacts by establishing small farm reservoirs, which will be led by communities.

Through this initiative, the DSWD will offer financial support to the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized families of indigenous peoples, farmers, and fisherfolk through cash-for-training and cash-for-work, in exchange for their work in constructing alternative water resources.

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Zubiri pushes rice production zones

SENATE President Juan Miguel "Migz" Zubiri said the need to establish rice production zones is crucial for the Philippines to achieve rice self-sufficiency.

"I have had discussions with the President (Ferdinand Marcos Jr.) about the establishment of rice production zones across the country, with each overseen by a dedicated undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture," Zubiri said

in a speech during the Philconsa (Philippine Constitution Association) Day and Senate Night sponsored by the Manila Overseas Press Club on Tuesday.

"And I promised the President that with close supervision over these rice production zones, within 90 days, we can have a bountiful harvest of rice," Zubiri added.

► **RiceA8**



■ Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri. PHOTO BY J. GERARD SEGUIA

■ RICE FROM A1

Zubiri

The senator said rice, a major staple in the Philippines, can be harvested fast, unlike sugarcane, pineapple or other crops that take almost a year to grow.

He called for support for Marcos' agricultural initiatives, noting the Senate's passing of the proposed amendments to the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act that will protect local

producers and consumers from agricultural criminals.

"We have been a very busy Senate, occupied with the passage of the priority measures of the administration, as well as the advocacy bills of our colleagues. I would like to put on record, though — we are not as fast as the House of Representatives. I have to salute the Speaker; they are doing a great job passing legislation very quickly there, as he said earlier," Zubiri added.

Philconsa President and House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez

was among the event's speakers, along with Philippine Ambassador to the United States Jose Manuel Romualdez, MOPC vice chairman and Philconsa governor.

"Since the start of the 19th Congress, we, along with our counterparts in the House, are proud to have passed high-impact legislation that addresses both the most urgent needs of our people and the long-term development that we need to pursue for the nation," the senator added.

BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO



Farmer makes it big with lettuce

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

KARIZA Mae Therese Baclig from Gonzaga, Cagayan, is among the hardworking beneficiaries of the Young Farmers Challenge (YFC) program of the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** who continues to expand her agribusiness operation.

She started with an indoor farming setup that uses artificial lighting to grow healthy and fresh lettuce for daily consumption and is now the owner of Innergrow Hydroponic Farm located in Cagayan.

It all began in 2021 when Baclig became one of the recipients of a P50,000 startup capital for her proposed agribusiness venture.

While she got her formal training in advanced hydroponics at the Farmers Technology Agricultural Learning Center (FarmTech), Baclig's initial business proposal only entailed lettuce production. She said FarmTech offers trainings and online classes on the science of growing crops efficiently. Topics discussed at Farmtech include natural farming, advanced aquaponics/hydroponics, composting, urban gardening, fruit tree propagation, mushroom production, mushroom processing and basic

hydroponics.

"I started making lettuce salad rolls with homemade roasted sesame dressing, which I think was very much enjoyed by my customers," Baclig said.

She then promoted her products via social media and by word-of-mouth, and joining trade fairs.

"I also displayed once my lettuce farm setup and lettuce salad rolls during a Kadiwa trade fair at Robinsons Mall in Tuguegarao City," Baclig said.

Since then, she saw an increase in the demand for her salad rolls "which even led me to buy hydroponically grown lettuce from my fellow growers."

"Due to a considerable supply needed by some samgyupsal stores, I decided to expand my agri-enterprise and put up a large-scale production in my hometown in Gonzaga, Cagayan," she said.

With two samgyupsal restaurants regularly buying her lettuce, her production of salad needed employing a technical personnel, a regular farm helper and an on-call helper.

"I also started offering a pick-and-pay system where my customers are allowed to go around the 144-square-meter greenhouse to pick locally grown lettuce and pay for their harvest," Baclig added.

According to the DA-Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Division in Region 2 (Cagayan Valley), Baclig is committed to scaling up her operations that is evident in her recent accomplishments.

One of her recent accomplishments is getting included in Top 10 micro, small and medium enterprises under the Bank of the Philippine Islands Small Enterprise Acceleration Lab-Small Enterprise Growth Agenda competition and receiving a total of P120,000 in grants on top of a mentorship program.

Baclig is also currently an incubatee of the Agribusiness and Developed Processed Products-Technology Business Incubator or ADePt-TBI.

"I believe that young farmers can greatly contribute to the overall agricultural productivity of the

country," she said, adding that the government programs like the YFC continue encouraging more youth to engage in agribusiness.

To be relaunched

The YFC program of DA supports and empowers young farmers and fisherfolk to be active partners in the country's pursuit of food security and agricultural development.

It offers financial grants or assistance and business development services to the youth so they can pursue or level up their agribusiness ventures.

Now in its third year, the DA, through the Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service (DA-AMAS) in collaboration with the office of Sen. Maria Imelda Josefa "Imee" Marcos and the Government Service Insurance System, will launch today, September 28, the YFC program.

With Marcos as the principal sponsor, the YFC program has provided a total of P149.25 million in starting capital to 2,955 young farmers for their various agribusiness ventures.

In addition to this, the DA-AMAS also provides various business development services to ensure youth farmers will con-



■ Kariza Mae Therese Baclig, owner of Innergrow Hydroponic Farm.
PHOTO FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

tinue and upscale their respective operations through coaching and mentoring, local and international product expositions and assistance with business registrations, among others.

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LESS IMPORTS A vendor weighs rice at the Marikina City public market on Sept 3, 2023. The US Department of Agriculture said it expects the Philippines to decrease rice imports amid high global prices and the imposition of a price ceiling by the Marcos administration. PHOTO BY ISMAEL DE JUAN



editorial

'High rice prices bring risk of social unrest'

THE rice riots in Japan, also known as Kome Sodo, were started by a group of women who were protesting the surging rice prices. Landlords and rice merchants, anticipating the dispatch of troops to Siberia, began rice speculation, causing prices to skyrocket. The women began with peaceful petitioning, but when workers who were angry about the high rice prices joined the cause, it led to a nationwide uprising, estimated to have involved some 10 million people. The military ultimately subdued the rioters, but the uprising led to the collapse of the Terauchi-Masatake administration.

