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## Economic sabotage raps filed vs rice smugglers

Rice price cap up for review; 4 more warehouses under investigation

By RAYMUND ANTONIO and CHINO S. LEYCO

**T**he Presidential Communications Office (PCO) yesterday said the Bureau of Customs (BOC) has filed economic sabotage and smuggling charges before the Department of Justice (DOJ) against rice smugglers in Bulacan, while cases are being built up for similar charges against smugglers in Zamboanga City.

In a statement, the PCO said that the agency has been filing ►**4**





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and readying case files against rice smugglers and hoarders while it also issued Warrants of Seizure and Detention (WSD) against other warehouses found with thousands of sacks of rice.

William Balayo, acting director of BOC's Legal Service, informed the PCO that they have filed three charges of economic sabotage against three importers over the weekend, while one was for violation of the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA) under Agricultural Product Smuggling.

The charges stemmed from the inspection the BOC conducted on Aug. 24 in Bulacan where the bureau discovered 200,000 sacks of rice in four different warehouses that led to the issuance of WSDs.

As of Sept. 29, the BOC had seized 236,571 sacks of rice from the Bulacan warehouses.

These moves were in line with the directive of President Marcos to the BOC to combat hoarding and illegal importation of rice.

Aside from the warehouses in Bulacan, the PCO also cited the BOC's discovery of warehouses in Cavite, Las Piñas, and Manila.

"It is now awaiting the submission of necessary documents from the two warehouse owners in Cavite and Las Piñas City," the PCO said, adding that "inventory is ongoing for the other two warehouses" in Manila.

The BOC also seized over 42,000 sacks of smuggled rice in Zamboanga City that were eventually donated to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) after the importers failed to present documents to

defend the legality of their importation.

The donated rice was distributed to beneficiaries of DSWD's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) led by the President in Tugawan, Zamboanga Sibugay; San Roque, Zamboanga City; General Trias City, Cavite; Iriga City, Camarines Sur; San Andres, Manila; Dapa, Surigao del Norte; and Dinagat Islands.

According to Marcos, he has directed the BOC to continue to go against smugglers and hoarders who are behind the price manipulation schemes that are driving up the price of rice.

"Ang buklok na lubos na sumisira sa balanse ng suplay at presyo ng bigas sa merkado [ay] ang hoarding at saka ang smuggling, at price manipulation na ginagawa ng mapagsamantalang mga negosyante (The rice weevil that destroys the balance supply and price of rice in the market is the hoarding and smuggling, and price manipulation that exploitative businessmen do)," he said.

He also emphasized that the government will relentlessly run after them to ensure affordable staple food for the Filipino people.

### Rice price cap review

The Department of Finance (DOF) said the Marcos administration will review the enforcement of rice price ceilings this week, taking into account the start of the harvest season to determine if the price controls should be lifted.

Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno said the government will assess specific trigger indicators to determine the optimal timing for lifting the mandatory price ceilings on rice, which have

been in effect since Sept. 5.

"Next week [Oct. 3], there will be a meeting to assess when to lift the rice price cap," Diokno told reporters during the Chat with SBED briefing last Friday, Sept. 29.

Diokno said their decision will be based on the "most recent information" they have during the Oct. 3 meeting.

"There are triggers, such as whether it is already the harvest season and if imports are incoming; those are the triggers. So, the president will decide based on our meeting next week when to lift," Diokno said.

Last week, National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said the decision to lift the price ceiling on commonly purchased rice varieties would be made "very soon."

Balisacan explained that price caps cannot be maintained indefinitely as the negative effects can outweigh the positive ones.

Under Executive Order 39, the price limit for regular milled rice was set at P41 per kilo, while well-milled rice had a cap of P45 per kilo.

Balisacan indicated that the price control measure might be lifted this month.

"October will be the peak of the harvest so we will be able to address the issue, remove the price cap," he said.

President Marcos had earlier rejected the proposal to temporarily reduce rice tariffs as a means to address the rising rice prices in the local market, stating that it was not the appropriate time to lower tariff rates due to the projected decrease in world rice prices.

The President made these comments following a sectoral meeting in Malacañang, where NEDA presented updates on the proposed rice tariff reduction, incorporating inputs from the DOF, Department of Trade and Industry, and the Department of Budget and Management.

### Large-scale smuggling

Balayo said that while three of the cases are classified as large-scale smuggling, one case did not meet the P10-million threshold and has been downgraded to a violation of the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA).

Nonetheless, it still pertains to the smuggling of agricultural products, specifically rice, he added.

Balayo also expressed optimism that the public will recognize the efforts of the Bureau of Customs, led by Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio, in combating all forms of smuggling, particularly the smuggling of rice.

### 4 more warehouses

Marlon Agaceta, chief of staff of the Customs commissioner, said there are currently four warehouses under investigation in relation to rice importation.

For the two importers, the deadline for submitting the necessary import documents to demonstrate the legality of their importation and provide proof of payment for the correct duties and taxes has already passed as of Friday.

"However, the two other letters of authority (LOAs), which were served on Sep. 15, still have two more days to submit their ongoing inventory," he added.

"The first warehouse has an inventory of 9,906 sacks of imported rice, while the other one contains 5,257 sacks of rice."

When asked about the time it takes for the Customs to file cases against suspected rice smugglers, BOC officials said the government allows the other party sufficient time to prove the legality of their importation process and ensures that due process is followed.

The officials emphasized that denying these individuals due process would potentially violate their rights as guaranteed by the Bill of Rights.

### Misdeclared carrots

Meanwhile, the Metropolitan Trial Court - National Judicial Capital Region Branch 24 rendered its verdict on Sept. 8, 2023, declaring the proprietor of Real Mart guilty of violating Customs laws by misdeclaring a shipment of carrots as frozen pastry buns.

This conviction resulted from a criminal complaint filed by the BOC on Sept. 10, 2020, with the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The case stemmed from an incident that occurred on June 26, 2020, when a shipment consigned to Real Mart arrived at the BOC - Port of Manila from Singapore.

The consignee declared the shipment to contain 2,500 cartons of frozen pastry buns. However, suspicions were raised when a derogatory report was received by the Port of Manila, prompting a physical examination of the shipment.

Upon inspection, it was discovered that the shipment did not contain frozen pastry buns as declared, but instead, contained misdeclared carrots, a clear violation of Customs regulations.

Subsequently, a warrant of seizure and detention was issued against the shipment, and appropriate charges were filed against the owner of Real Mart.





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## Buying price of palay increases to P22 per kilo

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Farmers' group Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. president Danilo Fausto yesterday said the farmgate price of palay has increased to P22, from the previous P15 to P17 per kilo, following President Marcos' directive to increase the buying price of palay from the National Food Authority (NFA) to P23 per kilo.

The farmgate prices of palay started

to recover after a decline due to the implementation of a price ceiling of P41 and P45 per kilo for regular and well-milled rice, Fausto added.

"When the price cap was implemented, the farmers feared that the traders would buy their palay at lower prices but after the buying price of NFA was increased to P19 for wet and P23 for dry, the buying price of palay recovered," he said.

President Marcos earlier announced

that the NFA Council set new buying prices for palay or unhusked rice to increase the income of farmers, adding that the NFA buying price is now P19 to P23 per kilo for dry palay and P16 to P19 per kilo for wet palay.

Fausto added that Marcos' decision on a proposal to temporarily cut the tariff on imported rice also helped prevent a slump in the farmgate price of palay.

"It (rejection of tariff cut) also helped as if you will bring down the

tariffs, you discourage local production. The assumption of our economic managers is that you can always buy rice abroad. We cannot depend on our supply of basic staple from importation," Fausto said.

Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno and Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan were the main proponents of the tariff cuts on imported rice.

"Our economic managers are not

farmers, they do not even know what is happening on the ground," Fausto said.

"Two days ago, I harvested and was able to sell at P22 per kilo. If it is milled, under the 65 percent conversion, traders can sell at P36, P38 per kilo and retailers can sell at P41, P45 per kilo," he noted.

Fausto said that the price cap can be lifted this month with the peak harvest season. — **With Catherine Talavera, Mark Ernest Villeza**





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## Extension of lower tariffs on agri goods still possible

By **LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON**

The possible extension of lower tariff rates on major agricultural commodities to ensure that inflation will revert to its downward trend and be back within target as scheduled remains up for consideration.

This, even as President Marcos last week rejected the economic team's proposal to temporarily cut the tariff on imported rice.

In a briefing, Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno said the tariff cut on rice has been ruled out "for this time."

"The President really is the decision maker. Our role as Cabinet secretaries is to give the best advice based on the most recent information," he said.

"And then once a decision is made, our next job is to implement, not to question the decision."

The economic team earlier proposed that the current 35 percent rice import tariff be slashed temporarily to zero or just up to 10 percent, at the maximum.

While the proposal was rejected, there is still a pending review on the extension of lower tariffs on several agricultural commodities, rice included.

This is via the Executive Order 10 earlier signed by Marcos which subjected fresh, chilled or frozen swine meat, maize, rice, and coal to the most favored nation rates for 2023 after inflation spiked last year.

The measure, however, will expire by yearend.

The EO reduced rates of duty on fresh, chilled or frozen swine meat up to 25 percent, corn at 15 percent, rice at 35 percent, and coal at zero duty.

DOF Undersecretary and chief economist Zeno Abenoja said the review process would

continue.

"Remember that the TC (Tariff Commission) is looking at the EO 10 so the process will continue," Abenoja said.

"The President gets inputs from everyone, including the results of the consultation," he said.

This week, the economic team and the Interagency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook will meet to look at all the commodities affecting inflation.

Likewise, the government will also meet this week to discuss the lifting of the price cap on rice.

Headline inflation jumped to 5.3 percent in August from 4.7 percent in July, snapping six months of downtrend.

Inflation picked up anew amid more expensive food items following the recent typhoons, as well as higher transport costs due to oil price hikes.





