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BBM: Rice prices, not surveys will measure my governance

By ALEXIS ROMERO

After seeing a sharp drop in his approval and trust ratings, President Marcos said the prices and availability of rice, not survey numbers, are the indicators of his governance, adding that the prices of the food staple are

stabilizing because of measures implemented by the government.

"The media asked me recently about survey numbers. The truth is I do not look at the survey numbers that much. I am looking at whether the prices of rice are really going down and whether the supply of rice is really

reaching all our countrymen," Marcos said in a video posted on YouTube last Saturday.

"That is the true measure of whether I am doing the right thing. We have seen the results, the stabilizing of prices because of the price cap and the removal of the price cap," he added in

Filipino.

Marcos said his administration would implement other strategies to help farmers and ensure they are not incurring losses. He cited initiatives on irrigation, mechanization, cheap fertilizer, post-harvest facilities,

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The 28th edition of the AgriLink/ FoodLink/ AquaLink 2023 themed 'Plant Health and Value Adding Key to Competitiveness' was held at the World Trade Center in Pasay on Oct. 5. Present during the event were (from left) AMIA president Ramil Rubia, NFHI chairman Chester Warren Tan, KAMICO chairman Shin Gil Kim, South African Ambassador Radebe Netshitenzhe, East-West Seed Group public affairs lead Mary Ann Sayoc, Sen. Cynthia Villar, Israel Ambassador Ilan Simon Fluss, Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban, Agrilink 2023 chairman Ricardo Tolentino and PCAFI president Danilo Fausto.



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farm-to-market roads, lowering transport costs and the proper timing and balance of the importation of farm goods.

"We are doing everything to ensure that the prices of rice in the market would continue to destabilize and decrease," he stressed. "There is no better gauge for our governance than to see our people experiencing comfort and convenience. That is my indicator: that there is no hunger or insecurity in terms of food."

The President's approval and trust ratings have seen "significant erosions," falling by double digits in September, according to a nationwide Pulse Asia survey.

While a majority or 65 percent of respondents to the Sept. 10 to 14 poll said they approved of Marcos' performance, it was lower by 15 points when compared to the 80 percent recorded in June. About 10 percent of the respondents said they disapprove of the Chief Executive's performance while 25 percent remained undecided.

The same survey also found 71 percent saying they trusted Marcos – lower by 14 points from the 85 percent in June. Some six percent said they distrust the President while 23 percent were undecided on the matter.

In a media interview last Oct. 4, Marcos said the drop in his poll numbers was not surprising because people are having a hard time because of the higher prices of rice and other agricultural products.

"What's important to me is that we make sure that people have enough to eat and that it is affordable to them," Marcos said during the interview.

"You cannot blame the people. They are really hurting. That's why we're doing all of these things. That's why we're doing all of the things to try and maintain the prices at a level that is affordable to our people," he added.

Responding to the escalating rice prices, the government implemented

price ceilings on the food staple on Sept. 5 through Executive Order 39, which capped the prices at P41 per kilogram on regular milled rice and P45 per kilogram for the well-milled varieties.

The month-long imposition of price caps has helped stabilize the prices of rice in the market, Marcos claimed as he maintained that the country has sufficient supply of the food commodity.

"I have said several times in my speeches that we do not have a supply problem," he said.

Marcos also said the government would use the proceeds of the Rice Tariffication Law to provide farmers the equipment they need like tractors, harvesters and dryers. He also cited efforts to lower the costs of the transporters of food products.

He has directed the agriculture department to use the excess collections of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to assist rice farmers and to boost production of the food staple.

In a recent meeting with agriculture officials, the President said the RCEF excess collection beyond the P10 billion requirement should be used to provide drying, mechanization and other equipment that would sustain rice farmers' productivity.

Under Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law, revenues from rice tariffs should pay for the annual requirement of P10 billion for the RCEF to bank-roll programs and projects raising the competitiveness and output of farmers of palay or unhusked rice.

The President has also approved the release of about P12.7 billion for the Rice Farmers Financial Assistance program, which aims to assist farmers tilling below two hectares of land – a move that is expected to benefit about 2.3 million small rice farmer beneficiaries who are registered in the registry system for basic sectors in agriculture as of June 30 this year. Each beneficiary will receive P5,000 in financial assistance.

– With Helen Flores

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GO NEGOSYO PILIPINAS ANGAT LAHAT! JOEY CONCEPCION

'B.B.M.'

"**B**aBangon Muli ang Agrikultura." This will be our rallying cry as we go and start transforming Philippine agriculture through the help of the private sector. It won't be easy or quick, but the timing will be right, thanks to the political certainty of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s historic mandate from the people and the urgency of addressing food insecurity.



At the beginning of his term, the President made it clear that agriculture would be a priority area. I am sure he knew how difficult the job would be. Remember that when he assumed the presidency, the world was five months into the Russia-Ukraine conflict. For two years before that, the pandemic had disrupted global supply chains. The war further choked the passage of many important commodities – wheat, most of all. And need I mention climate change and the destruction of important crops in Europe and the Americas because of floods and droughts?

I remember seeing wheat prices go through the roof, and soon after other commodities like sugar, milk and even today, oil. Even the largest companies suffered, as did the biggest economies in the world.

I recap the events of the past couple of years just to give perspective. The Philippines is not alone in experiencing towering inflation, high fuel prices and a general malaise in its economy. Everybody, everywhere is feeling the pinch, especially the poorest who must now make do with less food on the table. Even powerful men like the President suffer the effects when public opinion tells the administration, through lower approval ratings, of how hard life is.

To his credit, the President did not challenge the results of the pollsters. Instead, he acknowledged how Filipinos are feeling right now; he said he understands their sentiments completely. "*Kaya hindi mo masisi ang tao. Talagang naghihirap sila, eh,*" he said. "*Ibang usapan kapag bigas,*" he added.

Rice hits at something visceral in the Filipino. One economist pointed out that it shouldn't be so, because other parts of the country are not as dependent on rice as the people are in Luzon. But, unlike other food staples in the country, it is rice that is romanticized and politicized. Like the President said, *ibang usapan na kapag bigas*.

I believe that was the correct response. It shows empathy and a promise to do better by his countrymen.

It's easy to get swept up in the panic and the blame game, not realizing that it took years of neglect and mismanagement for us to get to this point where we have the problems that we have in agriculture. And it will take years to fix them. But we are starting to recover. Policies are being put in place, and a lot of housecleaning is being done.

Getting our country's agriculture industry back on track is a long game. It is just unfortunate that the long-standing problems of Philippine agriculture, including the low productivity of our farms, are now aggravated by climate change and all the disruptions it brings. These factors we cannot control, only mitigate. What we can control are how we cluster our farms, how productive we can make them and what policies we can put in place to make these changes sustainable.

I think very few will dispute the fact the roots of underdevelopment in the country can be traced to the structure of our economy, which is mostly rural and agricultural. Low productivity has long hounded the sector. This is due to attempts to implement a land reform program that resulted in fragmented farm-lands that cannot deliver the scale required to make a decent living for our farmers, much less give them access to technologies that could make their meager landholdings more productive.

What we need is to scale up agriculture, mentor our farmers and give them the technologies they need such as weather forecasting and modern farming methods. We also need to put in place the regulatory frameworks that could make transformative agriculture possible.

Fortunately, we have big-brother companies in our midst who see how uplifting the small farmers can redound to so many benefits down the road. When the small parts of their operation are well-functioning, the whole system runs smoothly and becomes profitable for everyone, from the chairman down to the smallest farmer in the value chain.

We've seen this big-brother model work in franchising and retail. Even the biggest malls in the country will be the first to tell you that they rely on a network of small and medium enterprises to keep their operations going. Small, startup stalls and brands infuse fresh ideas into even the biggest retail operations in the country.