The Progressive Alliance of Liberia called for a peaceful demonstration in Monrovia to protest the proposed increase in rice prices. On April 14, 1979, about 2,000 activists began what was planned as a peaceful march. However, more than 10,000 "back street boys" joined the march and quickly transformed the orderly procession into an orgy of destruction. Widespread looting of retail stores and rice warehouses occurred, and damage to private property was estimated to have exceeded \$40 million. Troops were called in to reinforce the police units. In 12 hours of violence, at least 40 demonstrators and rioters were killed, and more than 500 were injured.

From Bloomberg: "High rice prices, which have been fueled recently by India's export ban, bring the risk of political instability in Asia and Africa, according to the head of a United Nations agency. 'Rice, especially in Africa, can certainly bring potential conflict or social unrest, which at this moment in time would be quite dangerous, Alvaro Lario, who leads the International Fund for Agricultural Development, said in an interview in New York.'"

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has certified as urgent a bill imposing stiffer penalties against "agricultural economic sabotage," Malacañang said on Thursday. This after the Chief Executive sent a letter to Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" F. Zubiri on Wednesday certifying as urgent the approval of Senate Bill 2432, which will repeal Republic Act 10845, or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016. **(Read the BUSINESSMIRROR report, "PBBM certifies as urgent bill vs agri economic sabotage," September 22, 2023).**

"The need to facilitate the passage of this important piece of legislation is imperative, especially now that the country is beset by rising prices and shortages in agricultural products partly due to nefarious acts of smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel," the letter read.

SB 2432 mandates the creation of the Anti-agricultural Economic Sabotage Council. It also defined the crime of agricultural economic sabotage, which will include smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel of agricultural and fishery products. Those engaged in the said illegal acts will face stiff penalties, including life imprisonment and a fine of thrice the value of the agricultural and fishery products.

"When the offender is a juridical person, criminal liability shall be attached to all officers who participated in the decision that led to the commission of the crime, with a penalty of perpetual absolute disqualification to engage in any business involving importation, transportation, storage and warehousing, and domestic trade of agricultural and fishery products."

Assuring the Filipino people that his administration is working hard to boost the country's agricultural production, Marcos said the government will not falter in finding solutions to the country's agricultural issues without hurting the needs of Filipino farmers and retailers. "The recent months have truly been challenging. However, we continue to find the best solutions to the issues that we face without compromising the needs of our farmers and retailers," he said in his speech at the 51st anniversary of the National Food Authority on Tuesday.

We commend the President for working with Congress to address the sensitive issue of soaring rice prices. The people want to see him succeed in his fight against the powerful rice cartel and hoarders who keep on manipulating the prices of rice, sugar and onions. It would do well for the administration to also empower the Philippine Competition Commission to check industry players and dismantle the rice cartel.

Soaring rice prices and food shortages have contributed to past unrest in other countries. Apart from the rice riots earlier mentioned, surging wheat prices helped spark the Arab Spring that toppled rulers in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen.

We don't want to see any form of social unrest, much less a rice riot, in the country. That's why it's important for the government to heed the UN's warning that "high rice prices bring risk of social unrest."

The ultimate solution to high prices of rice is to invest in our rice farmers and help them improve their production. This will create jobs and cut our poverty rate. More importantly, it will also help strengthen the country's long-term food security.

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FPA warns farmers against use of unregistered fertilizers

THE Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority (FPA) has warned farmers against purchasing and using fertilizers, pesticides and other agricultural chemicals that are unregistered and have no valid certificate of product registration (CPR).

FPA, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture, recently issued an advisory to urge farmers not to use the unregistered and mislabeled fertilizers and pesticides. It was signed by

FPA Executive Director Julieta B. Lansangan.

"Section 8 of Presidential Decree No. 1144 [PD No. 1144] states that it shall be unlawful for any handler of pesticides, fertilizer and other agricultural chemicals or for any farmers, planter or end-user of the same as the case may be...to deal in pesticides and/or fertilizers which have not been previously registered with FPA, or which registration has expired and has been suspended

or revoked," the advisory read.

FPA said Section 9 of the same also provides that "[n]o pesticides, fertilizer, or other agricultural chemical shall be exported, imported, manufactured, formulated, stored, distributed, sold or offered for sale, transported, delivered for transportation or used unless it has been duly registered with the FPA..."

The advisory from the agency included photos of the following products that farmers should

avoid: Jumana Soil Conditioner, Aqua Oro, Pest-X and CEG Magic Foliar.

"Considering that the above-mentioned product has not gone through the evaluation process of FPA, the agency cannot assure its quality and safety," the advisory read.

"Hence, all concerned establishments are warned not to distribute, advertise, or sell the aforementioned product, otherwise, appropriate penalties

and sanctions shall be strictly imposed."

FPA urged all its regional and provincial personnel as well as law enforcement agencies and local government units to ensure that the products are not sold in their areas.

"Moreover, the Bureau of Customs is urged to restrain the entry of unregistered imported products," the advisory read.

The FPA said farmers and other users of agricultural chemicals may visit its website to check if a certain product is registered with the agency.



'Tariff cuts could slash rice farmers' income by P8/kg'

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS [@jearcalas](#)

PLANTERS could lose almost P8 per kilogram due to the decline in farmgate prices if the proposed reduction in tariff was approved, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

In its position paper submitted to the Tariff Commission, the DA expressed "reservation" in supporting the proposal by the private sector to reduce the tariff on rice imports due to various factors.

For one, the agency said lower tariffs would pull down the domestic farmgate prices of paddy rice or palay.

Citing its analysis, the DA said reducing rice tariffs to as low as 10 percent would slash farmgate prices by about P6 per kg.

The drop in farmgate prices is the result of the projected reduction in wholesale rice prices, which was estimated at an average of P9 per kg at a tariff rate of 10 percent, according to the DA.

"By rule of thumb where wholesale price is twice their farmgate price, the proposed tariff reduction may pull down farmgate prices of palay by about P6 per kg," read the DA's position paper dated September 25, a copy of which was obtained by the BUSINESSMIRROR.

The DA said the lower farmgate prices of dry palay would translate into lower profit margin for Filipino rice farmers.

Rice farmers stand to lose P7.82 for every kilogram of palay they produced, considering that the production cost is now at P13.55 per kg.

At an average yield of 4.06 metric tons (MT) per hectare, rice farmers' income per hectare would fall to

P31,700 from P55,400 or a difference of P23,700, according to the DA's paper.