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## **'Release of P12.7-B aid for rice farmers long overdue'**

Farmers' group Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) chairperson Danilo Ramos yesterday said that the P12.7 billion funding ordered for release by President Marcos was already provided under the Rice Farmers Finance Assistance (RFFA) Program, adding that the distribution of the assistance to farmers is long overdue.

"It is not out of the generosity of President and Agriculture Secretary Bongbong Marcos Jr. that he finally approved the release of the P12.7 billion budget for the Rice Farmers Finance Assistance Program. The said fund release is actually delayed and long overdue," Ramos said.

Ramos was reacting after Presidential Communications Secretary Cheloy Garafil announced that Marcos had approved the release of the amount to help 2.3 million farmers.

"The P12.7 billion for RFFA was from the 2022 excess tariff collection of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

At the least, the RFFA should have been released in the first half of this year in time for the first cropping season. We are now in the second cropping season. This is the second consecutive year that the RFFA release was delayed under Marcos Jr.," he said.

Ramos said that Section 13 of Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law provides that if the annual tariff revenues from rice importation exceed P10 billion, the excess shall be earmarked for the RFFA.

"During the plenary budget hearing of the Department of Agriculture last week, the DA budget's sponsor Rep. Tony-Pet Albano admitted that the government has yet to release the P12.7 billion RFFA budget as it awaits the President's approval and release order. We consider it a disservice on the part of the DA and Marcos Jr. that the RFFA's release was delayed for several months," he added. — **Bella Cariaso, Mark Ernest Villeza**

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## Fishing tycoon as new DA chief? Palace mum

By **HELEN FLORES**

Malacañang would not confirm reports that President Marcos is eyeing fishing tycoon Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. as secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

"Not confirmed," Presidential Communications Secretary Cheloy Garafil said in a brief statement yesterday when asked to comment on a report of *Bilyonaryo.com*.

Citing sources, *Bilyonaryo.com* said Laurel, who owns the Frabelle Group of Companies, has the qualities Marcos has been looking for in a DA chief, a position the President concurrently holds since assuming office in June last year.

Laurel was one of Marcos' top donors in the 2022 elections, the business news web-

site said.

Earlier, Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin said he believes Marcos was "on the way" to making a decision with regard to choosing the new agriculture secretary.

In an interview in June, Marcos said he would stay as agriculture secretary until efficient systems are in place to ensure food security and better living conditions for the country's farmers.

"So what I aspire is by the time I leave the DA, we will have systems in place so that we can guarantee the food supply of the Philippines, we can guarantee that the prices are affordable and that our farmers make a good living," Marcos said.

Several senators and other sectors have urged Marcos to appoint a full-time DA secretary.





## PBBM uubusin mga smuggled bigas

HINDI titigilan ng gobyerno ang paghabol sa mga nasa likod ng smuggling at pang-lipit sa supply ng bigas hanggang sa maubos lahat ang mga ito.

Ito ang inihayag ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. sa kanyang pinalakas na kampanya laban sa mga smuggler at hoarder ng bigas sa bansa.

Sa kanyang social media account, sinabi ng pangulo na sisiguruhin ng gobyerno na mawakasan at matuldukan ang pang-

aabuso ng mga hoarder at smuggler upang hindi mahirapan ang taumbayan.

"Hanggang makamtan natin ito, ipagpapatuloy natin ang pagkumpiska ng smuggled na bigas at pagbabahagi nito sa taumbayan," anang pangulo.

Ang mga nakumpiskang smuggled na bigas ng Bureau of Customs ang ipinamimigay ng gobyerno sa mga pinakamahirap na pamilya na benepisyaryo ng Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps).

Sinabi ng pangulo na sa ganitong paraan ay mawakasan ang pang-aabuso ng mga sindikato at masigurong walang magugutom na mga Pilipino.

Sunod-sunod ang ginawang pagsalakay ng mga otoridad sa mga warehouse ng bigas sa iba't ibang lugar sa bansa at kapag walang maipakitang patunay na legal ang pagpasok ng mga ito sa bansa ay kukumpiskahin ng gobyerno at ipapamahagi sa mga mahihirap.

(Aileen Taliping)



## LAUREL SWAK NA **ISKUP** AGRICULTURE SECRETARY

NAKATAKDANG italaga ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. ang bilyonaryong si Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. bilang secretary ng Department of Agriculture (DA).

Binanggit ng source ng **Bilyonaryo.com**, nakita ni Marcos kay Laurel ang mga katangiang hinahanap niya sa taong papalit sa kanyang puwesto bilang kalihim ng DA.

Si Laurel ay may-ari ng Frabelle, isa sa pinakamalaking deep sea fishing companies sa mundo. Nagtapos ito sa University of Santo Tomas sa kursong computer science.

Isa siya sa matalik na kaibigan ni Marcos at naging top donor (P30

million) noong 2022 presidential elections.

Nauna rito ay nagsilbi rin si Laurel bilang miyembro ng Private Sector Advisory Council (PSAC) ni Marcos, isang grupo na pinamumunuan ni business tycoon Sabin Aboitiz.

Kalat sa abroad ang negosyo ni Laurel dahil ang food empire nito ay matatagpuan din sa Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, China, Japan, South Africa, Papua New Guinea, at Solomon Islands.

Ang Frabelle, na sinimulan ng ama ni Laurel noong 1972, ang pangunahing supplier ng local canned tuna makers at nag-e-export ng mga

seafood products sa Africa, Europe, North America, Middle East at Asia. Pumasok na rin ito sa negosyo ng processed meat.

Si Laurel din ang presidente ng Agusan Power Corp. na kamakailan lamang ay nagbukas ng 24.9-megawatt Lake Mainit hydro power plant noong July kung saan ang Presidente mismo ang guest of honor.

Ang Agusan Power, ay joint venture sa pagitan ng Markham Resources ni Laurel at ang Japanese firm Electric Power Development Co., Ltd. (J-Power). Plano nila na magtayo ng 100 megawatts ng floating solar panels sa Lake Mainit.





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## Kadiwa stores in barangays pushed

A neophytesolon is pushing for the institutionalization of Kadiwa stores at barangay level, while providing better opportunities to local farmers.

Quezon City Representative PM Vargas said Kadiwa stores effectively helped Filipinos to stay within their means and budget.

"We have witnessed how these Kadiwa stores effectively help the public buy basic commodities at lower prices compared to those being sold in regular markets. The idea of having these stores permanently is a win-win solution to local suppliers and consumers especially now that prices of goods are on the steady rise," Vargas said.

The lawmaker has filed various House bills (HB 5878 to HB 5891) for the establishment of Kadiwa stores in all barangays of District V, Quezon City, aiming to address the issues on food insecurity among Filipinos.

This will complement Right to Adequate Food Framework Bill, which was earlier prompted by the former QC Rep. Alfred Vargas during the previous congress. Both measures aim to establish a framework that would ensure food availability, stability and security by establishing well-functioning distribution, processing and market systems.

"We intend to bring these rolling stores in respective communities to further lessen the expenses shouldered by the consuming public. Instead of spending for transportation cost, they could use the amount for more food items for the family," he said.

Through the Department of Agriculture, President Ferdinand Marcos has revived the Kadiwa program last year after a spike in prices of basic food products due to the pandemic.

*Jester Manalastas*





## DA to raise poultry production by 5 times

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said it will raise by five times in five years the local production of live-stock and poultry following a directive by President Marcos to reverse excessive importation and raise income of farmers.

DA Agriculture Undersecretary Degracias Victor B. Savellano said at the Poultry Forum 2023 said that as food security is national security, raising local agricultural production will be prioritized. It will be realized through a consultative approach.

In order to achieve the goal of raising local food production, the DA said it will adopt some measures, including, integrated operations of National Meat Inspection Service, Bureau of Animal Industry, Philippine Carabao Center, National Dairy Authority, and National Livestock Program; merge livestock with feeds development; regional meetings to include livestock groups; appointment of a focal person for all animal diseases; boost biosecurity in partnership with the Department of National Defense; enforce prohibitive policies on selling of questionable meats, vaccines and veterinary medicines via online platforms; raise insurance coverage of the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp.; lobby for access and increase in avail of low interest loan packages

with Land Bank; improvements in the Philippine Agriculture Industry Management Information Service (PhilAIMIS); increase share of livestock in the Philippine Rural Development Program and other Foreign Funded Projects; and fund a program for agro-industrial complexes for milk, feeds, cattle raising, among others.

"Recommendations from various sectors of our agriculture are currently being heard and studied on what, where, and how government actions are to be applied to boost our poultry sector," he said.

"We have started to meet with stakeholders to strategize a common direction and priorities in order to significantly increase our local food production, making it efficient, robust, and profitable for farmers."

The same assurance of a consultative governance was given by Savellano during an earlier convention of the National Federation of Hog Farmers Inc.

"We will find ways to produce more to lessen importations. By consulting with livestock associations on how much each sector can produce, (we will know) the actual demand. It will be the consideration in determining the minimal quantity of imports," he added.

Importation in previous years has

brought huge opportunity losses for the local poultry industry. DA aims to reverse these losses into gains.

Chicken meat importation has been consistently rising from 45.772 million kilos in 2008 to 67.264 million in 2009, 101.957 million in 2010, 127.227 million in 2011, and 411.069 million in 2022.

United Broilers and Raisers Association (UBRA) Chairman Gregorio San Diego said during the same forum that direct impact of this importation has displaced local production totalling a whopping ₱58.286 billion (299.366 million broilers).

Displaced too are 315.122 million day-old broilers amounting to ₱9.138 billion and 2.52 million broiler breeders valued at ₱756.294 million. Lost sales from byproducts (head, feet, intestine, blood) also reached to ₱5.987 billion.

Importation brings lost direct labor totalling to 31,512 at one caretaker per 10,000 broilers and lost jobs in feed milling, trucking, and dressing plants.