The franchising model shows mentorship in action for beginning entrepreneurs. Many entrepreneurs get their start through franchises. They get their feet wet by signing up as franchisees and plugging into an established system that guarantees them a built-up brand and a back-end system that they can learn from.

I am happy to share that such big-brother mentorship is now happening on a regional scale. We have signed the private sector from seven out of nine ASEAN member-states to join the Philippines in an Agri-MSME Development initiative that is patterned after our very own Kapatid Angat Lahat sa Agri Program.

The situation in the region is not unlike our own here in the Philippines. Of the ten ASEAN member-states, four countries still have around 20 percent of their population living in poverty. That is why it is heartening when countries like Singapore and Brunei – where poverty is almost nonexistent – agree to sign up and help their less prosperous neighbor countries and their farmers. We recently had a meeting with Brunei and we are optimistic that the Agri-MSME Development plan we had formalized with several MOUs last September during the ASEAN Leaders Summit will soon be up and running.

This will be a fitting run-up to the Philippines' chairmanship of the ASEAN come 2026.

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Palay fetches higher price; Pinoy rice farmers happy

By JEL SANTOS and ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

Rice farmers said they are happy with the recent increase in the buying price of palay as the country's rice harvest season begins.

President Marcos had earlier announced that the National Food

Authority (NFA) Council had increased the purchase price for dry palay from ₱19 to ₱23, and the price for wet palay from ₱16 to ₱19.

In a press release, the Presidential Communications Office (PCO), stated that farmers groups have expressed gratitude to Marcos for increasing

the price of palay to help rice farmers earn more.

Cesar Daayata, head of the Paradise Village CARP Beneficiaries and Farmer-Irrigators Association (PAVICABEFIA) in Wao, Lanao del Sur, thanked head Marcos for issuing the said order. ▶7



Palay fetches higher price; Pinoy rice farmers happy 1◀

"Pasalamat ko sa atung halangdon nga presidente nga unta mapadayon pa niya ang daghan kaayo nga kaa-yuhan alang sa mga mag-uuma aron sa pagpabarog ug lig-on alang sa atong rice production (I thank the President, hoping that he will continue to strengthen the welfare of rice farmers in order to strengthen our rice production)," he said.

According to Daayata, this has prompted his group to sell its produce to the NFA and he anticipates further encouraging events that will increase the nation's rice production.

The NFA-Isabela said that rice harvesting has already begun in the province and farmers are happy with the new sets of buying prices regardless of whether they give it to their financiers or the NFA warehouse as buying prices are assured.

By the third week of October, NFA-Isabela anticipates that its warehouse will be fully occupied.

The PCO said that rice harvesting has also started in Molinao, Albay.

"Drying facilities are now being filled for the drying process of palay before being transported to its respective buyers," it stated.

Malinao rice farmer Melchor Borhal has also thanked the Chief Executive for increasing the buying price of palay, saying such will immensely help local farmers

On Oct. 4, Marcos lifted Executive Order No. 39, or the nationwide price cap of rice, after almost a month of its implementation.

Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban has earlier allayed the fears of rice farmers that the farmgate price of rice may go down due to the implementation of the cap. "The farmgate price of palay will not decrease because when the President says that is the price cap, that's it," he said in Filipino.

The Department of Agriculture (DA), which Marcos concurrently heads, has recently recorded stable rice prices for regular and well-milled rice following the lifting of the price cap.

During his campaign, Marcos said that he was aspiring to bring down the price of rice to P20 per kilo.

Better measure of gov't performance

President Marcos explained that he is not concerned about the dip in his approval ratings as he said that lowering the price of essential goods in the market was the real measurement of his administration's success.

Marcos said this after the latest Pulse Asia Survey showed that his approval rating fell to 65 percent in September from 80 percent in June.

In his latest vlog, the President stressed that he is more concerned

about the movement of prices of basic goods in the market than his ratings.

"Katotohanan niyan, hindi masyado natin tinitignan ang survey number (The reality is I don't look at the survey numbers too much)," he said.

"Ang tinitignan natin kung talaga bang bumababa ang presyo ng bigas at kung talaga bang umaabot ang supply ng bigas sa lahat ng ating mga mamamayan (What we're looking at is if the price of rice is really going down and if it is reaching Filipinos)," he added.

According to Marcos, this was the

real measurement of his administration's success.

"Iyan ang tunay na panukat kung talagang tama ang ating ginagawa at nakikita naman natin sa resulta (That's the real test if we're doing the right thing and we're seeing results)," he said.

President Marcos is firm that all government efforts are geared towards improving the lives of the Filipino people as envisioned in the "Bagong Pilipinas" governance, which is centered on the welfare of the people.

"Mga kababayan, ginagawa natin ang lahat upang masiguro ang tuloy-tuloy na pag-istabilisa at pagbaba ng presyo ng bigas sa merkado (My fellowmen, we're doing everything to ensure the steady stabilization and decrease of price of rice in the market)," he said.

"Walang ibang sukat sa ating panunungkulan ang tumutumbas sa makita ngayon kung komportable at maginhawa ang tao (No other rating can match seeing people living comfortably)," he added.

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Marcos to DA: Help farmers from RCEF excess collections

By BETHEENA UNITE

President Marcos has ordered the Department of Agriculture (DA) to utilize the excess collections of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to help rice farmers.

Marcos directed DA officials to use the excess collection beyond the P10-billion requirement to provide drying, mechanization, and other equipment support to rice farmers to sustain their productivity.

The President made the directive during a recent meeting with Agriculture officials, Presidential Communications Office Secretary

Cheloy Garafil said on Sunday, Oct. 8.

During his visit to Western Visayas provinces on Friday to lead the distribution of seized smuggled rice to beneficiaries, he mentioned the government's intention to promptly release to farmers the amounts in excess of the P10-billion fund.

"Yung tinatawag na RCEF, yung nakokolekta sa pagpasok ng imported na agricultural goods. Mayroon po tayong kinokolekta na taripa. Iyang taripa na 'yan ay ibabalik natin sa mga farmer natin, sa pamamagitan ng mga assistance na ibinibigay ng Department of Agriculture (RCEF comes from the tariff) ►6

Marcos to DA: Help farmers from RCEF excess collections 1◀

that we collect from agricultural goods. That tariff will go back to our farmers through assistance given by the Department of Agriculture," Marcos said last Friday.

Under Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), revenues collected from rice tariffs should pay for the yearly requirement of P10 billion for the RCEF to bankroll programs and projects raising the competitiveness and output of palay farmers.

In the same meeting, the President also ordered the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) to enjoin all local government units to rationalize the pass-through fees and other transport costs imposed on motor vehicles transporting goods like rice and other

products while passing through local public roads to facilitate the faster and more economical transport of rice.

Marcos issued Executive Order (EO) No. 41 on Sept. 25, prohibiting LGUs from collecting toll fees and charges to all vehicles transporting goods or merchandise while passing through national roads and other thoroughfares not constructed or funded by them to significantly lessen transportation and logistics costs.

He also recently approved the release of P12.7 billion, which will be distributed to 2.3 million small rice farmers who will each receive P5,000 in financial assistance under the Rice Farmers Financial Assistance (RFFA) program of the government.



Rice retailers buck Senate bill

BY CELSO M. CAJUCOM

CABANATUAN CITY, Nueva Ecija: Danilo Bolos, cooperative president of Sapang Bagnoy Farmers Association here, has expressed fears over a proposed legislation that sets the threshold of P1 million for "agricultural economic sabotage" when all he wants is "to produce more rice, more food, to feed Filipinos."