Worse, the DA's paper indicated that the projected profit losses of rice farmers would even be bigger if world rice prices fall below current market levels and are only levied with a 10 percent tariff.

"The analysis also implies that farmers will have narrower profit margin at 10 percent tariff rate should world prices fall below \$614 per MT for 5 percent broken rice and P584 per MT for 25 percent broken rice given their current production cost of P13.55 per kg," the position paper read.

Furthermore, the DA sounded the alarm about the tariff revenue losses that the national government would incur if the rice tariff would be lowered. This, the agency said, will translate into a smaller fund that will be allotted for cash assistance for rice farmers.

The DA estimated that the state would only be able to collect P6 billion in rice tariffs if the tariff rate is reduced to 10 percent, based on the assumption that the import volume would be the same as last year when it reached 3.8 million metric tons (MMT).

"This will be about P15 billion less than the tariff revenue gained in 2022. This means fewer funds, possibly none in excess of P10 billion, will be made available for the Rice Farmer Financial Assistance [RFFA] or other programs/activities as provided for in the [rice trade liberalization law] in 2024 and beyond," the agency said.

The RTL law created the rice competitiveness enhancement fund (RCEF) that would earmark P10 billion for the development of the rice industry even if rice tariff collections fall below P10 billion. However, if the national government will not collect any excess rice tariff collections beyond P10 billion, then the cash assistance program for rice farmers will not be funded.

Under existing laws and regulations, the RFFA gets its fund from the rice tariffs collected in excess of P10 billion.

'Sufficient stocks'

THE DA also warned that the "intent" of the proposed rice tariff reduction to make "available more affordable rice" may not take effect "immediately."

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'Tariff cuts could slash rice farmers' income by P8/kg'

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It said traders, who imported rice at higher

price levels, will just continue to sell their old stocks and "possibly classify them as premium rice that command higher prices."

The DA also cautioned that the "announcement" of lower rice tariffs "could drive" global rice prices to further rise, which would "negate" the "supposed gains from the tariff reduction."

The agency maintained that the Philippines and other countries have sufficient rice stocks.

The DA said its "expected" milled rice output this year of 13.1 MMT together with imported rice would bring the total grain supply to 17.4 MMT.

Rice stock by the end of the year is expected to reach 2.58 MMT which would be enough to cover 69 days of the country's consumption requirement.

The Department of Agriculture added that based on outstanding sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance (SPSICs) issued for rice imports as of mid-September, at least 1.83 MMT of rice "remains valid to arrive in the last quarter."

"Even if only 50 percent of this volume gets into the country by November, the ending

stocks will increase to 3.5 [MMT], adding 25 days more to the 69 days of buffer stocks," it said.

The DA also said the proposed tariff reduction is "ill-timed" since the country's main harvest season has already started and lower tariff rates would "jeopardize" the farmer's income.

"Considering our analyses based on available data and other information, the Department of Agriculture cannot support the proposed reduction of the [most favored nation] tariff on rice at this time," the DA said.

The DA submitted its position paper a day before President Marcos Jr., who is the concurrent agriculture secretary, announced that he rejected the proposal of his economic managers to temporarily reduce rice tariffs due to the projected downward trend in the international prices of the staple.

(Related story: businessmirror.com.ph/2023/09/27/marcos-rejects-rice-tariff-cut-proposal/).



NIA eyes 183 solar-powered irrigation sites

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) said 183 sites are in the pipeline for the development and construction of solar-powered irrigation (SPI) projects next year.

These projects cost P1.72 billion.

In a statement, NIA said the 183 SPI projects are capable of irrigating 2,168 hectares of new areas.

NIA added next year's target is higher compared to the 147 potential SPI projects set for this year with a total project cost of P1.64 billion.

NIA said as of September 15, only 17 of the 147 target SPI projects for 2023 have been completed. These cost P117.36 million.

These projects provide irrigation to 830 hectares of agricultural land nationwide, benefitting 801 farmers.

NIA said it strives to utilize the full potential of its irrigation facilities, dams and reservoirs for



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

agro-tourism, aquaculture and renewable energy sources.

NIA earlier signed a memorandum of agreement with the PPP Center on a partnership that will maximize technical services and

capacity-building for the utilization of public-private partnership (PPP) modalities for irrigation projects.

NIA earlier said at least 50 potential projects have been iden-

tified for PPP with seven revenue streams including hydroelectric power, solar power, aquaculture, wind energy, bulk water supply, water treatment and carbon credits. - **Jed Macapagal**



Guidelines on vaccine vs ASF, bird flu out soon

THE Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) has finished the final draft of the guidelines on the administration of vaccines against the African swine fever (ASF) and avian influenza (AI).

The final draft has been submitted to Department of Agriculture (DA) legal team for clearance, said Joanna Marie David, BAI veterinary epidemiology section head, at the third quarter meeting of the National Sectoral Committee on Poultry and Livestock last week.

Once cleared, David said, the guidelines will be submitted to Domingo Panganiban, DA senior undersecretary.

"For the AI vaccine adaptation, there are three companies endorsed by the BAI to the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) for the importation of vaccine but as of

now, there seems to be no SPS (sanitary and phytosanitary) import clearance that has been released," David said.

Joshua Cruz of the BAI-National ASF Prevention and Control Program said the completion of trial testing for the ASF vaccine is due this week of September or early October.

The National Sectoral Committee on Poultry and Livestock also passed a resolution recommending that the FDA and BAI provide reports on the importation of 300,000 doses of ASF vaccine and its dissemination.

BAI data as of September 20 showed that nine regions, 17 provinces, 45 municipalities and 117 barangays have active ASF cases, while eight regions, 15 provinces, 77 municipalities and 165 barangays have active AI cases. - **Jed Macapagal**



DSWD eyeing P15K cash aid for El Niño-hit farmers

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

THE national government is looking at the possible grant of a P15,000 cash assistance to farmers who will be severely affected by the El Niño phenomenon, Social Welfare Secretary Rex Gatchalian said yesterday.

Gatchalian said the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is now discussing the initiative with the **Department of Agriculture (DA)**.

"Nag-uusap na kami ng Department of Agriculture para masigurado natin na 'yung intervention na 'yan ay papasok pa sa mga darating na araw (We are coordinating with the Department of Agriculture to make sure the intervention will arrive in the coming days)," said Gatchalian in a statement.