This in turn resulted in lost feed sales estimated at ₱4.877 billion. Other losses were also reported in sales of feed ingredients. (Bernie Cahiles-Magkilat)





# Egg retail prices to continue rising until 2024

By BELLA CARIASO

The spike in the retail prices of eggs is expected to continue until the first semester of 2024 amid the expected high demand this Christmas and the decline in production, according to the United Broiler Raisers Association (UBRA) and Philippine Egg Board (PEB).

In an interview with **The STAR**, UBRA and PEB chairman Gregorio San Diego attributed the upward trend in the retail prices of eggs to a drop in production after

the devastation of recent Typhoons Egay and Goring, adding that the farmgate price of eggs increased between P0.15 and P0.20 per piece.

He said that among those affected by recent typhoons was the province of Ilocos.

"At present the increase in the farmgate of eggs in Ilocos is the highest, with almost one peso increase as the medium-sized egg is now P7.33 (per piece) from P6.55 as many chicken layers died because of the typhoons," San Diego added.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has said that the damage of southwest monsoon enhanced by Typhoons Egay and Falcon to the livestock and poultry has reached P386.45 million while the damage brought by the southwest monsoon enhanced by Typhoons Goring and Hannah to livestock and poultry totaled P10.42 million.

"If the (farmgate price) of eggs reaches P5 (per piece), we will suffer losses as the feed a chicken layer eats is almost P5 already," he added.

San Diego said that by the

second semester of 2024, the supply of eggs is expected to increase as breeders have started to arrive.

"Eggs will flood the market and that's our worry, we will again suffer losses," he added.

At the same time, San Diego said that many egg producers decided to slow down in their production amid the threat of bird flu as the DA and Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) have yet to approve the vaccine against avian flu.

San Diego added that as early as August 2022, poultry

raisers filed a petition for the approval of the bird flu vaccine.

"Our neighboring countries are already implementing vaccination but it is delayed here in our country for unknown reasons," he said.

He said that smuggled bird flu vaccines proliferate online.

"We want it (approval of the vaccine) to be accelerated as once a chicken tested positive of bird flu, the entire population will be wiped out as the DA will condemn the entire farm but smuggled vaccine can

be bought online. We already informed the DA and BAI about this," San Diego said.

Based on monitoring of the DA, the retail price of medium-sized eggs reached between P6.50 and P8.50 per piece.

On the other hand, San Diego said that the farmgate price of chicken ranged from P112 to P113 but the retail price remains high at P200 per kilo.

"The problem is as we expect an increase in the demand of chicken during Christmas, the imported meat also floods the market," he added.



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## Chicken imports may hit new high this year

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

Chicken importation is again poised to reach record high this year, causing losses in the local poultry sector and its allied industries, according to United Broilers and Raisers Association (UBRA).

During the Poultry Forum 2023 last week, UBRA chairman Gregorio San Diego said chicken meat importation was higher in the second semester.

San Diego said importation has brought about billions of losses on broiler and allied industries.

"This year, from January to July, we have already imported 249.37 million kilograms. Historically, importation is higher in the second half versus the first half. Depending on government actions, this year's importation will be another record high," he said.

Total chicken meat importation reached 411.07 million kilograms last year, up 1.57 percent from 404.71 million kilos in the same period in 2021.

San Diego said chicken meat importation has consistently rose in the past decade. From just 45.772 million kilos in 2008 to 67.264 million kilos in 2009, chicken importation breached the hundred million kilo volume in 2010.

The volume of importation reached 101.957 million kilos in 2010 and 127.227 million kilos in 2011.

"The total chicken meat importation is 411.069 million kilograms last year, up 323 percent from 2011, almost 30 percent increase per year," San Diego said.

He said last year's importation has displaced local production of 299.366 million broilers valued at P58.286 billion.

Also displaced are 315.122 million day old broilers amounting to P9.138 billion and 2.52 million broiler breeders valued at P756.294 million.

Lost sales from byproducts such as head, feet, intestine, blood totaled to P5.987 billion.

Importation also translated to lost direct labor totaling to 31,512 at one caretaker per 10,000 broilers and lost jobs in feed milling, trucking, and dressing plants.

Lost feed sales amounted to P4.877 billion while lost feeds ingredient sales totaled P11.89 billion (corn); P8.154 billion (soya); P4.478 billion (coconut oil); and P1.132 billion (rice bran).

There was also opportunity loss for veterinary products (disinfectants, vaccines vitamins, antibiotics) at P3.623 billion and P2.993 billion for dressing plants.

To lessen importation, DA Undersecretary **Deogracias Victor Savellano** said raising local agricultural production would be prioritized and realized through a consultative approach.

"Recommendations from various sectors of our agriculture is currently being heard and studied on what, where, and how government actions are to be applied to boost our poultry sector," he said.

"We will find ways to produce more to lessen importations. By consulting with livestock associations on how much each sector can produce, (we will know) the actual demand. It will be the consideration in determining the minimal quantity of imports," the DA official said.





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## AFP, DA go farming with cultivators, stakeholders

THE Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) have joined forces to further educate farmers, tillers and farmland cultivators on techniques in increasing production output despite challenges posed by the El Niño weather phenomenon.

Soldiers from the Philippine Army's 10th Infantry Division and Davao de Oro Agricultural Office are now partners in a caravan to share expertise on farming and benefits of agribusiness.

During the caravan, experts deliver lectures on various aspects of agribusiness, farming techniques, crop characteristics and proper livestock handling for propagation.

The agricultural office in Davao de Oro said the event was the fourth and final leg of its information caravan with 654 attendees, primarily farmers and food producers.

Adora Rodriguez, assistant chief of Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance-Agribusiness Investment and Promotion Division, reiterated the essential role of farmers in the overall development and well-being of society.

The agency cited the importance of the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA) and offered strategies to combat the threats posed by the El Niño and highlighted available credit and support

grants for food producers.

The DA had distributed mushroom fruiting bags, vegetable and corn seeds and fertilizers to support the farmers.

"We want our fellow countrymen to have livelihood opportunities. By engaging in activities like this and informing farmers about government projects, including the involvement of the military, we can improve their livelihoods. When individuals have productive occupations, we promote peace," Rodriguez said.

Gov. Dorothy Gonzaga of Davao de Oro reaffirmed the government's unwavering commitment to strengthening the agricultural sector and conserv-

ing the countryside.

"Caring for our farmlands is crucial; if abused, our crops will suffer. Avail yourself of all agriculture-related interventions and programs established by our government," Gonzaga said.

Acting commander Brig. Gen. Allan Hambala of the 10th Infantry Division expressed full support for the agency's campaign to empower farmers and safeguard them from recruitment and manipulation by communist groups.

"The farmers are the backbone of our nation's prosperity. Keep sowing the seeds of progress, and we will stand with you every step of the way," Hambala said.

**FRANCISCO TUYAY**





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## DA targets higher livestock output

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

**T**HE Department of Agriculture (DA) is seeking to increase the local production of livestock and poultry by five times in five years, which will minimize the need for food imports.

The DA said on Saturday that this would also raise farmers' profits and lower the price of livestock and poultry products, ensuring the availability of protein sources for consumers.

"Recommendations from various sectors of our agriculture are currently being heard and studied on what, where, and how government actions are to be applied to boost our poultry sector," Agriculture

Undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano said during the Poultry Forum 2023 on September 27.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that in 2022, the Philippines produced 2.14 million metric tons (MT) of livestock commodities, while the poultry sector produced 2.6 million MT the same year.

Savellano said they have started

meeting livestock and poultry stakeholders to strategize priorities to increase local production while making the industries efficient, robust and profitable.

"We will find ways to produce more to lessen importations. By consulting with livestock associations on how much each sector can produce, [we will know] the actual demand. It will be the consideration in determining the minimal quantity of imports," he said.

According to the DA, chicken meat importation had consistently risen from 45.77 million kilos in 2008 to 67.26 million in 2009 and from 101.957 million in 2010 to 411.069 million in 2022.

The importation led to a loss in local production totaling P58.286 billion or equivalent to 299.366

million broilers, said United Broilers and Raisers Association (UBRA) Chairman Gregorio San Diego.

The DA said this brought opportunity losses for the local poultry industry, adding that it aims to reverse these losses into gains.

Also displaced were 315.122 million day-old broilers amounting to P9.138 billion and 2.52 million broiler breeders valued at P756.294 million.

Meanwhile, lost sales from byproducts such as head, feet, intestine and blood totaled P5.987 billion.

San Diego also said other areas that were affected due to importation and loss were feeds at P4.877 billion in sales and lost feeds ingredient sales at P11.89 billion

for corn, P8.154 billion for soya, P4.478 billion for coconut oil, and P1.132 billion for rice bran.

Likewise, opportunity losses for veterinary products and dressing plants were estimated at P3.62 billion and P2.99 billion, respectively.

To address excessive importation, the DA identified strategies it would adopt to raise local production, including merging livestock with feeds development as well as working with the programs for corn, seaweed and other high-value crops.

"We have to focus on feeds as we cannot grow livestock without it. We want RFO 4-A to transition its focus from sugarcane to corn," said Savellano, referring to the DA's regional field office in Calabarzon.

The DA also said it will seek low-interest loan packages from the Land Bank of the Philippines and an increased share of livestock in the Philippine Rural Development Program and other foreign-funded projects. It added that the present share of livestock and poultry's contribution to the country's gross domestic product remains low.

Moreover, Savellano said the DA seeks to strengthen an indemnification program for animals infected with diseases, among others.

"We must have an indemnification program where it will be attractive for farmers to report ASF (African swine fever) or AI (avian influenza) outbreaks in their farms. Now, nobody is reporting. We need to fund this program," he added.





# RICE TARIFF CUTS NOT YET COMPLETELY OUT

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

**T**HE reduction in rice tariffs is not completely off the table as the economic managers are set to review the lower rates imposed by President Marcos Jr. on certain agricultural commodities under his Executive Order (EO) 10.

Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno disclosed that the reduction of rice tariffs has been "ruled out" for now after Marcos rejected the proposal last week. (*Related story: <https://BUSINESSMIRROR.com.ph/2023/09/27/marcos-rejects-rice-tariff-cut-proposal/>*)

"Narule out nayun [rice tariff reduction], for this time," Diokno told reporters in a recent press briefing.

However, this does not mean that the ball has stopped rolling as finance officials revealed that the administration's economic team is set to meet soon to review the implementation of EO 10.

Under Marcos's EO 10, the lower tariff rates on imported rice, corn and pork were extended until the end of the year.

"The President really is the decision maker. Our role as cabinet secretary is to give the best advice based on the most recent info. And then once a decision is made, our next job is to implement, not to question the decision," he explained.

Diokno emphasized that the government's decisions are data-driven and are also based on the latest pertinent figures and information that they have.

SEE "RICE," A2

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## Rice...CONTINUED FROM A1

Finance Undersecretary Zeno Ronald R. Abenoja said the review process for the EO 10 "will continue," with the President getting inputs "from everyone," which includes results of any pertinent consultative processes.

"The TC [Tariff Commission] is also looking at EO 10. So that process will continue, but this time we were only looking at rice but there are other commodities that we will also look at," Abenoja said.

Abenoja said the pertinent intergovernment agencies including the Economic Development Group will meet this week to discuss EO 10, which would involve rice tariffs.

Under existing rules and regulations governing the President's power on modifying tariff rates, the TC must conduct a public stakeholders meeting which in turn would make a recommendation to the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda).

The Neda is the one that will make the necessary recommendation to the President on tariff adjustments. Matters related to tariff modifications can also be tackled at the Cabinet-level Committee on Tariff and Related Matters (CTRM)

chaired by the Trade Secretary and co-chaired by the Neda Secretary.

Under Marcos's EO 10, the lowered rates on rice, corn and pork shall automatically revert to their regular levels after December 31, 2023.

The BUSINESSMIRROR first reported on why the Department of Agriculture (DA), which is headed by Marcos, did not support the proposed tariff reduction by the economic managers and certain private stakeholders.

Based on the DA's analysis, rice could lose almost P8 per kilogram due to the decline in farmgate prices if the proposed reduction in tariff was approved. **(Related story: <https://BUSINESSMIRROR.com.ph/2023/09/28/tariff-cuts-could-slash-rice-farmers-income-by-%e2%82%a78-kg/>)**

Last week, more and more agricultural groups, including sheep and rabbit raisers, were opposing the proposal to reduce tariffs on imported commodities like rice as the government would lose almost P60 billion in revenues. **(Related story: <https://BUSINESSMIRROR.com.ph/2023/09/25/more-groups-buck-proposal-to-slash-tariffs-on-agri-goods/>)**





# Nestlé's regenerative agriculture push for coffee missing a key ingredient: farmers

By JOHN EIRON R. FRANCISCO

**M**ALAYBALAY, Bukidnon—After coffee farmer Arnold Abear embraced the “regenerative agriculture” concept of Nestle Philippines Inc., his yield perked up.

Abear told the BUSINESSMIRROR that prior to adopting the multinational firm's farming strategy, his yield hovered around 250 kilos to 350 kilos per hectare per year.

Currently, Abear said his farm has been hitting an average 900 kilos per hectare, even reaching a staggering “more than 1 ton of yield per hectare.” Abear's current yield is already above the 538 kilos per hectare average coffee farm yield nationwide, based on latest government figures.

Had Nestle Philippines not intervened, the farmer from Northern Mindanao said “*siguro po wala na; patay na ang industriya ng kape dito sa ating bansa.*”

He believes that the multinational firm's investments ultimately benefit both farmers and consumers alike.

Abear's achievement confirms the experience of Nestle Philippines, as expressed by Corporate Affairs Executive and Agronomist Donnel Tiedra.

“It only means na kapag [if it's the] right technology, bringing technical assistance with the coffee value chain and bringing the farmers to the farm business school,” it can have a significant impact, Tiedra said during the event the company organized here.

There's only one problem: Abear is pushing 50. And “regenerative agriculture,” a farming method that “respects” the cycle of Mother Nature, needs farmers patient with such a long process.

But farmers must be young to make this approach successful and sustainable.

## Youth matters

THE “regenerative agriculture” approach introduced by Nestle Philippines comes at a time the Philippines coffee industry is seeing an increase in demand for the bean while supply is unwieldy as coffee farmers are aging, experts say. This is compounded by the need to transfer the agricultural practice to young people.

According to Tiedra, the first hurdle is the attitude of young Filipinos towards farming.

“Majority of young people nowadays, *ayaw nila sa* [they shun] agriculture, because they always associate agriculture to poverty and hard labor,” he said.

Nestle Philippines Vice President for Corporate Communications Anne Michelle Torres-Pador flagged such conditions as chilling to the coffee industry.

“*Kung wala ng mag-kakape* [If there are no coffee farmers], *paano na ang* [what will happen to the] coffee industry *bukas* [tomorrow]?” she said.

The Nestle executives noted that without an influx of new talent into the coffee industry, there could be a severe shortage of coffee farmers within the next 10 years to 15 years. The Philippines is currently 44.4 percent self-sufficient in coffee, which means more than half of the country's coffee supply comes from abroad.

They added that such a scenario could lead to the Philippines to increasingly rely on imported coffee and lose leverage when exporters either impose a ban, such as India's rice stance, or control trade.

And with the local coffee industry still failing to keep up with a rising demand for the beverage, the lure of importation of the commodity becomes more enticing every day.

## 84% share of Mindanao

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) revealed that the Philippines's green coffee bean (GCB) production is centered in Mindanao, accounting for a substantial 84 percent of the overall yield.

Meanwhile, Luzon and Visayas contribute 9 percent and 7 percent, respectively, to the country's GCB production. The statistics highlight the regional disparities in coffee production within the country.

Further analysis of 2022 data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), covering the period from January to March 2022, underscores the dominance of Robusta coffee in the country's coffee production landscape, constituting a significant 72 percent. Arabica coffee follows with a 20 percent share, while Excelsa and Liberica make up 7 percent and 1 percent, respectively.

Despite these numbers, a critical issue looms over the Philippine coffee industry—the sufficiency level, or the ability to meet local demand, is alarmingly low, standing at a mere 27 percent.

The PSA data also revealed this deficiency in production compared to demand has been a persistent problem since 2016, posing a significant challenge to the country's coffee sector.

According to DA Regional Technical Director for Operations (RTDO) Carlota S. Madriaga, the country is



NESTLÉ'S demo farm in the Bukidnon Integrated Coffee Center. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

an ideal place to grow quality coffee.

However, Madriaga said, local coffee production is decreasing by 3.5 percent annually over the past 10 years. Meanwhile, the country's coffee consumption for the last three years (2018 to 2020) increased by 2.1 percent.

## Regenerative agriculture

NESTLE Philippines' Head of Agribusiness, Arthur R. Baria, told the BUSINESSMIRROR the concept of enhancing traditional coffee farming—to uplift farmers' livelihoods by elevating their income above the poverty line—“is a good story to tell; from then, let's achieve some more.”

“Using regenerative agriculture and intercropping—the more sources of income, the more *tataas ang* annual income *nila*,” Baria emphasized.

In 2021, Nestle, in collaboration with the German development agency GIZ, launched an initiative under the Nescafe banner called “Project Coffee Plus.”

This initiative aimed to introduce 1,500 farmers to the principles of Regenerative Agriculture and entrepreneurship.

The outcome of this intervention has been reflected in the data, demonstrating a significant success in increasing the yields and profits of coffee farmers who participated by a remarkable 300 percent.

According to the initiative's results, coffee farmers achieved an average yield of 900kg/ha, a substantial improvement from the baseline crop yield of 235 kg/ha recorded in the 2018-2019 period.

Notably, a subset of 192 top-performing farmers even exceeded this, achieving yields of 1mt/ha and higher.

The outcomes of this initiative have been closely monitored and evaluated by the Rainforest Alliance, an international nongovernment organization dedicated to partnering with businesses to enhance agriculture, preserve forests, combat climate change, and safeguard the rights of people.





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Meanwhile, implementing initiatives are nothing, "*kapag walang healthy soil na pagtatamnan ng kape* [if there's no healthy soil on which to plant coffee] in the future generations," Tiedra said, adding that regenerative agriculture is vital.

"We teach our farmers, to help them develop a richer soil and make these coffee farming communities more resilient," Tiedra emphasized.

Addressing the challenges faced by Filipino farmers, Baria stressed the importance of training and access to affordable loans.

As the world's biggest buyer and manufacturer of GCB, Nestle's commitment to training and access to affordable loans has become a beacon of hope for the coffee industry.

## Next generation

NESTLE'S Pador said the company uses a two-pronged approach to rejuvenate the local coffee industry.

"*Habang hinahanda po natin ang lupa para sa magkakapeng Pilipino* [while we're preparing the land for coffee-drinking Filipinos], we are also helping the new generation of coffee farmers," she declared.

She underscored the seriousness of Nestle's commitment by stating, "We are here to stay; we are here for the long haul."

Pador acknowledged the issue of aging coffee farmers: "*Ang mag-kakape po natin ay tumatanda na* [they are getting old]," and urged collaboration within the industry.

There's hope, though. Third Year Agriculture Student of Sultan Kudarat State University, Queenie Subasco expressed her willingness to pursue agriculture as her college course, citing the current state of the country's coffee industry as a motivating factor.

"*Nakikita ko po na lumiliit na ang bilang ng mga estudyante na kumukuha ng* [I can see that fewer students are taking up] agriculture," Subasco shared during the media briefing.

She firmly believes that the agricultural industry holds immense

potential and offers a multitude of benefits.

Subasco lamented, in Filipino "Some people don't appreciate the importance of, and our country's need, for agriculture."

Meanwhile, DA Administrative Aide IV An Cristie Tangcalagan, a former student of agriculture, expressed her strong belief that "Maybe you think that we are giving up agriculture, but no, we are still here and we are fighting for it."