Bolos was referring to Senate Bill (SB) 2342, which seeks to repeal Republic Act (RA) 10845 or the "Anti-Smuggling Act of 2016" as well as penalties for violating it.

He said he believes that all legitimate rice retailers and rice traders

are unjustly lumped as "hoarders" under SB 2342.

"The rice retailers will buy from the rice millers, and they will stock for the rainy days. That's not hoarding," Bolos also said.

Lenny Gagarin, a rice retailer

in Cabanatuan City, has admitted that she does not have an idea about the threshold of P1 million.

Laila Soriano, a restaurant owner in Barangay Mabini Extension in this city, invested a capital of P4,000 for her business.

To recoup her investment, Soriano said, she has to adjust her prices to cope with inflation.

"Is that economic sabotage?" she asked.

There are at least 8,000 legitimate rice retailers nationwide who stand to be adversely affected by this bill, if the threshold comes to pass.

Rice retailers here have taken issue with the Senate apparently failing to include rice stakeholders as part of the Technical Working

Group involved in drafting the proposed legislation.

"We were neither consulted nor invited to participate in the activities of the working group while the bill was being crafted," they said.

Their exclusion from the Senate process, the retailers added, also apparently led to SB 2342 seeking the repeal of the 2016 anti-smuggling law.

The Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Council would carry out the mandate of SB 2342 if approved.

The rice retailers and rice traders described as "harsh punitive penalties" for erring rice merchants' majority of whom only want to help the government achieve rice self-sufficiency the soonest.

Certified as urgent by President

Ferdinand Marcos Jr., SB 2342 has triggered potentially unintended consequences, among them the disruption of legitimate business operations of the country's rice merchants.

They called for scrapping the "reduction of the economic sabotage threshold to P1 million under Senate Bill 2342 a significant concern because it is disproportionately punitive."

The retailers cited "several unclear guidelines" in the House and the Senate bill versions granting "excessive discretions to law enforcers who could risk making arbitrary decisions that could compromise due process."

"The broad scope of covered infractions and severe penalties

may create a chilling effect on vital industries," they said.

"The merchants promise cooperation to President Marcos if they will include us in the formulation of the policies so that goals will be met without compromising principles of economics, justice and due process."

The merchants promised the President that they would make comprehensive recommendations to include stakeholders for the legislation to meet its goals without burdening businesses or compromising principles of justice.

"A legislation that involves legitimate industry players is the best way to achieve a stable and strong economic environment that can nurture growth," they said.



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Marcos to DA: Use RCEF to help farmers

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ordered the Department of Agriculture (DA) to utilize the excess collections of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to assist rice farmers and boost the country's rice production and supply.

The Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said the directive was issued during the Chief Executive's meeting with DA officials in the Palace last week.

The RCEF excess collection beyond the P10 billion requirement should be used to provide drying, mechanization and other equipment support to rice farmers to sustain their productivity.

Under Republic Act 11203 or the "Rice Tariffication Law" (RTL), revenues collected from rice tariffs should pay for the yearly requirement of P10 billion for the RCEF to bankroll programs and projects raising the competitiveness and output of palay farmers.

"In the same meeting, the President also ordered the Department of the Interior and Local Government to enjoin all local government units to rationalize the pass-through fees and other transport costs imposed on motor vehicles transporting goods like rice and other products while

passing through local public roads to facilitate the faster and more economical transport of rice," the PCO said.

Marcos issued Executive Order (EO) 41 on September 25, prohibiting LGUs from collecting toll fees from vehicles transporting goods or merchandise while passing through national roads and other thoroughfares not constructed or funded by them to significantly lessen transportation and logistics costs.

He also approved the release of P12.7 billion, which will be distributed to 2.3 million small rice farmers who will each receive P5,000 in financial assistance under the government's Rice Farmers Financial Assistance (RFFA) program.

Additionally, the President ordered the distribution of financial assistance to small rice farmers who will be affected by the lifting of EO 39, which sets the mandated price ceiling on regular and well-milled rice.

"We will increase allocation from the Rice Tariffication Law and give them to farmers through the distribution of equipment, tractors, harvesters and dryers," Marcos previously said.

KRISTINA MARALIT



Use excess RCEF funds for farmers' aid – Marcos

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. has ordered the Department of Agriculture (DA) to use excess collections from the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to provide farmers with drying, mechanization, and other equipment support to sustain rice productivity in the country, the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said yesterday.

In a news release, the PCO said the President, who is the concurrent DA secretary, told department officials that RCEF collections exceeding P10 billion can and should be used to acquire equipment to support and help improve agricultural productivity.

Republic Act 11203, or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), created

the RCEF, which has a P10 billion annual appropriation to be used for the acquisition of rice farm machinery and equipment; for rice seed development, propagation, and promotion; as expanded rice credit assistance in the form of a credit facility managed equally by the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) and the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP); and for rice extension services.

Under the law, tariff revenues in excess of the P10 billion annual appropriation will be earmarked for rice farmer financial assistance, titling of agricultural rice lands, expansion of crop insurance program on rice, and for crop diversification program.

Marcos, after announcing the lifting of the price cap on regular and well-milled rice last week, said

the RCEF collection has already generated around P12 billion this year. The P2 billion in excess of the P10 billion, he said, should be divided and used for programs that would benefit farmers and fisherfolks.

He also said the government would continue to assist farmers and vulnerable sectors after the lifting of the price caps.

The President said among the measures being implemented by the government is the barring of local government units (LGUs) from collecting toll fees and charges to all vehicles transporting goods or merchandise while passing through national roads and other thoroughfares to significantly lessen transportation and logistics costs, and the provision of rice assistance by Metro

Manila lawmakers to their poor constituents.

The PCO said the President has already ordered the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) to enjoin all LGUs to rationalize the pass-through fees and other transport costs that they impose on motor vehicles transporting goods such as rice and other food products to facilitate the faster and more economical transport of rice.

The President has also recently approved the release of P12.7 billion to be distributed to 2.3 million small rice farmers affected by the lifting of the price ceiling. Each farmer beneficiary will receive P5,000 in financial assistance under the Rice Farmers Financial Assistance (RFFA) program of the government.



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Use excess RCEF to help farmers, DA told

DRIVEN to boost rice production and supply in the Philippines, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has ordered the Department of Agriculture (DA) to utilize the excess collections of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to assist rice farmers.

In a recent meeting with DA officials, President Marcos said the RCEF excess collection beyond the P10 billion requirement should be used to provide drying, mechanization, and other equipment support to rice farmers to sustain their productivity.

Under Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), revenues collected from rice tariffs should pay for the yearly requirement of P10 billion for the RCEF to bankroll programs and projects raising the compet-

itiveness and output of palay farmers.

In the same meeting, the President also ordered the Department of Interior and Local Government to enjoin all local government units to rationalize the pass through fees and other transport costs imposed on motor vehicles transporting goods like rice and other products while passing through local public roads to facilitate the faster and more economical transport of rice.

President Marcos has earlier issued Executive Order (EO) No. 41 on September 25, prohibiting LGUs from collecting toll fees and charges to all vehicles transporting goods or merchandise while passing through national roads and other thoroughfares not constructed or funded by them to



Farmers groups welcome higher palay price

WITH the start of the harvest season for rice, members of farmers' associations across the country welcomed the recent increase in the buying price of palay, aimed at helping farmers earn more.

Cesar Daayata, president of Paradise Village CARP Beneficiaries and Farmer-Irrigators Association (PAVICABEFIA) in Wao, Lanao del Sur, has expressed their group's gratitude to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. for issuing the said order.

Daayata said this has encouraged his organization to sell their produce to the NFA and hopes that more positive developments will come to boost the country's rice production.