He said the DA will identify the farmer-beneficiaries who will be most affected by the expected dry spell that the El Niño will cause.

The weather bureau has said that the dry spell is expected to intensify in the last quarter of 2023 towards the first quarter of 2024.

Gatchalian said at present, the DSWD is focused on the distribution of the P15,000 cash grant under the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) for small and micro rice retailers and sari-sari store

owners affected by the implementation of the rice ceiling under Executive Order 39.

Under EO 39, the government imposed a price cap of P41 per kilo on regular-milled rice and P45 per kilo on well-milled rice.

In an interview during the state network's Bagong Pilipinas program, Gatchalian said the DSWD has disbursed close to P100 million to around 7,000 retailers nationwide who have already received the P15,000 cash grant.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), which prepared the list of retailer beneficiaries, estimates the number of beneficiaries to reach 10,000.

He said they have already started the distribution of cash grants to sari-sari store owners last Monday, with around 2,000 sari-sari store owners expected to benefit from the SLP.

Gatchalian said the DTI submits the beneficiary list to DSWD on a weekly basis as they first verify if the beneficiaries are affected and implement the price cap.

He said the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), meanwhile, is helping with the identification of the sari-sari store owners.

As this developed, DSWD Assistant Secretary Romel Lopez

said Gatchalian will join President Marcos Jr. in the rollout of the Walang Gutom 2027: Food Stamp Program (FSP) in Caraga Region and the distribution of premium quality Jasmine rice to more than 4,000 beneficiaries in Dinagat Island, Surigao City, and Dapa, Surigao del Norte, all on Friday.

"Similar with the beneficiaries from Tondo, the new batch of beneficiaries from Caraga will be able to use their Electronic Benefit Cards to purchase a combination of nutritious food items from DSWD-accredited partner merchants such as the Kadiwa ng Pangulo stalls," Lopez said.

The beneficiaries under the FSP pilot implementation will receive food credits worth P3,000 per month for six months.

The government hopes to fully implement the program next year. It targets to assist one million poor families.

Gatchalian reiterated that no actual cash is given to the beneficiaries but food credits through their Electronic Benefit Cards. The food credits can be exchanged for nutritious and healthy food items from accredited stores and Kadiwa ng Pangulo stalls.

In order to be able to regularly receive their monthly food credits, beneficiaries are required to participate in nutrition education

sessions, attend skills training from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and join job fairs organized by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

The FSP is undertaken by the DSWD in partnership with the World Food Program (WFP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) secretary Arsenio Balisacan said the President's decision to reject the proposed rice tariff cut was due to improving global data on rice, compared to when the proposal was made weeks ago.

"In the last couple of weeks, the Department of Agriculture showed us that world prices of rice have started to go down, the global rice production... is a bit better than what was previously the case when we were looking at the data," Balisacan told reporters on Wednesday.

"The data then that we were looking at was showing negative growth in global rice production because of anticipation of the El Niño, but many countries that have now produced their production data show that the harvest was quite good, better than initially expected, and of course that changed the whole scenario," he added. —
With Angela Celis



Contractor pinalagan alegasyong ghost project sa NIA

MARIING pinabulanan ng isa sa may-ari ng isang construction company ang alegasyong sangkot sila sa anumang ghost project partikular na sa **National Irrigation Authority (NIA)**.

Ayo kay Mary Mae Sebastian, isa sa may-ari ng P.L. Sebastian Construction na mayroong tanggapan sa Inayawan, Sta. Cruz Davao del Sur, siyam na proyekto na ang nasungkit sa pamahalaan simula nang lumahok sa mga bidding.

Kabilang dito ang Construction/Improvement of Maguinadanao-Sultan Kudarat Bdry, Lebak-Kalamansi Road sa ilalim ng Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH)

noong Mayo 2009 hanggang Disyembre 2011, Construction/Improvement of Malabang-Sulatin Gumander Road sa ilalim ng DPWH noong Setyembre 2003 hanggang Disyembre 2007, Contract Package 3 Compostela-New Bataan-Liboton Road, Compostela Valley sa ilalim ng DPWH noong Disyembre 2000 hanggang Nobyembre 2003, ang Widening (2 to 4 lanes) of Maniki Bridge ad approaches along Tagum—Panabo Circumferential Road Davaodel Norte sa ilalim ng DPWH noong Hulyo 2018 hanggang Nobyembre 2021 at marami pang iba.

Binigyang-diin ni Sebastian na lahat ng

kanilang proyekto sa pamahalaan ay natapos sa takdang panahon.

Bukod dito ang kanilang mga materyales na ginamit ay pawang akma aniya sa mga proyektong pinapasok nila.

Ang paglililaw ng mga Sebastian ay ginawa matapos na ipatawag ng Senado ukol sa imbestigasyon sa privilege speech ni Senador Raffy Tulfo sa iregularidad sa mga irrigation projects ng NIA.

Handa rin aniya ang mga Sebastian na makipagtulungan sa pamahalaan upang matukoy kung sino ang pumalpak sa mga proyekto at bahagi ng mga ghost project.



Gov't to discuss lifting of rice price caps

By **LOUELLA DESIDERIO**

The government is likely to meet next week to discuss the implementation and lifting of the price caps on rice, according to the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA).

"We'll more likely meet again next week because he (President Marcos) did say he wants us to meet again and see the numbers, see the indicators, see the outcomes vs. the objectives of the price caps and then we'll make a decision," NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan told reporters yesterday.

Balisacan said the agency

would want to see the price caps on rice lifted soon.

"We all recognize that there are so many moving parts and these price caps could not be expected to last very long because that creates a lot of problems," he said.

Under Executive Order 39, price caps were imposed on regular rice at P41 per kilogram and P45 per kilogram for well-milled rice amid increasing prices.

The price caps took effect on Sept. 5.

"The President will announce that once he has all the information that he is asking us to show, to study, indicators that will be useful to inform

that decision. Hopefully, in the next, in a week or so, we can come up with those indicators and the President can make the decision," Balisacan said.

Life terms for hoarders

The House of Representatives has approved on third and final reading the bill expanding and strengthening the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016 or Republic Act 10845, which provides life imprisonment as penalty for hoarders and price manipulators.