## Call to action

IN a recent news briefing at the Bukidnon Integrated Coffee Center, NESCAFE Ph launches "Kape't-Bisig Sa Pagbangon" campaign, a movement aims at raising awareness and rallying Filipinos to support their local coffee farmers and secure a prosperous future for the generations to come.

"We will ask everybody to raise awareness to talk about the current landscape of the coffee industry," said Nescafe Classic Assistant Brand Manager Igi Natanuan.

This campaign goes beyond traditional charitable efforts, combining online engagement and educational empowerment in a remarkable way.

In a pioneering move, the company introduces the "Kape't-Bisig Sa Pagbangon Online Challenge" on TikTok, the first-ever brand challenge in the Philippines with a cause.

This challenge invites everyone to participate by creating TikTok content—be it singing or dancing—using the iconic "Bangon" music, as a tribute to the hardworking Filipino coffee farmers.

"We must take on the challenge, we must inspire the youth," Natanuan added. "There's hope that they can do something in improving the coffee agricultural landscape here in the Philippines."

The online challenge harnesses the power of social media to amplify the message of supporting local coffee farming.

Through the catchy tunes and captivating dance moves, participants can spread awareness and inspire others to join the cause.

Natanuan emphasized that there is no tangible incentive to the participants, but "the incentive that they will get is the help and the awareness they will raise from the challenge that they did."

As highlighted by Natanuan, it's not just about coffee; it's about fostering unity and camaraderie among Filipinos for a brighter future.

## Investing in education

AS an integral part of this initiative, NESCAFE Ph is committed to investing in the future of the agricultural industry by providing educational grants to the top three agricultural universities in Mindanao: Central Mindanao University, Sultan Kudarat State University, and University of Southern Mindanao.

"They are a beacon of hope, they are teaching agriculture," Nescafe Classic Assistant Brand Manager Igi Natanuan stated the reason why they choose these institutions.

This investment will benefit 400 Junior and Senior High School students who are the children of coffee farmers.

"They are our future coffee farmers," Natanuan said, who could really level up farming in the country.

Through this initiative, P10 million will be allotted to this educational assistance. Each student grantee will receive a one-time grant of 25,000 pesos.

"We have a preference for students taking up agriculture," according to Natanuan. The parents should be a member of the Nestle partnered cooperatives such as Sta. Catalina Multipurpose Cooperative and Lamac Multipurpose Cooperative.

Nescafe believes this financial assistance will not only support the educational aspirations of these young individuals but also emphasize the importance of the agricultural sector in the Philippines today and in the future.

"We're working together to achieve our goal and objectives for the coffee industry not only in Northern Mindanao," said the DA's RTDO Madriaga.

Tiedra firmly stands by the idea that agripreneurship holds "substantial opportunities," and sees it as a crucial pathway for empowering the younger generation.

He added that farming, particularly in the case of coffee cultivation, transcends the traditional notion of agriculture, presenting a dynamic business opportunity.

To support this vision, he highlighted the importance of imparting fundamental entrepreneurial skills, along with sound business and marketing knowledge, to farmers through specialized training programs the multinational food and beverages company provides.

Coffee Farmers can boost their income if they apply "good agricultural practices with the right interventions," Tiedra said.

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# DA wants 'efficient regulation' of livestock sector

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

@jearcalas

**T**HE Department of Agriculture (DA) is reviving its plan to have "end-to-end jurisdiction" over livestock and poultry-related matters to ensure the efficient regulation of the sector and to fast-track the approval of permits, including veterinary vaccines.

Agriculture Undersecretary for Livestock Deogracias Victor Savellano said the DA is in discussions with the Department of Health (DOH), particularly its Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Office of the President through the Executive Secretary, to clarify regulatory overlaps and delineation.

In a recent poultry forum, Savellano said the interagency dialogue seeks to improve the implementation of the Food Safety Act by strengthening the roles of implementing government entities.

However, the DA is taking a different route this time as it plans to just ink a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the DOH instead of pushing for the amendment of the Food Safety Act, which is "cumbersome," according to Savellano.

"That's long [amendments]. What we're doing now is we are asking the Executive Secretary to help us because the DOH and FDA are implementing the law and we think we should be coordinating with each other since we have the manpower, equipment and laboratories," Savellano told reporters in an interview.

"If some processes will be with them [DOH and FDA] then it may take time. If processes would take long then [there would be consequences] that we will have to resolve."

Savellano urged livestock and poultry stakeholders to submit their respective position papers and consolidate their position on the matter.

Regulatory woes involving livestock and poultry stemmed from the delineation of duties and responsibilities between the agriculture agencies and the health agencies after the Food Safety Act was enacted.

For example, veterinary drugs and vaccines are registered with the FDA but the testing and evaluation are conducted by pertinent agriculture agencies.

Previous agriculture leaders had advocated for the return of processed meat products as well as veterinary items like drugs and vaccines under



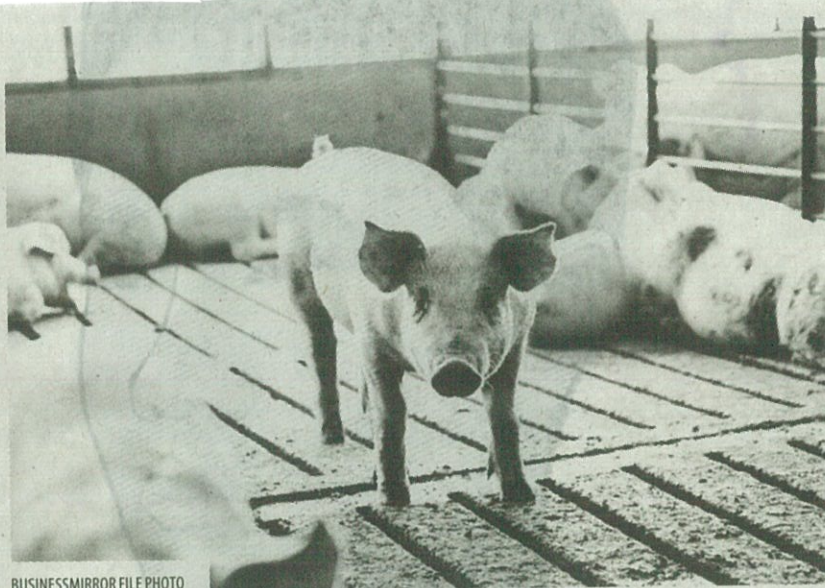
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BUSINESSMIRROR FILE PHOTO

the DA-attached agencies' jurisdictions. (Related story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2017/09/25/amendments-to-food-safety-law-sought/>)

The timeline for the forging of the MOA, Savellano said, is "immediate" since there are certain regulatory functions that should be reverted to the DA, such as the approval of vaccines for animals.

"If it is for animals then they should let the DA handle it. If it involves humans then it's under DOH."

## Animal vaccines

THE DA's move to realign regulatory roles and responsibilities comes at a time when the country needs to import critical animal vaccines, such as the avian influenza vaccine.

Jun Romo, President of Philippine College of Poultry Practitioners Inc. (PCPP), said the country's avian influenza (AI) vaccine guidelines are "steadily moving forward."

Romo said there is a need to fast-track the approval of the guidelines because of the presence of migratory

birds and the circulation of the AI virus in the country.

Romo disclosed that the draft guidelines are currently undergoing "legal scrubbing" and once done, it would be submitted to President Marcos Jr. for his approval. Marcos is concurrently the country's agriculture chief.

PCPP is the private sector partner of the national government in crafting the country's bird flu guidelines. The national government is represented by the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Previously, he said the FDA wanted to allow the importation of a few vials of AI vaccine for trial testing akin to the tests being undertaken for African swine fever.

However, the FDA was convinced during the last tripartite meeting to adopt the updated vaccine guidelines that have already taken into consideration risks and food safety concerns.

Endorsement letters for three vaccine candidates were already submitted to the concerned government agencies, Romo said.

"Before, the FDA wanted a smaller volume [of vaccines] for trials but that

is not what the industry needs right now. The migration of live birds is already here so we need mass vaccination to end [the virus]," he said in a recent forum.

"The [draft memorandum circular] is now with the [Department of Agriculture's] legal [service] for legal brushing and for approval of the DA secretary to make it an official MC. Of course we are also waiting the evaluation on the side of the FDA."

Romo said the approval of the vaccine guidelines is "urgent" since illegal bird flu vaccines are already circulating in the market through e-commerce platforms like Shopee and Lazada.

He warned that the use of illegal bird flu vaccines may cause the AI strains circulating in the Philippines to mutate.

"[The vaccines sold online] are either just oil emulsion or aluminum hydroxide solution. Those vaccines are not really legitimate [products] of vaccine companies," he said.

"There are also vaccines coming from nearby countries that are not prescribed to be used. Our circulating strain is 2.3.4.4b, using these vaccines may push the virus to mutate further and once our legitimate vaccines arrive they might become ineffective."





## PHL 2024 broiler chicken production forecast at 1.53 million metric tons

THE PHILIPPINES is expected to post broiler chicken production of 1.53 million metric tons (MT) in 2024, boosted by the industry's continued expansion, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) said.

The forecast, issued by the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), suggests a production growth rate of 3.4%.

"FAS forecasts increased chicken production in 2024 because integrators are expanding production," it said.

"In the broiler commercial sector, the usual growth for the poultry sector is 3% to 7% a year. The 3.4% expected production growth in 2024 is at the low end of that range," the FAS added.

It also forecast higher chicken meat imports for next year due to higher-than-expected demand and competitive prices compared to domestic production.

Imports of chicken meat rose 18.3% to 289.52 million kilograms (kg) in the first eight months. This accounted for 35.4% of all meat imports in the period, according to the **Bureau of Animal Industry**.

Beef output is expected to rise slightly to 190,000 MT as

some hog and small ruminant farmers are shifting to cattle raising.