"Pasalamat ko sa atung halangdon

nga president nga unta mapadayon pa niya ang daghan kaayo nga kaayuhan alang sa mga mag-uuma aron sa pagpabarog ug lig-on alang sa atong rice production," Daayata said.

The NFA-Isabela said that harvesting of rice has already started in the province and farmers are satisfied with the new sets of buying prices regardless whether they deliver it to their financiers or the NFA warehouse as buying prices are guaranteed.

NFA-Isabela expects their warehouse will be full by the third week of October.

Melgar added that she is grateful to President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. and the NFA for their continued support of the farmers.

PCO



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PRICE CAP

THE mandated price ceiling for rice has helped stabilize the prices of the staple in the market, **President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said on Saturday.**

The chief executive emphasized that the stabilization of rice prices in the market was one of the factors that prompted the government to lift the implementation of Executive Order (EO) No. 39, which imposed the PhP41.00 price ceiling on regular milled rice and the PhP45.00 price cap on well-milled rice.

Lawmakers agreed that the imposition of price cap on rice was among the factors that stabilized the price of the staple.

With the lifting of the price ceiling, President Marcos stood firm that necessary assistance to affected sectors will continue including efforts to strengthen and enhance the country's agricultural sector.

Marcos gave his assurance that the government will continue finding ways to significantly reduce the cost of production amid the recent surges of prices of basic commodities.

With the lifting of the price ceiling, President Marcos stood firm that necessary assistance to affected sectors will continue, including efforts to strengthen and enhance the country's agricultural sector. **PCO**



Price cap sa bigas epektibo - BBM

EPEKTIBO ang ipinatupad na price ceiling ng gobyerno upang mapatatag ang presyo ng bigas sa pamilihan. Ito ang inihayag ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. sa kanyang lingguhang vlog kaugnay sa mga ipinatupad na hakbang ng gobyerno upang mapigilan ang mga tusong negosyante na nagmanipula sa presyuhan ng bigas.

Matapos aniyang maipatupad ang price cap ng isang buwan ay umayos na ang presyo ng bigas at natigil ang manipulasyon ng mga hoarder at mga smuggler sa bigas.

"Yan ang tunay na panukat kung talagang tama ang ating ginagawa at nakikita naman natin sa resulta, nag-stabilized ang presyo dahil sa price cap," anang pangulo.

Ngayong natanggal na ang price ceiling, sinabi ni Presidente Marcos na ilalarga ang ibang istrategiya upang tulungan ang mga magsasaka para hindi malugi sa kanilang mga produkto.

Tiniyak ng pangulo na walang patid ang mga aksiyon ng gobyerno upang masiguro ang tuloy-tuloy na pagbaba at pagiging matatag ng presyo ng bigas sa merkado at patuloy na tutugisin ang mga smuggler at hoarders hanggang sa tuluyang mabuwag ang mga ito.

"Bakit natin ito ginagawa? Dahil dapat talagang direktang nakikinabang ang taong-bayan sa kawalang hiyaan nitong mga smuggler at hoarder na ito. Malinaw ito na mensahe mula sa pamahalaan na lahat ng uri ng pagmamaniipula ng presyo ng bigas at iba pang mga bilihan ay nagpapahirap sa ating mga mamayan at walang lugar ito sa isang Bagong Pilipinas," diin ng pangulo

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Price cap nakatulong sa rice stabilization - PBBM

Nakatulong umano ang paglalagay ng price ceiling sa bigas para patatagin ang presyo nito sa merkado.

Ito ang sinabi ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. at iginiit na ang stabilization ng presyo ng bigas sa merkado ay isa sa dahilan kaya inalis ng gobyerno ng implementasyon ng Executive Order (EO) No. 39 na nagpapatupad sa P41.00 price ceiling sa regular milled rice at sa P45.00 naman sa well milled rice.

Dagdag pa ng Pangulo sa kanyang lingguhang vlog na matapos na ipatupad ang price cap ng isang buwan ay umayos na ang presyo ng bigas at natigil na rin ang manipulasyon ng mga hoarder at mga smuggler sa bansa.

Ito umano ang tunay na panukat kung talagang

tama ang kanyang ginagawa at nakikita ang resulta na nag-stabilized ang presyo dahil sa price cap.

Kaya ngayong natanggal na ang price ceiling, ayon kay Marcos ay ilalarga na ang ibangistratehiya para tulungan ang mga magsasaka para hindi malugi ang kanilang mga produkto.

Patuloy rin umanong tutugisin ang mga smuggler at hoarders hanggang sa tuluyang mabuwag ang mga ito para masiguro na walang Filipino ang magugutom.
(Gemma Garcia)

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Muling pag-angkat ng NFA: panukalang banô, korap (1)

PINUNTUSAN ko nu'ng Biyernes ang mga banô at korap na burokrata. Naglipana sila sa Dept. of Agriculture (DA).

Binobola nila si President Bongbong Marcos at mga mamabatas na ipawalang-bisa ang Rice Tariffication Law. Ibalik daw sa National Food Authority ang kapangyarihang umangkat ng bigas, maglisensya ng importers at mag-inspekyon ng mga pribadong bodega.

Ito raw ay dahil nagmahal ang presyong bentahan ng bigas sa P50-P60 per kilo, imbis na bumaba sa pangako ni Marcos Jr. na P20 per kilo. Kapos daw tayo sa bigas nang tatlong milyong tonelada. Pang-isa't kalahating araw na lang ang 46,000 tonelada na imbak ng NFA.

Aba'y sino ba ang may kasalanan na kinapos tayo ng ani at imbak, hindi ba't ang mga burokratang 'yan din? Isa ako sa maraming nag-ulat nu'ng Hulyo-Oktubre 2022 pagka-upo ng Marcos Jr. admin: magkaka-tagtuyot dahil sa El Niño ngayong 2023 kaya bababa ang ani. Nabaha ang mga taniman ng trigo sa hilagang China habang nanguluntoy sa init ang mga palayan

Sapo1

NI JARIUS BONDOC



sa timog, Pinakyaw ng China ang ani ng India, na kumonti rin dahil sa heatwave.

Nagpatuloy ang giyera sa Ukraine kaya bagsak ang ani ng trigo. Nagmahal ang presyong pandaigdig ng cereals. Sinamantala ito ng Thailand at Vietnam na binibilhan natin ng tatlong milyong toneladang bigas taun-taon.

Malamang maulit lahat 'yon sa 2023, babala namin. Kaya pag-ibayuhin dapat ng DA ang pagkalat ng wastong binhing palay at pamurahin ang pataba at transportasyon.

Hindi nila ito ginawa, kanya-kanyang binhi pa rin ang mga magpapalay, triple pa rin ang presyo ng pataba, puro delihensya pa rin sa pier at police checkpoints.

Kasalanan ito ng mga banô. Ngayon balak nila umangkat ng bigas. Dito papasok ang kakambal na korap.

(Itutuloy bukas)



PRIVATE SECTOR URGED TO BANKROLL PROJECTS

DA TO TRY PPP ROUTE IN FIGHT VS INFLATION

The **Department of Agriculture (DA)** is seeking more collaborations with the private sector to ramp up investments in the agriculture sector via the public-private partnership (PPP) scheme.

The DA is planning to conduct a public-private partnership forum in the agriculture and fisheries sector scheduled for Nov. 24. It has yet to announce details of this event.

It recently issued a special order forming different working groups to organize the activity, which would serve as an avenue for exchanging ideas to determine potential PPP projects, policy frameworks and other interventions.

Through the investment forum, the agency intends to forge partnerships with private entities "that can bankroll critical projects that will deliver much-needed services to farmers and fisherfolks and/or as technical partners in projects for the agriculture and fisheries sector," per its previous issuance.