House Bill 9284 or the Anti Agri-Fishery Commodities and Tobacco Economic

Sabotage Act obtained 289 votes from administration lawmakers at past midnight on Wednesday, where rice smuggling, as well as other products, can be classified as economic sabotage punishable by life imprisonment.

"We want to send a chilling effect on these cartels that have been operating for decades. We really mean business this time. And our primary task here is to protect the welfare of the masses – provide them with the most affordable goods in the market," the Speaker said.

Last week, Romualdez gave assurance that the measure, part of 20 bills listed by the

Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council for passage this December, will be approved on third and final reading before Congress goes on recess on Sept. 30.

The Speaker said once the anti-agricultural smuggling measure becomes a law, it would protect farmers and fishermen from smugglers, especially in times when prices are manipulated and agricultural products are hoarded.

He said the proposed law would also benefit the public in terms of stable prices as it would discourage hoarding and price manipulation.

"We have to work on and

pass this measure as expeditiously as we can," he added.

"Our goal is to make sure there will be conviction and final judgment on smuggling cases. As highlighted by our resource persons, the sad reality is that no one has been convicted of smuggling," House agriculture panel chairman Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga said.

According to him, there are many salient features of the substitute bill, saying the "major thrusts are the expansion of the coverage of the current law to include other products that are often being smuggled and hoarded." – **With Delon Porcalla, Bella Cariaso**



PH total factor productivity in agri and climate change

OF the many challenges the global agriculture sector is facing, climate change is perhaps the most magnified. And this is for good reason, as extreme weather conditions can wreak havoc on food systems, affecting both producers and consumers.

A study paper by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) posted on its website clearly states the need to mitigate the impact of climate change and how it affects agricultural total factor productivity (TFP).

Titled "Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation 2022: Reforming Agricultural Policies for Climate Change Mitigation," it identified the Philippines as among the countries needing climate change mitigation measures and an improvement in agricultural TFP.

Let me first discuss the need to improve the country's TFP. Specifically, the OECD paper said that Philippine TFP growth was slower than the global average.

The United States Department of Agriculture-Economic Research Service (USDA-ERS) has a clear definition of TFP: "TFP measures the amount of agricultural output produced from the combined set of land, labor, capital and material resources employed in farm pro-



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duction. If total output is growing faster than total inputs, then the total productivity of the factors of production (i.e., total factor productivity) is increasing."

The USDA, through its website (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/>), also has findings up to 2020 of the TFP of almost all countries and territories, with the Philippines having a TFP index of 101. More than 400 countries and territories were studied by the USDA-ERS.

In 2016, the Philippines had a score of 99, and 103 for 2017 to 2019. Hence, the TFP score of 103 for three straight years prior to the pandemic was the highest for the Philippines.

Notably, the OECD paper said that from 2019 to 2021, the government's support to farmers was one of the highest among emerging nations as a share of gross farm receipts.

"Support to farmers in the Philippines as a share of gross farm receipts averaged 27.1 percent in 2019-2021. This is higher than the OECD average and one of the highest among emerging

economies covered in this report," it added.

What surprised me is the Philippines got a higher TFP index number than Thailand's 98 in 2020 but Myanmar got a higher 103. In Southeast Asia, Brunei has the highest TFP of 125 followed by Vietnam with 118, Cambodia with 111, Indonesia with 110 and Laos with 108. Besides Thailand, the Southeast Asian countries with lower TFP index numbers than the Philippines were Timor-Leste with 99 and Malaysia with 97.

In Asia, the highest TFP index for 2020 was garnered by Mongolia with 143 while India got 117 for the same year.

More reforms needed

While the OECD cited that the Philippines had a better TFP number among some Asian countries, it noted the need to undertake more reforms in our agriculture sector especially now that extreme weather conditions are negatively impacting agriculture.

Here is what the OECD recommended for the Philippine agriculture sector to level up and become resilient to climate change: Accelerate climate change mitigation policies; allocate more funds to deliver more services to food producers to increase their

productivity; increase long-term investments in infrastructure and research and development (R&D); institute a holistic approach to disaster risk management where policy objectives cuts across programs and institutions; and enhance biosecurity against diseases and pests.

To accelerate climate change mitigation policies, the OECD said the Philippines needs to accelerate the development and implementation of climate change mitigation policies for agriculture. This includes the commitment of the country under its 2021 Nationally Determined Contribution to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 75 percent by 2020 and 2030 compared to business-as-usual emission projection.

"Current policy settings focus on adapting to climate change rather than mitigating GHG emissions. Given its ambitious but conditional mitigation commitments, the Philippines will benefit from membership in international mechanisms collaborating on mitigation solutions, such as the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases and the newly launched Global Methane Pledge," the OECD said.

There is also a need to shift to a policy to allocate more funds for the increased or expanded delivery

of services to food producers to increase their productivity. The OECD even cited funding the interventions of the National Food Authority to support the prices of palay (unmilled rice), through buffer stocking, as money not spent wisely.

"The budget financing these interventions could be more efficiently spent on direct income support and to finance general services to improve productivity and climate adaptation and resilience in the sector, while bolstering social measures for the most vulnerable consumers," it added.

For increasing long-term investments in infrastructure and R&D, the OECD said that both should result in leveling up productivity in the agriculture sector. It cited that decades of not investing adequately for both has resulted in the Philippines having slower TFP growth than the global average and many countries and territories in Asia.

For instituting a holistic approach to disaster risk management, the OECD pointed out that the Philippines was susceptible to typhoons, tropical storms and flooding, necessitating the need to assess the current risk management tools. This includes assessing the extent of insurance and cash-transfer schemes in encouraging

risk-reducing decision-making among food producers.

"Evaluation should be used to improve policy design and delivery. Support for climate-smart agricultural innovation and advisory services should be prioritized," it said.

For improving biosecurity and disease control measures, the recommendation is to require coordination among local authorities and providing advisory services to stakeholders.

Measures to mitigate the impact of climate change on agriculture will definitely have a positive impact on agriculture, but let us not also forget the other factors that can also make farming and fishing more productive: Clustering of fragmented farmers, forming partnerships with major private sector players, giving food producers better market access including the export market, crop diversification, more credit support, adapting regenerative agriculture, among others.

While the initiatives I mentioned are primarily aimed at improving the income of food producers, these will also improve their capabilities to deal with extreme weather conditions as they can establish better farming systems that are both profitable and resilient.