"The trendline of total beef and carabeef production shows it is increasing over time. Inventory is declining, which means cattle and carabao are being sold as meat," the FAS said.

It noted a slight uptick in the number of cattle and carabao slaughtered.

Beef consumption is likewise expected to rise slightly in 2024, while shipments are expected to be flat due to the low demand for imported beef.

Shipments of beef fell 16.78% to 91.65 million kg in the first eight months.

Meanwhile, the FAS said that pork production is set to increase to 970,000 MT in 2024 due to the repopulation efforts of hog farmers after African Swine Fever hit the industry.

"Industry contacts say that the current rate of growth is slow relative to the losses," it added.

Due to tight global supply, pork imports are expected to drop to 500,000 MT. During the eight months, pork imports slipped 12.7% to 59.13 million kg. — **Adrian H. Halili**



## Pangasinan, Ilocos Norte declared free of bird flu

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said Pangasinan and Ilocos Norte are free from type H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza or bird flu.

The clearance was issued through memorandum circulars signed by Senior Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban.

Pangasinan detected its first case in San Carlos City in July 2022 among layer chicken.

The DA said Ilocos Norte detected cases in Laoag, Sarrat, Bacarra, and Pasuquin in October and November 2022, affecting duck and layer chicken farms.

It added that the two provincial governments worked with DA Regional Field Office IV-A and the Bureau of Animal Industry to depopulate, clean, and disinfect the affected areas, while conducting surveillance of nearby farms.

"Continued disease monitoring and surveillance in the 1-km and 7-km surveillance zones surrounding the affected farms yielded negative test results for influenza type A virus," the DA said.

According to the guidelines issued by the World Organization for Animal

Health, a country or area may be declared free of avian influenza 28 days after the completion of depopulation, disinfection of the last affected establishment, and no signs of infection observed after surveillance.

"More than 90 days have elapsed since the end of the cleaning and disinfection operations and that surveillance activities yielded negative (AI) test results," the DA added.

The DA declared Aurora, Quezon, Capiz, Batangas, Ilocos Sur, Rizal province, and South Cotabato as free of bird flu this year. — **Adrian H. Halili**





# FIRST SHIPMENT OF PH AVOCADOS SETS SAIL TO SOKOR

AN initial shipment of 3,040 boxes of fresh "Hass" avocados from the Philippines with an estimated value of USD48,433 (P2.7 million) set sail to South Korea on Saturday.

According to the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Plant Industry (DA-BPI), the first shipment left the KTC Port Tibungco in Davao City and is expected to arrive in Pyongtaek Port, South Korea on Oct. 8.

DA-BPI Assistant Director for Regulatory Services Ruel Gesmundo, DA-Region 11 (Davao Region) Director Abel James Moteagudo, Dole Philippines Senior Vice President and Stanfilco Division General Manager Tet-suya Kitae, led the ceremonial send-off.

The Philippines, through the Bu-

reau of Plant Industry (BPI), on Sept. 25, 2009 officially expressed its intent to export fresh Hass avocado fruits to Korea, responding to the request of Dole Philippines.

The Department of Animal and Plant Quarantine Agency (APQA) of the Republic of Korea and DA-BPI reached a historic agreement on June 19, 2023, and came into effect on Sept. 8, 2023.

The significant market access achievement was made possible through the diligent efforts of the DA-BPI, headed by Director Gerald Glenn Panganiban, and the Philippine Agriculture Office in Seoul.

Panganiban played an instrumental role in expediting the market access request by incorporating this agenda during the International Plant Protec-

tion Convention (IPPC), attended by several member countries, including the top management of APQA.

This marks the beginning of a fruitful trade relationship between the two nations, as the people of South Korea can finally taste the creamy and nutrient-rich Hass avocados from the Philippines.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. remains committed to the acceleration of agricultural development by opening the country's doors to Philippine fruit exports.

Under his leadership, the Philippines is continuously making progress in creating opportunities in the global market and solidifying its capability to trade top-quality agricultural products. PNA



OFF TO SOKOR. Officials of the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Plant Industry and Dole Philippines hold a send-off ceremony for the first shipment of fresh "Hass" avocados worth an estimated USD48,433 for South Korea at the KTC Port Tibungco in Davao City on Sept. 30. The shipment is expected to arrive in Pyongtaek Port, South Korea on Oct. 8. Photo courtesy of DA-AFID





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# PH Sept inflation pegged at 5.3%

**BSP sees final number to range from 5.3-6.1% on more expensive food, fuel**

**By Ronnel W. Domingo**  
@RonWDomingo

Private-sector economists agree that headline inflation in the Philippines will read at 5.3 percent in September—the same as in August—but there are also those looking at a further uptick just like the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

The BSP said on Friday that it expects the latest monthly readout to be within the range of 5.3 percent to 6.1 percent.

The midpoint of this range, 5.7 percent, suggests that the central bank expects the rate of growth in prices of goods and services that the average Filipino household commonly buys to have gone up for the second month in a row.

Goldman Sachs is also looking at a 5.7-percent print

for September, mainly due to higher vegetable prices as well as higher electricity rates and domestic oil prices.

The American financial services group said their forecast was higher than the Bloomberg consensus of 5.3 percent.

## Oil price surge

In a research note, Goldman Sachs said that across the region, headline inflation—for both retail and factory-gate prices—has ticked back up in a number of economies.

This “reflect[s] the surge in oil prices since the end of June as well as higher food [notably rice] prices in some cases,” they said.

Jonathan Ravelas, managing director of eManagement for Business and Marketing Services, also forecasts 5.7 per-

cent, saying that inflation went slightly higher because of rising prices of fuel and rice as well as a weaker peso.

## Supply constraints

Robert Dan Roces, chief economist at Security Bank Corp., said they were expecting the readout to tick up to 5.4 percent, mainly due to increases in the cost of electricity and food.

“These sectors have been subject to supply constraints and higher production costs, which have been passed on to consumers,” Roces said.

“Despite the slight uptick, our outlook for the coming months suggests that inflation is likely to be on a downward path,” he added, citing expectations of better supply conditions.

ING Bank expects inflation

in the Philippines to stay elevated and above target for another month, but lower from August at 5.1 percent in September.

“Rice prices could still edge higher despite a presidential order capping rice prices on select varieties of the all-important staple,” The Netherlands-based group said.

“We could see Philippine inflation settle at 5.1 percent year-on-year, well above target and the main reason why the [BSP] has suddenly turned extremely hawkish,” ING Bank said.

The United Kingdom-based Pantheon Macroeconomics is also expecting 5.1 percent in September as they see inflation in the Philippines heading down over the coming months to settle at 2.9 percent by December. **INQ**



Date: 09-02-2013 Page: A9



# BOC seizes 236,571 sacks of smuggled rice in Bulacan

By **JeromeAning**  
@JeromeAningINQ

Citing a Bureau of Customs (BOC) report to President Marcos, Malacañang on Sunday said more than 236,000 sacks of rice found in four different warehouses in Bulacan have been issued warrants of seizure and detention on suspicion that the grains were smuggled and being hoarded.

The Presidential Communications Office, in a statement, said the BOC told the Office of the President that 236,571 sacks of rice were found in the warehouses as of Sept. 29, which prompted the agency to seize the grain stocks and sue the owners

for economic sabotage and agricultural product smuggling.

The BOC said it was still waiting for the comments of government prosecutors as far as the criminal charges are concerned.

The bureau also said that as of Sept. 29, it has also issued letters of authority to four other warehouses, one each in Cavite and in Las Piñas City, and the other two in Manila.

It is now awaiting the submission of necessary documents from the warehouse owners in Cavite and Las Piñas while inventory is ongoing for the warehouses in Manila.

On Friday, the BOC's Bureau Action Team Against

Smuggling filed four smuggling charges with the Department of Justice against rice smugglers in Bulacan.

## Economic sabotage

Lawyer William Balayo, the acting director of BOC's Legal Service, said over the weekend that charges of economic sabotage will be filed against three importers and against one for agricultural product smuggling under the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act.

The charges stemmed from the inspections that customs agents conducted in Bulacan on Aug. 24.

The BOC said it was also

conducting a case buildup for the filing of charges against the suspected smugglers of rice in Zamboanga City where over 42,000 sacks of smuggled rice were earlier seized. They were eventually donated to the Department of Social Welfare and Development after the importers failed to present documents to defend the legality of their importation.

In his visit to San Andres, Manila, on Sept. 26, the President said he had directed the BOC to continue to go after smugglers and hoarders behind the price manipulation schemes that are driving up the price of rice. INQ





# Trader gets 4 years for carrot smuggling

By **EVELYN MACAIRAN**

**A businesswoman was sentenced to at least three years in prison for smuggling P2 million worth of carrots into the country, the Bureau of Customs (BOC) said yesterday.**

The Manila Metropolitan Trial Court Branch 24 meted Divina Bisco Aguilar, the proprietor of Real Mart, a prison term of three

years and one day to four years on Sept. 8 for violating Section 1401 in relation to Sections 102 and 1400 of Republic Act 10863, the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act, the BOC said in a statement.

Court records show Aguilar misdeclared a shipment of carrots smuggled from Singapore as 2,500 cartons of frozen pastry buns. The shipment arrived at the Port of Manila on June 26, 2020.

According to the BOC, the shipment

of carrots had a total appraised value of P2,051,988.18, a dutiable value of P1,709,342.18 and customs duties, taxes and fees totaling P342,646.

The BOC said it ordered a physical examination of the shipment upon receiving a derogatory report. It issued a warrant of seizure and detention against the shipment.

The bureau filed a criminal complaint against Aguilar with the Department of Justice on Sept. 10, 2020.





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# Palace eyes seizing 200K sacks of rice in warehouses

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA [@sam\\_medenilla](#)

**M**ALACANANG on Sunday reported the Bureau of Customs (BOC) is now seeking to confiscate over 200,000 sacks of suspected smuggled rice from warehouses in Bulacan.