The DA is exploring investment opportunities and pushing for PPPs to alleviate the consequences of rising food



Domingo Panganiban

inflation, high production costs and the possibility of drought.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said inflation rate accelerated to 6.1 percent in September, fueled by the increase in prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages at 9.7 percent.

"For agriculture, the Philippine government is interested in promoting public-private partnerships and investments in agricultural inputs and fertilizers, as well as vital infra-

structure—such as post-harvest and cold chain facilities, smart agriculture technology, seed technology, and irrigation systems, among others," Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban told a forum earlier.

Agriculture officials met with US government officials and Business Council for International Understanding (BCIU) members to look into possible areas for collaboration.

These include pest and disease control, farm clustering and consolidation, food safety regulations, expanding marketing and trade opportunities, engaging young farmers and agripreneurs, training opportunities, technology transfer, digitalization and modernization.

The open forum and networking lunch form part of the US and BCIU's agriculture mission, an outcome of the bilateral discussions between President Marcos and US President Joseph Biden Jr. in May.

The US is the country's top trading partner for agriculture, fisheries and food products, the DA said. Total trade totaled \$5.22 billion in the previous year. —JORDEENE B. LAGARE INQ



3 bays in Samar placed on red tide alert

Harmful algal bloom affects coastal areas of two cities, four towns in two provinces on the island

By **Joey Gabieta**
@joeygiabieta

TACLOBAN CITY—The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) has warned the public not to consume shellfish products taken from three bays on Samar Island where the red tide toxin was detected.

"To safeguard human lives, we are issuing this warning as a precautionary advice to the public to refrain from gathering, selling and eating all types of shellfish and *Acetes* sp. locally known as 'alamang' or 'hipon' from these bays," said BFAR in its local shellfish bulletin on Friday.

According to BFAR, affected by the red tide toxin were the Irong-Irong Bay in Catbalogan City, Samar province; the coastal waters of Calbayog City, also in Samar; and Matarinao Bay in Eastern Samar province.

The bloom of this toxic organism returned in Matarinao Bay after three weeks of red tide absence and in Irong-Irong Bay after nine months, the agency said. The coastal waters of Calbayog City was included in the

red tide watch in early 2022.

Matarinao Bay covers the coastal waters of the Eastern Samar towns of General MacArthur, Hernani, Quinapondan and Salcedo.

BFAR said the change in weather patterns caused the red tide blooms in the Eastern Visayas region.

Safe to eat

Fish, squid, crab and shrimp gathered from these areas are safe to eat provided that all entrails are removed and the marine products are washed thoroughly with running water before cooking.

While the shellfish ban has been lifted in some areas in the region, BFAR said monitoring will continue to check possible recurrence.

Water and shellfish meat samples from the three bodies of water will be sent to their main office for confirmatory testing, it said.

The regular water sample checks cover the coastal waters of Daram, Zumarraga, Camabatutay, Maqueda and Villareal

in Samar; coastal waters of Guiuan, Eastern Samar; San Pedro Bay in Samar; coastal waters of the towns of Leyte, Calubian and Sogod, Ormoc City, Carigara Bay in Carigara and Cancabato Bay in Tacloban City, all in Leyte; and the coastal waters of the island-province of Biliran.

These areas had a history of red tide recurrence in the past years, according to BFAR.

BFAR regularly analyzes water samples from these areas, through its regional laboratory, to ensure that shellfish gathered here are safe for human consumption.

If seawater turns positive for red tide, the agency gathers and sends meat to their national laboratory for thorough analysis.

Be extra vigilant

Red tide is a term used to describe a phenomenon where the water gets discolored by high algal biomass or the concentration of algae.

BFAR asked local governments to exercise extra vigilance against the gathering, trading and consumption of shellfish to

prevent the incidence of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) which can occur minutes after ingesting bivalve shellfish such as mussels, oysters and clams that contain red tide toxins.

Consuming toxic shellfish could lead to PSP which affects the nervous system within 30 minutes after consumption.

Symptoms of PSP include tingling of the lips and tongue which spreads to the face, neck, fingertips and toes. It will also lead to headache, dizziness and nausea, among others.

In severe cases, BFAR said muscular paralysis and difficulty in breathing may occur within five to 12 hours.

Red tide happens when there is an overgrowth of algae, which causes the color of the water to turn red, green or brown.

Some of these algae produce toxic chemicals, contaminating the shellfish that consume them.

So far, there is no antidote or direct treatment for PSP, but BFAR said symptoms may be treated by inducing vomiting and pumping the stomach. **INQ**



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'Be wary of El Niño effects on rice supply'

The Department of Agriculture should not relax its guard amid the projection of a strong drought to occur later this year and likely to continue until the second quarter of 2024, former DA secretary Leonardo Montemayor warned.

"It's too early to tell (if there will be no problem in the supply of rice). Remember we still have problems with the El Niño. We expect that we will have a comfortable supply of rice in the country until the end of the year but it is still possible that it would not be achieved if the impact of the El Niño is severe," said Montemayor, Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) board chairman, in a radio interview over the weekend.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration warned in its latest advisory that El Niño increases the likelihood of below normal rainfall conditions, which could bring dry spells and droughts in some areas of the country and would likely manifest during the last quarter this year

up to the first quarter of 2024.

"We should not relax our guard. It is important that, as soon as farmers finish their harvest, the government provide the necessary assistance so they can plant again and strengthen our palay production so that we can harvest again in the second quarter of next year," Montemayor said.

The effect of the peak harvest season will be felt in the next two weeks in terms of an increase in the supply of rice in the market, he added.

"We should expect the price of rice to go down depending on how much the decrease is, we have to wait and see but there should be stability of retail prices," Montemayor pointed out.

He said the country could expect "a big carryover of rice," which should be enough for the first quarter of 2024. He also believes that the retail prices of rice will stabilize at between P41 and P45 per kilo.

"The P38 (per kilo of rice) is no longer possible as the farmgate price

of palay also increased because of the high cost of production of our farmers. In fact, the National Food Authority also increased its buying price to P23 per kilo from P19 (per kilo). That's twice or P46 (per kilo) if you convert that to rice," he explained.

President Marcos lifted the price ceilings on rice on Oct. 4 after the implementation of the cap on Sept. 5.

Based on monitoring of the DA in Metro Manila markets, the retail prices of local regular rice ranged between P41 and P45 per kilo; local well-milled rice, between P45 and P48 per kilo; local premium rice, between P47 and P60 per kilo; and local special rice, between P54 and P62 per kilo.

On the other hand, imported regular milled rice was pegged at P43 per kilo; imported well-milled rice, P45 and P48 per kilo; imported premium rice, between P52 and P58 per kilo and imported special rice, between P53 and P60 per kilo.

— Bella Cariaso



PH bans live pig, pork from Sweden

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE Philippines has temporarily banned the entry of pig and meat products from Sweden.

Covered by the ban ordered by the Department of Agriculture are live pigs, pork meat and skin, and semen to prevent the spread of African swine fever (ASF) in the country.

A report submitted by Sweden

to the World Organization for Animal Health indicates an ASF outbreak affecting wild boar in Fagersta, Sweden, in August.

"Sweden is an accredited country to export swine-related com-

modities to the Philippines, and there is a need to prevent the entry of any ASF-susceptible products originating from Sweden that might enter the country through hand-carried products from international vessels or any other possible routes," the DA said.

"There is a need for regulatory controls through sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures to protect human and animal health,"

it added.

Likewise, the DA ordered the immediate suspension of processing and evaluation of the application and issuance of SPS import clearance for pork products.

Veterinary quarantine officers and inspectors are also allowed to stop and confiscate the said commodities at all major ports of entry.