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PH hybrid rice impress Asia-Pacific seed producers

A FIELD study tour organized by over 50 member countries of the Asia-Pacific Seeds Association (APSA) left the Philippines on Sept. 23, 2023 very impressed with the country's milestones and achievements in hybrid rice seeds production as well as the close collaboration among the sector's stakeholders.

Frisco Malabanan, current APSA executive committee member who is with the government's Masagana Rice Industry Development Program, initiated the first field study tour in the Philippines. He was a former chairman of the Special Interest Group on Field Crops.

Headquartered in Bangkok, APSA is the largest regional seed association in the world with more than 600 members, according to its website.

It promotes sustainable agriculture through the development, production and trade of quality seeds within, to and from the Asia-Pacific region and continues to maintain strong links with several key international organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization, CGIAR institutions, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Trade Organization.

Heidi Gallant, executive director of APSA, provided more insights into what the association means to its members who represent the entire spectrum of the seed industry — both the public and private sectors — including national seed

associations, government agencies, public and private seed companies, and associate members, which represent organizations outside of the Asia region.

Majority of its members are seed enterprises, including breeders, producers, distributors, retailers, exporters and importers. Countries with the highest number of members are China (20 percent), India (19 percent), Pakistan (7 percent), Bangladesh (7 percent), Japan (7 percent), Thailand (4 percent), South Korea (4 percent) and Chinese Taipei (4 percent).

Of the 15 delegates who joined the just-concluded field study tour, three companies were from China and others were from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Malabanan said the APSA study tour coincided with the holding of the 16th National Rice Technology Forum (NRTF) of the private sector group, Rice Board, in Hagonoy, Davao del Sur. It showcased clustered demo farms of hybrid rice companies, soil nutrition and digital companies involved in the rice sector.

The delegates were impressed by how the Philippines could pool all seed production companies in one site during the NRTF tour in Davao Sur, which Malabanan said was a result of the close collaboration between government and private companies.

PNA

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Average farmgate price of palay up nearly P5/kg in Aug

THE average farmgate price of unmilled rice was higher by almost P5 per kilogram in August compared with the previous year's level, according to the latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Based on its Farm Prices Survey, PSA said the average farmgate price of palay last month reached P22.16 per kilogram, nearly 26 percent higher than the P17.61 per kg recorded a year ago.

Month-on-month, data showed

that the average farmgate price of palay went up by 14.3 percent from P19.38 per kg posted in July.

"Among regions, the highest farmgate price of palay during the month was recorded in Region 3 [Central Luzon] at P27.54 per kilogram, while the lowest farmgate price of palay was posted in Region 8 [Eastern Visayas] at P18.04 per kilogram," the agency said.

The highest farmgate price of palay was recorded in Central Luzon, the country's rice granary,

where it reached P27.54 per kg. The lowest farmgate price was posted in Region 8 where traders bought it an average of P18.04 per kg.

Inflation data released by the PSA last September 5 showed that regular-milled rice prices and well-milled rice prices rose by 8.9 percent to P43.34 per kg while that of well-milled rice went up by 8.1 percent and averaged P47.63 per kilo.

"Overall, rice prices grew 8.7 percent in August 2023," it added.

"Inflation is likewise expected to remain elevated in the coming months due to continued impact of supply shocks on food prices and the rise in global oil prices. Nonetheless, inflation is still projected to decelerate back to within the inflation target by the fourth quarter 2023," the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas said in a statement.

Experts warned last August that rice may again be the cause of higher inflation in the coming months as data indicated that

prices returned to levels that were seen prior to the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), which aims to bring down the price of the staple.

PSA data showed rice inflation averaged 4.2 percent in July, the highest since February 2019 when the increase in the commodity's prices was at 4.5 percent. RTL was implemented in March 2019.

The spike in rice prices had prompted President Marcos Jr. to implement a price cap. Economic managers had also pitched the reduction in the tariffs of imports to pull down prices.



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Habambuhay na kulong bill vs agri smugglers aprub sa house

Pinagtibay na sa Kamara sa ikatlo at huling pagbasa ang panukala na mag-aamenda sa Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act o ang Republic Act (RA) No. 10845 na nagpapataw ng habambuhay na pagkakakulong laban sa mga agri-smugglers.

Ang House Bill (HB) No. 9284, o ang Anti Agri-Fishery Commodities and Tobacco Economic Sabotage Act ay nakakuha ng 289 pabor na boto, walang tumutol at wala ring abstention.

Sa ilalim ng panukala ang smuggling ng bigas at iba pang produktong agrikultura ay ituturing na "economic sabotage" sa ilalim ng panukala at magiging habambuhay na pagkakakulong ang parusa rito.

"Malapit nang matapos ang mga maliligayang araw ng mga smugglers, hoarders, at ang mga nagca-cartel. Your days are numbered. Once this bill is enacted, we will use its provisions to the fullest in order to prosecute these evil-doers who made our kababayans suffer," pahayag ni Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez.

Dahil sa kahalagahan na maisabatas ang panukala, pansamantalang itinigil ng Kamara ang pagtalakay sa panukalang P5.768 trilyong budget para sa 2024 upang bigyang daan ang botohan.

Ang buong titulo ng panukala ay "An Act declaring large-scale agri-fisheries commodities and tobacco smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, cartelizing, and other Acts of market abuse as economic sabotage, Amending for the purpose Republic Act No. 10845, otherwise known as the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016." (Joy Cantos)



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Earthworms crucial to world grain output

PARIS: Most gardeners know that earthworms help keep soils healthy, now scientists have assessed just how important their underground activities are to global food production — and how to protect them.

In a research published on Tuesday (Wednesday in Manila), scientists found that earthworms may be to thank for more than 6 percent of global grain yields every year because of their crucial role in soil ecosystems.

Worms help to decompose dead plant material, releasing nutrients plants need to grow, and their tunneling helps plant root growth, among other benefits.

Evidence suggests they also help plants protect themselves against common soil pathogens by stimulating their defenses.

But they are threatened by today's intensive and chemical-heavy agricultural techniques, scientists said.

Researchers writing in the journal *Nature Communica-*

tions analyzed maps of earthworm populations, soil properties, crop yields and previous studies of plant productivity to estimate the creature's impact on the global production of key crops.

"Contribution" was defined as the percentage of the yield made possible, thanks to earthworms.