In a press statement, Presidential Communications Office (PCO) Secretary Cheloy Velicaria-Garafil disclosed BOC has issued warrants of seizure and detention for the 236,571 sacks from four warehouses, which it inspected in Bulacan last Friday.

"The BOC said they are still waiting for the comments of the government prosecutor as far as

the discovery of the sacks of rice is concerned," Garafil said.

The initiative was part of the government's intensified campaign against rice smugglers and hoarders after the unusual spike in the price of the food staple last month.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. attributed the trend to price manipulation by unscrupulous individuals, which prompted him

to impose the following price cap: P41 per kilogram (kg) for regular milled rice (RMR) and P45 per kg for well-milled rice (WMR) nationwide.

The pronouncement has led the BOC to file four smuggling charges before the Department of Justice (DOJ) against rice smugglers in Bulacan.

PCO noted that BOC is now building up its case against the reported smugglers in Zamboanga City, which allowed it to confiscate 42,000 sacks of smuggled rice, which were donated to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

DSWD distributed the donated rice to Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) beneficiaries in Tungawan, Zamboanga Sibugay; San Roque, Zamboanga City; General Trias City, Cavite; Iriga City, Camarines Sur; San Andres, Ma-

nila; Dapa, Surigao del Norte; and Dinagat Islands.

Customs officials also issued letters of authority (LOA) to warehouses in Cavite and in Las Piñas City, and two warehouses in Manila, which are also suspected to contain smuggled goods.

"It is now awaiting the submission of necessary documents from the two warehouse owners in Cavite and Las Piñas City," Garafil said.

The Marcos administration is currently trying to address the rise in food prices after inflation accelerated to 5.9 percent last August from 5.6 percent from the month before.

Last Friday, the Palace announced that the President also issued Executive Order No. 41, which prohibited local government units (LGU) from collecting "pass-through fees" for national roads to help "temper" inflation rate.



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## Misdeclaring carrots as pastry buns lands importer in prison

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS  
@jearcalas

**A**N importer was sentenced by a metropolitan court to up to 4-year imprisonment for agricultural smuggling after misdeclaring a shipment of carrots as pastry buns, according to the Customs bureau.

The Bureau of Customs (BOC) said the Metropolitan Trial Court-National Judicial Capital Region (MTC-NJCR) Branch 24 convicted a certain Divina Bisco Aguilar, the proprietor of "Real Mart," for violation of Customs laws.

The court promulgated its verdict last

September 8, the BOC said. The conviction came three years after the bureau filed a criminal complaint with the Department of Justice last September 10, 2020, the agency added.

Aguilar was sentenced to a prison term of three years and one day to four years, according to the BOC.

The case stems from an incident that occurred on June 26, 2020, when a shipment consigned to Real Mart arrived at the BOC-Port of Manila from Singapore. The consignee, owned by Divina Bisco Aguilar, declared the shipment to contain 2,500 cartons of frozen pastry buns, read the bureau's statement issued last Sunday.

"However, suspicions were raised when a derogatory report was received by the Port of Manila, prompting a physical examination of the shipment," it added.

Upon inspection, the Customs bureau discovered that the shipment contained carrots instead of the declared frozen pastry buns. Subsequently, a warrant of seizure and detention was issued against the shipment, and appropriate charges were filed against the owner of Real Mart, it added.

The legal battle that followed involved years of preliminary investigation and court hearings according to the BOC. Finally, on September 8, 2023, the MTC-NJCR Branch 24 rendered its verdict, finding the

accused guilty beyond a reasonable doubt for violation of Section 1401 in relation to Sections 102 and 1400 of Republic Act (RA) 10863, commonly known as the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA), the BOC added.

The BOC said there is another pending case filed against the same importer before a regional trial court for violation of RA 10845 or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act as the value of the shipment involved met the minimum P1-million threshold for large scale smuggling as economic sabotage.

"In another incident, the BOC filed two criminal complaints with the DOJ on September 8 and 15, 2023," it said.

"These cases involve the misdeclaration of various goods from Korea without approved clearance from the Food and Drug Administration and the exportation of a universal CT tester with a falsified General Authorization Certificate. These incidents are in violation of relevant provisions of the CMTA," it added.





## Carrots importer hinatulan ng agri smuggling

Isang babaeng importer ang hinatulan ng hukuman dahil sa kasong agricultural smuggling, ayon sa Bureau of Customs.

Base sa pahayag ng BOC, hinatulan umano ng guilty ng Metropolitan Trial Court-National Judicial Capital Region Branch 24 noong Setyembre 8, 2023 si Divina Bisco Aguilar dahil sa paglabag sa batas matapos ideklara ang shipment ng kanyang carrots bilang frozen pastry buns.

Isinampa umano ng BOC ang kasong kriminal laban kay Aguilar sa Department of Justice noong Setyembre 10, 2020.

Base sa pahayag ng BOC, nangyari ang insidente noong Hunyo 26, 2020 kung saan ay dumating ang shipment na nakapangalan sa Real Mart, na pag-aari ni

Aguilar sa Port of Manila galing Singapore.

Dineklara umano ang mga kargamento na nasa 2,500 kahon bilang frozen pastry buns. Subalit naghinala ang mga taga-BOC matapos na makatanggap umano ng report mula sa Port of Manila kung kaya't binusisi ang mga kargamento at dito natuklasan na carrots pala ang mga laman nito.

Sinamsam ang mga kargamentong sa bisa ng warrant of seizure and detention at sinampahan ng kaso ang may-ari ng Real Mart.

Ayon sa BOC, napatunayang guilty ang akusado sa kasong paglabag sa Republic Act No. 10863 o Customs Modernization and Tariff Act at hinatulan ito ng tatlo at isang araw hanggang sa apat na taong pagkabilanggo. **(Betchai Julian)**





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## Abante NEGOSYO

### Presyo ng itlog tumaas

TUMAAS na ang presyo ng itlog dahil sa kakulangan ng supply na sinabayan ng pag-sipa ng demand dahil sa nalalapit na holiday season.

Ayon kay United Broiler Raisers Association (UBRA) at Philippine Egg Board Association chairman Gregorio

San Diego, ang presyo ng farm gate ng mga itlog ay tumaas ng P0.20 hanggang P0.30 ngayong linggo dahil na rin sa mababang supply ng mga itlog bunsod ng pabago-bagong klima kaya nauunsyami ang panginitlog ng mga manok. Nakadagdag din sa gastos ang matabas na presyo ng feeds.

Ang average farm-gate price ng isang medium-sized egg ay nasa P6.35 pero ngayon ay

umakyat na sa P6.55 at posibleng tumaas pa.

Sinabi pa ni San Diego na naapektuhan sila nang magkulang ang supply ng feed dahil sa pananalasa ng Bagyong Egay at Goring gayundin ang epekto ng bird flu.

"Nitong mga nakaraang buwan, talaga namang lugi ang mga nasa negosyo ng paitlugaan kasi... mura ang presyo ng itlog pero tumataas ang aming cost lalo na ang feeds, fuel, at kuryente," ayon kay San Diego sa isang panayam.

Giit pa ng UBRA na hindi na kakayanin sa panahon ngayon ang P5.00 na itlog dahil ang kinakain ng isang manok ay halos nasa P5.00 na at feeds pa lang, wala pang vitamins. (Vick Aquino)



RICE FARMERS GET P12.7 BILLION  
BOOST FROM GOVERNMENT



## EDITORIAL

### Helping rice farmers

PEOPLE concede that government authorities are employing all means to help the beleaguered rice farmers in the Philippines amid the many challenges confronting them.

Without doubt, these agricultural workers, particularly the small ones, play a key role in government efforts to achieve food security.

Definitely, concerned government authorities will be drawing the ire of the country's millions of rice farmers and their loved ones if they fail to meet their mushrooming needs.

Thus, President Marcos should be commended for ordering the release of P12.7 billion to fund the highly-successful Rice Farmers Financial Assistance (RFFA) program.

Marcos said the financial aid would help the farmers cope with the increasing cost of production, sustain their productivity and challenges like the El Nino phenomenon.

RFFA is an assistance program for rice farmers tilling below two hectares of land as mandated under Republic Act (RA) 11598 or the Cash Assistance to Filipino Farmers Act 2021.

Beneficiaries include those in farm cooperative assistance (FCAs), irrigators associations (IAs), agrarian reform beneficiary organizations (ARBOs), small water impounding systems associations (SWISAs) and other farm groups.

Communications Secretary Cheloy Garafil said President Marcos ordered the release of the amount to help small rice farmers amid challenges besetting the agriculture sector.

The government has identified a total of 2.3 million small rice farmer beneficiaries, who will receive P5,000 each in financial aid, according to Secretary Garafil.

Beneficiaries are farmers listed in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA).

Without second thoughts, we applaud the government for helping the country's rice farmers.





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## BOC CHARGES 4 IMPORTERS WITH RICE SMUGGLING

THE Bureau of Customs (BOC) said that it filed four agricultural smuggling cases on Friday, September 29, against the rice importers who were allegedly connected with the warehouse in Bulacan that was previously raided, an official said on Saturday.

"The Bureau of Customs Bureau Action Team Against Smuggling (BATAS), that's the anti-smuggling arm of the Bureau of Customs, nakapag-file po kami ng four cases, particularly po ito iyong sa rice," said lawyer William Balayo, the acting Director of BOC's Legal Service.

"Ang particular factual backdrop po nito, ito po iyong mga ni-raid noong August 24 sa Bulacan and pardon me po kung hindi ko mapapangalananiyong mga akusado. Nonetheless po, we are happy to state that ito pong pinaylan (file) po namin ng cases. Tatlo po dito ay iyong economic sabotage," he said.

While the three cases are considered large-scale, one case was not able to meet the P10-million threshold and was degraded to a violation of the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA) although it also falls under agricultural products smuggling, rice in particular, Balayo explained.

Balayo expressed hope that the public will under-

stand that the BOC, under the leadership of Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio, is trying its best to stop all kinds of smuggling, particularly rice smuggling.