However, shipments from Sweden that were already in transit and

were slaughtered or produced before August 6 will be allowed entry.

The Bureau of Animal Industry said Sweden shipped 3.31 million kilograms of pork meat into the country from January to August 2023 and a total of 4.12 million kg in 2022.

Meanwhile, the DA lifted the temporary ban on the importation of poultry from Chile and Turkey, as both countries had resolved all

cases with no additional outbreaks of bird flu or avian influenza.

The importation of domestic and wild birds and their products, including poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs and semen originating from the two exporting countries, is now allowed.

"The risk of contamination from importing poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs and semen is negligible," the DA said.



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Philippines bans pork imports from Sweden

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it banned swine and pork products from Sweden, following reports of an outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF) in that country.

In a memorandum order signed by Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban, the DA imposed a temporary ban on shipments of domestic and wild pigs and their products and by-products including meat, pig skin, and semen.

"There is a need for regulatory controls through sanitary and phytosanitary measures to protect human and animal health," according to the memorandum.

The DA said that it would immediately suspend the processing, evaluation, and issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances for the affected products.

It added that all shipments en route before the ban will be

allowed to enter provided that the animals were slaughtered before Aug. 6.

The memo also authorized the confiscation of all such shipments by the DA's Veterinary Quarantine Officers and Inspectors at all major ports.

The outbreak of ASF was initially detected in a wild boar in Fagersta, Sweden.

The finding was confirmed by the Swedish National Veterinary Institute on Sept. 6 and submitted to the World Organisation for Animal Health.

"Sweden is an accredited country to export swine related commodities to the Philippines and there is a need to prevent the entry of any ASF-susceptible products originating from Sweden that might enter through hand carried products from international vessels or any other possible routes," it said. — **Adrian H. Halili**



FREEPIK



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El Niño peak during lean months for rice to show up in 2024 prices

By Adrian H. Halili
Reporter

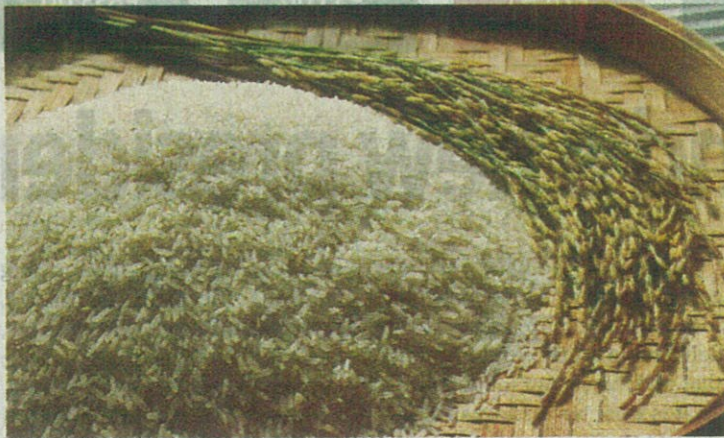
RICE PRICES in early 2024 are likely to reflect the peak of the El Niño dry spell, which also coincides with the lean season for the staple grain, according to Calixto V. Chikiamco, president of the Foundation for Economic Freedom.

Mr. Chikiamco said in a Viber message that the anticipated shortage needs to be headed off by building up inventory.

"If there isn't a large stock of reserves that could cushion the supply pinch, rice prices could increase again," Mr. Chikiamco said.

The government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), has forecast the peak of the El Niño to take place in late 2023 and early 2024.

A surge in the retail price of rice prompted President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. to order price controls on Sept. 5. He fixed the



FREPIK

maximum price at P41 per kilogram for regular-milled rice and P45 for well-milled rice.

Mr. Chikiamco said the price controls, which were lifted on Wednesday, were "not sustainable," having caused traders to stop importing rice.

"The price ceiling caused traders to halt imports and therefore could have a short-term impact on rice supply. It also caused traders to reduce the price which they offered to farmers (for palay, or unmilled rice)," he said.

Former Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar said another round of price controls should not be resorted to the next time prices rise.

"Instead of re-imposing price caps, it is better to reduce the present tariff to only 10%. You can reduce rice prices significantly, but this should only be a temporary measure," Mr. Dar said in a text message.

Mr. Marcos, who is also the Secretary of Agriculture, had rejected the proposal to temporar-

ily lower the tariffs on imported rice, saying global rice prices are expected to fall.

Mr. Dar said that the government must continue to implement measures to stabilize rice prices.

"The government must see to it that there is big enough inventory in the hands of the households, commercial traders, and the National Food Authority (NFA)," Mr. Dar said.

As of early July, the national rice inventory fell 11.3% year on year to 1.8 million metric tons (MT), according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Inventory held by commercial establishments was at 984.76 thousand MT, households 771.93 thousand MT, and NFA warehouses 60.84 thousand MT.

"NFA must build up and increase its buffer stock by buying from local production," Mr. Dar added.

The NFA Council last month set a new purchase rate for dry and wet palay of P19-P23 and P16-P19 per kilo, respectively. The previous buying price was P16 per kilo for wet and P19 per kilo for dry palay.



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NIA bares thrusts for dry spell in 2024



LITO GAGNI

WITH the El Niño phenomenon seen wreaking havoc on the country's food security, it is heartwarming to hear about a government agency utilizing data analytics to prepare the country for the worst, with a dry spell seen hitting us for a longer duration next year. Science has finally dawned on us and it is a good thing that the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) is trying to be on top of the situation.

The way Ms. Josephine Salazar, NIA OIC deputy administrator for engineering and operations, spelled it out during the Saturday News Forum at Dapo Restaurant, we believe the government can nip in the bud any crisis in food security that may arise, such as that of the rice supply situation that led to a hefty uptick in the inflation rate for August.

For one, NIA is coordinating with the Department of Agriculture for the pre-positioning of seeds for high-value crops in areas with irrigation problems, which can be had from an analysis of data of the preceding

years. This is what the government needs.

By identifying areas that will have problems with irrigation due to the dry spell, NIA plans to connect with the DA to tell farmers to switch to high-value crops. In that way, the farmers will benefit by weaning them away from crops that will need irrigation.

So far, NIA has identified around 257,600 hectares of agricultural land as most vulnerable to the adverse impact of the El Niño phenomenon. These lands have an estimated yield of about 1.46-M metric tons of rice. Knowing this data, the government

By identifying areas that will have problems with irrigation due to the dry spell, NIA plans to connect with the DA to tell farmers to switch to high-value crops. In that way, the farmers will benefit by weaning them away from crops that will need irrigation.

can then have a handle on the amount of rice that will have to be imported for the dry spell.

Aside from this, the municipal agriculture officers in each of the municipalities to be affected by the El Niño phenomenon can embark on an information campaign to tell the farmers about the need for them to switch to other crops, notably high-value crops.

According to NIA, they will be prepositioning seeds for high-value crops for distribution to the farmers whose lands will be affected by the dry spell. Central Luzon has been identified as the most vulnerable, with 85,000 hectares of land tagged as prone to the negative effects of the phenomenon, characterized by less than normal rainfall and prolonged dry spell.

Aside from Central Luzon, the other regions that will be affected

according to NIA are: Soccsksargen (27,000 hectares), Ilocos Region (24,000 hectares), Mimaropa (17,000 hectares), Western Visayas (15,000 hectares), Central Visayas (14,000 hectares), and Zamboanga Peninsula (13,000 hectares).

Ms. Salazar said NIA has already relayed to the above-mentioned areas the need for farmers to plant high-value crops to mitigate the impact of the El Niño. This is part of the El Niño action plan that the agency crafted in July.