They found earthworms may contribute to around 6.5 percent of the world's annual grain production, which includes dietary staples such as wheat, rice, maize and barley.

"Their contribution may even be larger," said Steven Fonte, an associate professor at Colorado State University in the United States who co-authored the study.

This is because earthworm populations "are likely underestimated in many places, especially in the tropics, due to a lack of research and funding in the global south," he told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Earthworms also contributed to 2.3 percent of global production of legumes, foods that

include peas, lentils, chickpeas, soybeans and alfalfa.

The annual total amounted to more than 140 million metric tons, the study estimated.

Conservation call

The authors said their findings represent one of the first attempts to quantify the contribution of a beneficial soil organism to global agricultural production.

They acknowledged a strong sampling bias when estimating earthworm populations because most of the data points were available in Europe and North America.

Even so, they found that earthworm contribution is especially high in the global south, contributing about 10 percent of total grain production in sub-Saharan Africa and roughly 8 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, the researchers found.

They attributed this to soils there generally having higher acid and clay content, and being less exposed to fertil-

izer, increasing the role earthworms play in plant growth.

In Europe and East/Southeast Asia, more than 7 percent of grain production was attributed to their activity, thanks to their higher population levels and soil acidity.

Smaller earthworm populations, more widespread use of inorganic fertilizer and other soil properties were likely to have lessened their impact in other regions.

Agricultural and environment policies should support earthworm populations and soil biodiversity to help make the sector become more sustainable, the scientists suggested.

Measures could include reducing tillage, cutting the use of toxic pesticides and increasing the application of worm food sources like manure and compost, said Fonte.

"Soils are estimated to contain approximately half of all biodiversity on the planet and are incredibly important for biodiversity conservation efforts," he said.

AFP

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FAO report offers solutions for reducing methane missions

METHANE emissions are increasingly identified as a turbocharged driver of the climate crisis, catalyzing interest in how they can be mitigated in key agricultural sectors.

To bolster awareness of possible actions that can be taken, and support members with a menu of solutions, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) published last September 25 "Methane emissions in livestock and rice systems. Sources, quantification, mitigation and metrics."

The report was put together by a multidisciplinary team composed of 54 international scientists and experts of the Livestock Environmental Assessment and Performance (LEAP) Partnership hosted at FAO since 2012. It offers a comprehensive overview and analysis of methane emissions in livestock and rice systems.

It focuses on both the sources and sinks of methane gas, outlines how emissions can be measured, describes a broad sampling of mitigation strategies, and evaluates the kind of metrics that can be used to measure both emissions and their mitigation on the climate system.

"The results and recommendations of this report bolster the efforts of countries and stakeholders committed to reducing methane emissions and, in so doing, move us towards more efficient, inclusive, resilient, low-emission and sustainable agrifood systems," said FAO Deputy Director-General Maria Helena Semedo in report's foreword.

Methane accounts for about 20 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions and is more than 25 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere.

Methane emissions from anthropogenic activities currently contribute about 0.5 degrees Celsius to observed global warming, making their reduction an important pathway to achieve the Paris Agreement.

The report aims to help enable agrifood systems to contribute their share to the Global Methane Pledge, a non-binding initiative endorsed by more than 150

countries to decrease methane emissions by 30 percent from 2020 levels by 2030, which would avoid more than 0.2 degrees Celsius of average global temperature increase by 2050.

FAO said the work is in line with its Strategy on Climate Change and the Strategic Framework 2022-2031, both of which aspire to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through a holistic mix of better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life—the Four Betters.

Besides agrifood systems, other human activities that generate methane emissions include landfills, oil and natural gas systems, coal mines and more. About 32 percent of global anthropogenic methane emissions result from microbial processes that occur during the enteric fermentation of ruminant livestock and manure management systems, while another 8 percent comes from rice paddies.

Measurement issues

FAO said one of the trickiest issues with methane is how its emissions and inventories are measured, evidently a critical factor in determining the best mitigation pathways.

"Precise methods have been developed, often involving placing animals in respiration chambers, but they are expensive, labor-intensive, and difficult to apply to grazing animals. Sophisticated use of drones and satellites has been deployed, but this approach entails much modeling and research is lagging behind in validating these methods," the report read.

"Moreover, enteric methane emissions can vary substantially between animals of the same species, opening a role for genetic selection as well as dietary innovation in livestock feed."

Another key environmental factor is how local soils serve as a methane sink. Research summarized in the report indicates that upland forest soils are the most efficient at this, especially in temperate biomes, with storage rates four times as great as that of cropland, and that dry grazing lands have a notably higher uptake rate than moist grazing lands.

"Those findings could point to the merits of sylvopastoral approaches such as that deployed in a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System in Portugal."

FAO said more empirical data and systematic measurement standards will help craft better tailored local mitigation approaches.

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Thailand moves ahead with \$8-B farmer debt suspension plan

THAILAND approved a debt moratorium plan that will benefit millions of farmers struggling to pay back about 283 billion baht (\$8 billion) of loans as Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin rolled out more measures to spur economic growth.

Srettha's cabinet on Tuesday gave the nod to set aside 12 billion baht from the state budget this year to cover the interest cost on loans taken by an estimated 2.7 million farmers eligible for the debt suspension. The three-year moratorium, effective from October 1, will likely cost the government about 30 billion baht, Deputy Finance Minister Julapun Amornvivat told a briefing.

The debt relief for farmers, a key support base for Srettha's Pheu Thai Party, is part of a series of stimulus policies unveiled by the new government to lift economic growth to an average 5 percent annually. While the past governments spent a significant amount of money in alleviating farmer debt burden, it has failed to stem a surge in household debt level to 90 percent of GDP.

"This time will be different," said Julapun, adding that the government will not only suspend interest and principal on loans taken by farmers but also provide

trainings, fresh loans and other incentives to lower bad debts.

More than 90 percent of Thai farmer households are indebted at an average of 450,000 baht, and the vicious cycle of debt and reliance on credit to overcome the burden pushes them into a trap, according to a study by the Puey Ungphakorn Institute of Economic Research.

The cabinet also approved setting up of a committee to work out details of the debt relief program and a one-year debt freeze for small- and medium-sized businesses affected by the pandemic, according to government spokesman Chai Wacharonke.