"Kasi talagang pahirap po iyong rice smuggling dito po sa ating bansa. And lalo na din po na hindi po namin trabaho talaga iyong hoarding, iyong paghuhuli po ng hoarding, pero sa pagbubukas po natin ng mga bodega nakikita po natin ngayon, Sir, iyong mga bigas na sa tingin namin ay baka hino-hoard po," he said.

"And once na nakakita po kami ng ganiyan, we coordinate with the appropriate government agencies kagaya po ng NBI, kagaya po ng DTI and the PACC parasila po ang mag-file ng cases for hoarding. Sana po malinaw iyon na ang Bureau of Customs po ay hanggang sa anti-smuggling lang po; wala po kami sa hoarding."

In the same forum, lawyer Marlon Agaceta, the chief of staff of the Customs Commissioner, said there are four pending letters of authority (LOA) implemented against four warehouses related to rice importation.

For the two importers, the deadline for submission of corresponding import documents to show the legality of the importation and proof of payment of correct duties and taxes lapsed

on Friday, Agaceta said.

"But the two other LOAs which were served on September 15, mayroon pa posilang two more days to submit an ongoing po iyong inventory," he said.

"The first warehouse, ang na-inventory po na stocks of rice, is 9,906 sacks of imported rice and the other one is 5,257 sacks of rice."

Asked why it takes time for the BOC to file the cases against suspected rice smugglers, the BOC officials said that the government always gives time for the other party or the stakeholder to prove the legality of their importation process and to give them due process.

Without giving due process to these people, the state may be liable for violating the Bill of Rights, the officials said.

Under the CMTA, importers are given 15 days to present proof of payment of duties and taxes through hearings before imported goods are seized if there is a violation on the side of the importer.

The BOC said that a case build-up is still being conducted for the filing of charges against smugglers in Zamboanga City where more than 42,000 sacks of smuggled rice were confiscated that were eventually donated to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).



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### **'Rice & cash,' ayuda sa mahihirap babaha sa mga darating na araw - Romualdez**

Para agad matugunan ang problema ng mga mahihirap sa buong bansa dahil sa mahal na presyo ng bigas at iba pang mga bilihin, mamimigay ng cash ayuda ang Kongreso at Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) sa mga darating na araw.

Magsisimula sa Metro Manila ang tinaguriang "Malaya Rice Project" sa susunod na linggo na aabot sa higit 3 milyong indibidwal sa buong bansa ang inasahang makakatanggap ng ayuda mula sa sektor ng mahihirap, senior citizen, person with disability, single parent, at indigenous person.

Ayon kay House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, "this is an initiative of the House and the DSWD para agad matulungan ang mga naghihi- kahos na mga kababayan natin habang inaayos ng pamahalaan ang long term solution sa kagutuman at mahal na bilihin".

"Tulad ng mga sinabi ko noon, batid ng pamahalaan ang paghihirap ng mga kababayan natin kaya ginagawan agad

natin ng paraan para maibsan kahit papaano ang kanilang paghihirap", ayon pa kay Romualdez".

Sa naturang programa, P1,500 cash ang matatanggap ng bawat benepisyaryo.

P570 mula sa naturang cash assistance ay dapat ibili ng 15 kilos ng bigas na nagkakahalaga lang ng P38 per kilo. Ang murang bigas ay ititinda sa labas ng mga payout centers sa araw na iyon.

Ang natitirang P930

ay pambili o panggas- tos nila sa iba pang pangangailangan.

Ang mga benepisyaryo ay manggagaling sa iba't-ibang distrito ng Pilipinas mula sa listahan na isusumite ng mga kongresista.

"Hindi titigil ang pamahalaan na tulungan ang mga mahihirap sa mga panahon na ito dahil ngayon nila mas kailangan ng tulong", pag- sisiguro ni Romualdez. (Doris Franche-Borja)





**Taas presyo ng itlog, magpapatuloy**

Asahan na ang patuloy na pagtaas ng presyo ng itlog sa mga susunod na araw, bunsod na rin ng nalalapit na Kapaskuhan.

Ayon kay Philippine Egg Board Chairman Gregorio San Diego, dahil nalalapit na ang Holiday Season, inaasahang tataas din ang demand o pangangailangan sa itlog, na magreresulta sa pagtaas ng presyo nito.

Sinabi pa ni San Diego, na siya ring chairman ng United Broiler Raisers Association (UBRA), isa pa sa mga sanhi ng pagtaas ng retail price ng itlog ang pagbaba ng produksiyon nito dahil na rin sa pananalasa ng mga nakalipas na bagyo sa bansa.

Babala pa ni San Diego, posibleng magpatuloy ang pagtaas ng presyo ng itlog sa unang bahagi ng susunod na taon. (Mer Layson)





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## Wheat, soybeans plunge

CHICAGO wheat futures cratered more than 6 percent on Friday, hitting a three-year low after US government data pegged wheat production above analysts' expectations.

Soybean futures also closed sharply lower on larger-than-forecast domestic stockpiles, and the drop in both commodities dragged down corn prices.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated the nation's now completed wheat harvest at 1.812 billion bushels, 78 million bushels bigger than a previous estimate and significantly above the average analyst forecast of 1.729 billion bushels in a Reuters poll.

Chicago Board of Trade wheat futures plummeted 6.4 percent to \$5.41-1/2 a bushel and hit the lowest level since Sept. 28, 2020, on a continuous chart.

It was the sharpest single-day percentage point drop since the middle of March 2022, when global grain markets shook off some of the panic-buying following Rus-

sia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The wheat balance sheets aren't nearly as tight as had been indicated," said Karl Setzer, brokerage research lead for Mid-Co Commodities.

Wheat prices had already been under pressure from ample Russian supplies and signals that Ukraine was managing to find export routes despite Russian attacks on port facilities.

In a separate report, the USDA said US wheat stocks as of Sept. 1 stood at 1.780 billion bushels, up slightly from 1.778 billion bushels reported a year earlier and reflecting poor export demand for US supplies.

"It is simply another piece of bad news," Rich Nelson, chief strategist for Allendale, said of the wheat stocks data.

US soybean stocks fell to their lowest in two years, but were larger than analysts expected. CBOT soybean futures fell 25-1/2 cents to \$12.75 a bushel. -Reuters





## Drought-hit Indian farmers protest against sharing of river water

BENGALURU- Farmers battling drought in India's southern state of Karnataka began a day-long strike on Friday to protest against the sharing of water from a river that also runs through the neighboring state of Tamil Nadu.

Police urged calm with all schools and public places staying shut, as thousands of farmers and trade union members held rallies after protests began this week in the tech hub of Bengaluru, against an order from the Supreme Court to share the waters.

"We will not let water from our river enter into the other state at a time when our farmlands are barren," said T. Ramanujan, the leader of a farmers' union in Karnataka.

With millions of farmers dependent on the river Cauvery for irrigation in both states, the dispute over sharing its waters has been one of the long-standing legal battles.

In August the Tamil Nadu government approached the Supreme Court, requesting its intervention, while Karnataka argued that it had

inadequate water in its reservoirs due to low rainfall.

Street protests began this week after the court directed Karnataka to release 5,000 cusecs of river water to Tamil Nadu for 15 days this month. A cusec is a volume equivalent to one cubic foot, or 28 cubic liters, per second.

Protesters in Bengaluru chanted "ours, ours, Cauvery is ours," slogans and called for police and government officials to join the protest.

Scores of people and some children from distressed districts carried placards with signs that said "We will give our blood but not water."

The government of Tamil Nadu says Karnataka had failed to manage the river and it must limit over-consumption of the shared resource.

"I have sown seeds but the ground is dry due to scanty rainfall and now we have shortage of supply from Cauvery river," said S. Kumar, a 48-year-old farmer in the state's district of Pudukkottai. "Small farmers

are struggling this year."

The Cauvery originates in the Karnataka region of Talakaveri and flows through Tamil Nadu before entering the Bay of Bengal.

Officials at an industry body in Karnataka said over 60 percent of manufacturing plants adhered to the call for strike, a decision that cost them about four billion Indian rupees (over \$48 million).

"Nevertheless, we readily accept our losses because we accept that water is crucial for both sustaining life and food production," said Ramesh Chandra Lahoti, President at Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Rice prices in key exporting countries including Thailand and Vietnam have climbed around 20 percent since India, the world's biggest shipper of the grain, banned shipments of a key variety in July, tightening global supplies.

Traders expect similar supply curbs by other exporters needing to ensure domestic food security, which has left importers scrambling to secure shipments. - Reuters



A combine deposits harvested wheat in a tractor trolley at a field on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. (Reuters Photo)





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## China places major orders of feed corn in boost for Ukraine

HAMBURG/KYIV/SINGAPORE — Chinese importers are believed to have made large purchases of animal feed corn from Ukraine in the past two weeks, traders in Asia and Europe said, providing a boost for the war-ravaged country from an unlikely source.

The traders were unable to say the exact volumes, but several said they amounted to several hundred thousand metric tons.

Some estimates from European traders ranged from 500,000 to 1 million tons for shipment between October and December.

A Ukrainian government source also confirmed corn sales to China, a key ally of Russia, particularly since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

"Importers in China have bought around 10 to 12 Panamax cargoes of Ukrainian corn for November/December shipment," said a Singapore-based trader at an international grain trading company, referring to a size of ship with a capacity that typically exceeds 60,000 tons of grain.

"Ukraine is the cheapest origin for corn as of now," the trader said.

A Ukrainian government source said: "I cannot tell you the volume, but I know that many (traders) did it and it is a good trend (for Ukrainian corn)."

Russia has tried to impose a de facto blockade on seaborne Ukrainian grain exports through the Black Sea. Its exit from a UN-backed safe shipping corridor in July has made the Danube River Ukraine's main grain export route and Moscow has been bombing port infrastructure along the river for months. — **Reuters**

### FULL STORY



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