Altogether, the plan sets forth the water delivery schedule, utilization of Alternate Wetting and

Drying (AWD) technology, diversification of crops, and the use of early maturing and drought-resistant crop varieties, the provision of production and the use of solar technology.

For now, around 68 percent or 2.1 million hectares of the 3.1 million hectares of potential irrigable area in the country have already been irrigated. Another focus of NIA is the use of solar-powered irrigation projects, which will result in lower irrigation fees for farmers.

With the technology, farmers who pay around P1 million for ir-

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rigation will now be paying around P400,000, a 60 percent reduction that will redound to the benefit of farmer-families. In September, NIA allocated P1.7 billion for the programmed solar-irrigation projects in 183 sites nationwide that will irrigate a new area of 2,168 hectares.

The NIA is likewise proposing another P30-billion worth of solar-

powered irrigation projects for additional 791 sites to provide irrigation water supply to 39,694 hectares nationwide. That will mean more rice output or high-value crops where needed.

By relying on data analytics, NIA is providing the government a better template for preparing for food security problems that may arise. After all, PAGASA expects the intensity of El Niño to escalate next month, with January to March resulting in severe dry spell and with that knowledge, it can prepare better.



NIA: Rice granary is most vulnerable to El Niño

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) has identified Central Luzon, the country's rice granary, as the most vulnerable to El Niño.

Of the 257,600 hectares of farms nationwide that have been tagged as vulnerable areas, NIA said 85,000 hectares are in Region 3. Central Luzon is considered as the top producer of rice in the Philippines.

The other vulnerable farms identified by the NIA are in Region 12 (27,000 hectares); Region 9 or Zamboanga Peninsula (13,000 hectares); Region 7 or Central Visayas (14,000 hectares); Region 6 or Western Visayas (15,000 hect-

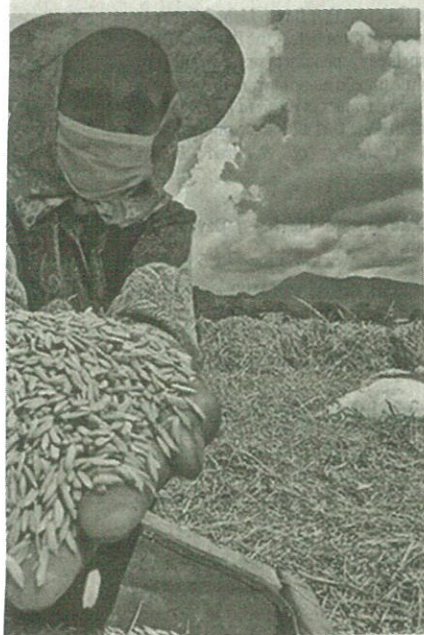
ares); Region 4-B or Mimaropa (17,000 hectares); and Region 1 or the Ilocos Region (24,000 hectares).

"So we will encourage farmers on those identified areas to plant high-value crops. NIA is coordinating with the Department of Agriculture for the preparation and positioning of seeds," Josephine Salazar, officer-in-charge of NIA's Engineering and Operations, said in a statement issued by the Presidential Communications Office.



BUSINESSMIRROR FILE PHOTO

NIA said it has prepositioned seedlings to over 200,000 hectares of farmland for protection against



the possible effects of the El Niño phenomenon next year.

Salazar also said the agency

is preparing to set up immediate measures such as positioning of seedlings for the identified farmlands that have high value crops.

"For the overall direction of NIA *po ngayong* 2024, we are also preparing for the El Niño as well," she said. "Under our proposed budget for 2024, *mayroon na po kaming mga immediate na measure* for that."

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., who is the concurrent Agriculture chief, has directed a whole-of-government approach against the looming impact of the dry spell.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Operations Arnel de Mesa had said that the Department of Agriculture needs to coordinate "very closely" with the NIA for the timing of the planting of rice.

Preliminary data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority

(PSA) showed that palay production in April to June went up by 1.1 percent to 4.24 million metric tons (MMT) from the previous year's 4.2 MMT.

Despite the increase in unmilled rice output during the period, PSA said the volume of crops production in the second quarter was lower at 17.87 MMT.

"This exhibits an annual decline of -0.9 percent compared with the same period of the previous year at 18,050.56 thousand metric tons."

The annual decline in the volume of crop production during the quarter was mainly brought about by the annual decreases noted in the production of corn (-0.8 percent), sugarcane (-11.3 percent), rubber, cup lump (-8.5 percent), and sweet potato (-7.5 percent).

Samuel P. Medenilla



NFA ready to borrow to buy 500K mt palay from farmers

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS @jearcalas

STATE-RUN National Food Authority (NFA) stands ready to borrow money from state-run banks should it need more cash in meeting its target of buying 500,000 metric tons (MT) of palay from local farmers this harvest season.

High-ranking agriculture officials disclosed that the NFA plans to be more aggressive in procuring unmilled rice from farmers this harvest season after its buying price was raised to as much as P23 per kilogram.

"The NFA was given an instruction by the President [Marcos Jr. to procure] as much as possible this season. They are targeting at least 500,000 MT and they plan to borrow [money] if need be, if [its] current funds [are] not enough," Agriculture Undersecretary for Rice Leocadio S. Sebastian said in a recent Senate hearing.

Sebastian explained that the NFA is keen on using all of its budget, totaling about P10 billion

for its procurement program this fourth quarter.

He pointed out that the NFA budget rose to such a level due to some carryover funds from last year.

He added that the NFA's procurement target is above its optimal procurement level of 350,000 MT.

Sen. Risa Hontiveros asked why the NFA would borrow money if it has carryover funds, to which Sebastian responded that it is just a contingency plan.

"If they still need more funds. They have a credit line with the Land Bank [of the Philippines] and DBP (Development Bank of the Philippines)," Sebastian said.

The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) confirmed to

the BusinessMirror that the NFA has indeed unused funds from last year that it can still utilize this year.

The NFA's available budget at the end of June 30 stood at P9.686 billion, comprising P1.215 billion in unused funds last year and P8.471 billion as available budget for this year, according to the DBM.

Since this year, the NFA has been given a state subsidy of P9 billion. The rice agency's subsidy is expected to remain at the same level next year.

Struggling to procure

THE NFA's palay procurement target seems to be in line with its goal of maintaining a 300,000-MT buffer stock in rice form under its 2023 performance scorecard approved by the Governance Commission on GOCCs (GCG).

The NFA has been struggling to meet its procurement target on a monthly and quarterly basis, based on its accomplishment reports.

In the first quarter, the NFA explained that it was unable to meet its 66,390 MT procurement target since the period was not a harvest season and the only available stocks were spillovers from the previous cropping season.

In the second quarter, the NFA was only able to purchase 6 percent or about 12,900 MT of palay out of

its 213,170.5 MT procurement target. The NFA cited the lean months as the reason behind its dismal procurement status in April to June.

The only time that the rice agency was close enough in reaching at least half of its procurement target was in January, when it purchased 7,552.2 MT of palay from local farmers. The NFA had a 16,307.5 MT procurement goal in January.

The NFA procured the least volume of palay in August when it was only able to purchase 285.25 MT, only a percentage of its 26,568.5 MT target. The NFA explained that the high buying price by private traders and low available stocks due to the lean months affected its procurement program.

Bounce back

NFA Administrator Roderico R. Bioco is confident the agency can procure more rice this harvest season, with the buying price raised to P23 per kilogram.

The NFA Council, chaired by Marcos Jr. in his concurrent capacity as agriculture chief, approved the increase in the rice agency's buying price in late September. The NFA is now buying dry palay at P23 per kilogram and wet palay at as much as P19 per kilogram.