Other measures approved by the cabinet include:

- Operational budget of 1.38 trillion baht and 259 billion baht investment for 46 state enterprises for the fiscal year starting October 1

- Approved 2.2 trillion baht public debt management plan for the 2024 fiscal year, which include new borrowing of 194.4 billion baht, debt restructuring and debt repayment

- The National Housing Authority,

Dhanarak Asset Development Co., the State Railway of Thailand and the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority to borrow funds next fiscal year to manage their businesses.

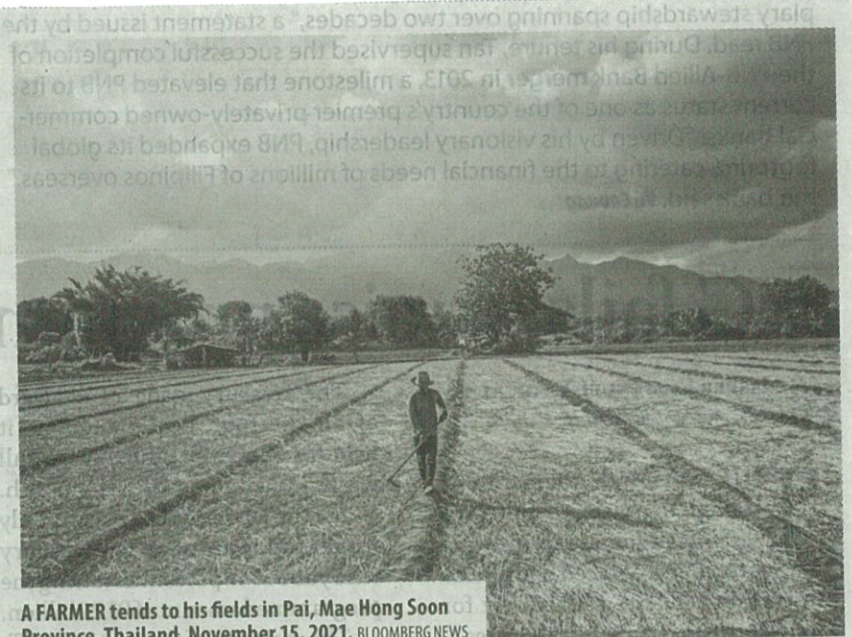
Argentina's soy

THE world's biggest crop trading houses have a message for the next president of Argentina: Free up soy production and exports, or risk getting left behind by rival suppliers Brazil and the United States.

Officials from Cargill Inc., Louis Dreyfus Co., and China's state-owned Cofco Corp. were unanimous in their concern over the South American nation's outlook as it heads toward a crucial election next month.

"It's very sad for me to see how Argentina has lost influence and relevance in global markets," Pablo Scarafoni, head of commercial operations for Cargill in South America, said last week at a soybean conference in the crop-trading hub of Rosario. Once a dominant player in the region, Argentina has seen its agricultural sector wither under the heavy hand of the state.

"While Brazil is growing with gigantic strides helped by the political and economic framework, while the US also grows with policies like biofuel mandates, Argentina's



A FARMER tends to his fields in Pai, Mae Hong Soon Province, Thailand, November 15, 2021. BLOOMBERG NEWS

soy production is stagnant," Scarafoni said.

Argentines vote in a presidential election on October 22, with the stage set for a shift away from state intervention in the economy that's left the resource-rich country mired in crisis. Net reserves of dollars are in negative territory, inflation is running at nearly 125 percent, and about two of every five Argentines live in poverty.

Myriad government restrictions, compounded by three consecutive droughts,

have particularly hurt agriculture. Farm revenues and investments have been constrained by export taxes of up to 33 percent for soy, quotas for cargoes sold abroad, and currency controls.

"Where do we want to go as a country?" Scarafoni asked. "Do we want to generate more dollars, or do we want to settle for small production, farmers who aren't profitable, and a processing-exports industry in decline?" **Bloomberg News**



Corn, wheat gain ground

SINGAPORE- Chicago corn futures rose on Wednesday, recouping the previous session's losses on bargain buying and positioning ahead of US government stock data due later this week, although expectations of large global supplies kept a lid on the market.

Soybeans and wheat also gained ground.

"The market is just waiting for the US stocks report with some buying interest at these levels," said one Singapore-based trader. "Global supplies are looking comfortable."

The most-active corn contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) rose 0.4 percent to \$4.81-

1/2 a bushel. Soybeans added 0.1 percent to \$13.03-3/4 a bushel and wheat climbed 0.5 percent to \$5.91-3/4 a bushel.

Ample corn supplies from South America and the harvest of the second-largest corn crop on record in the United States are providing headwinds to prices.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) is slated to issue a closely watched, quarterly report on US grain stocks at the end of the week.

Russian attacks on Ukrainian ports are raising concerns over wheat supplies, although plentiful Russian supplies are weighing on the market. - Reuters



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Brazil court fines Cargill in case involving child labor on cocoa farms

SAO PAULO — Commodities trader Cargill has been ordered by a Brazilian court to pay 600,000 reais (\$120,185) as indemnity for buying cocoa from farms where child labor or forced work has been identified.

US-based Cargill said on Tuesday it disagreed with the complaints and fine and would appeal the ruling to a higher court.

According to a decision dated Sept. 18, seen by Reuters, from the 39th Labor Court in the northeastern state of Bahia, Cargill was also ordered to add to its contracts with Brazilian cocoa suppliers clauses to end the commercial relationship if child labor or

other unlawful working conditions occur.

The lawsuit was brought against the commodities company by local labor prosecutors.

The court also requires Cargill to start a “due diligence” process to verify whether there is child labor in its supply chain and launch a campaign to combat the practice, according to the ruling.

In a statement, Cargill said it could not comment on details of the case because it is subject to legal confidentiality.

However, it said it “does not tolerate” human trafficking, forced or child labor in its operations or supply chain and suspends suppliers if any violation is found.

In the lawsuit, the company said that it buys cocoa from hundreds of producers, co-ops and merchants in the country and has no way of knowing whether child labor was used in any stage of that chain.

The court’s decision was first reported by local news outlet Reporter Brasil.

Similar lawsuits have appeared in other countries aiming to make food companies liable for cases of child labor.

A federal judge in Washington, D.C., last year dismissed a lawsuit by eight citizens of Mali who sought to hold Hershey Co., Nestle, Cargill and others liable for child slavery on Ivory Coast cocoa farms. — **Reuters**