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NFA ready to borrow to buy 500K mt palay from farmers

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"As soon as peak harvest occurs, our farmers will rely more on NFA to stabilize palay prices. The P23-per-kilogram [buying price] will help stabilize palay prices that are needed to keep planting intentions for the next crop more positive," Bioco told reporters in a recent interview.

"When farmers have more money, they can provide more for the next crop, which is important given the higher risks due to possible effects of El Niño," he added.

Federation of Free Farmers Chairman Leonardo Q. Montemayor concurred with Bioco, noting that the NFA's current buying price levels should be a "competitive alternative" to the private traders' offer when the current harvest peaks.

"It is possible [that they would procure 500,000 MT of palay]. The P23 per kilogram buying price is attractive," Montemayor, a former agriculture secretary, told the BUSINESSMIRROR.

However, other rice industry players said the P9 billion budget of NFA would only be enough to procure around 390,000 MT of palay.

Orly Manuntag, co-founder of Philippine Rice Industry Stakeholders Movement, pointed out that NFA's higher buying price would be able to command the farm-gate prices offered by rice traders in the on-going harvest season.

"If the farmer would sell to private traders and the private traders would buy below P23 per kilogram, the farmer would just opt to sell to the NFA instead to the private traders," Manuntag said.

Financial targets

For Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) President Danilo V. Fausto, the NFA must not resort to borrowing just to meet its procurement target as such could deepen agency's existing debt.

"Let the market play. Let's not go back to the old regime where it buys high and sells low," Fausto told the BUSINESSMIRROR.

Furthermore, the NFA targets to post a net loss of less than or equal to P7.5 billion this year, according to its 2023 performance scorecard.

The NFA's outstanding bank loans at the end of August stood at P112.06 billion, per agency reports.

Since the enactment of the rice trade liberalization law in March 2019, the NFA has been reduced to a buffer stocking agency mandated to procure stocks solely from local palay farmers. The NFA's stocks can only be distributed to local government units and even government agencies for relief operations and calamity responses.



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Palawan declared African swine fever-free anew

PUERTO Princesa, Palawan—This province was once again declared an African swine fever (ASF)-free zone following a recent epidemic that broke out on an island barangay in Magsaysay town.

The Provincial Veterinary Office (ProVet) announced Friday that Palawan has been given a clean bill of health by the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) following the decisive action of line provincial government offices that led to the speedy containment and subsequent eradication of ASF in the affected village.

Dr. Darius Mangcucang, officer-in-charge of the ProVet, said the province is now classified as a "dark green zone" under the Department of Agriculture's (DA) national zoning prevention and control plan, indicating that no active ASF cases remain here.

"Dark green zone means that Palawan remains ASF-free. Although we had an incursion of ASF, we were able to contain it right away. The disease did not leave Barangay Cocoro. The virus did not even reach the other villages of Magsaysay town," Mangcucang said in Filipino.

His explanation came after the BAI, on ProVet's request, certified the municipality

of Magsaysay, along with the rest of the province, ASF-free because of the rapid and complete containment of the outbreak in Cocoro.

The ASF-free stamp allows piggeries here to resume the exportation of their products outside of the province, it added.

This was done after blood samples collected from pigs in the towns of Magsaysay and nearby Cuyo between September 18 and 19 all tested negative for the disease.

Mangcucang said the tests confirmed that Palawan is once again ASF-free.

It can be recalled that in July, agriculture and veterinary authorities reported the unexplained deaths of domestic pigs in the vicinity of Cocoro, prompting the ProVet to launch an investigation aided by the BAI.

On August 24, the BAI determined that ASF was the cause of the deaths of roughly 300 pigs that occurred in the village

Mangcucang said the virus may have come from Antique, where there is ASF.

He said after the ASF-free confirmation, all areas in Magsaysay and Cuyo towns, with the exception of Barangay Cocoro, are permitted to again transport swine outside of Palawan.

Philippine News Agency



NIA-UPRIIS launches 6th Kadiwa store in Guimba

By Steve Gosulico

GUIIMBA, Nueva Ecija -- The National Irrigation Administration-Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (NIA-UPRIIS) on Friday launched its sixth "Kadiwa sa NIA-UPRIIS" store at the Division 6 office in this town.

Led by engineer Gertrudes A. Viado, NIA-UPRIIS head, and engi-

neer Jose Ariel G. Dominigo, NIA-UPRIIS Division 6 chief, the launching in Bgy. Cavite was also graced by farmer-members of the 13 irrigator associations headed by its president Frederico C. Cinense III.

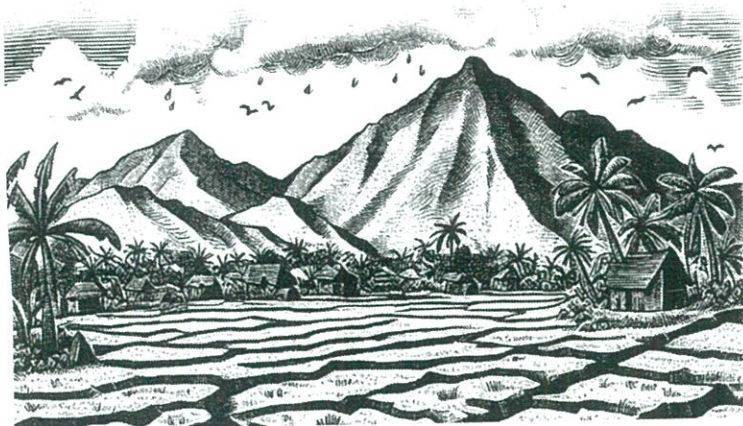
"Ngayon po ang paglulungsad ng Kadiwa sa ating dibisyon kaya po andiyan ang ating mga produkto para po maibenta ng direktso sa

ating mga konsyumer. Makakamura po ang ating kababayang mamimili. Hindi na dadaan sa middleman. Kaya po hinihiling namin sa pamahalaan sa tulong po ng NIA para po 'yung ating produkto ay maibenta namin ng maganda para umasenso naman ang mga magsasaka," said Cinense III, whose group was mainly responsible in bringing

the newly-harvested crops and vegetables, including meat products for the activity.

Viado urged the farmer-irrigators' group to work hard as more convergence programs are prioritized by the national government towards the attainment of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.'s dream for the farmers and the Filipino people.

EL NIÑO TO CAUSE DRY SPELLS, DROUGHTS IN PARTS OF THE COUNTRY



EDITORIAL

El Niño phenomenon

THE ongoing El Nino phenomenon in the Philippines is set to become "strong" by the end of 2023 and may persist until the first half of 2024, according to the weather bureau.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration said El Nino, likely to lead to below normal rainfall conditions, may cause dry spells or even drought in many parts of the country.

The phenomenon happens once every two to seven years.

The last El Nino affected the Philippines during the last quarter of 2018 and lasted until the third quarter of the following year.

This year, El Nino - the natural climate phenomenon of warm temperature in the Pacific Ocean - started in June.

And scientists have warned that 2023 could see record heat as human-caused climate change, driven largely by the burning of fossil fuels, like coal and oil, warms the atmosphere.

Thus, we commend the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) for identifying some 275,000 hectares of agricultural land as most vulnerable to the adverse impact of El Nino.

Central Luzon (CL) or Region III was listed as the most vulnerable area, with 85,000 hectares of agricultural land tagged as prone to the negative effects of the phenomenon.

Following CL are Soccsksargen (27,000 hectares), Ilocos Region (24,000), Mimaropa (17,000), Western Visayas (15,000), Central Visayas (14,000) and Zamboanga Peninsula (13,000).

NIA officer-in-charge Deputy Administrator for Engineering and Operations Sector Josephine Salazar said these areas have been advised to plant high-value crops to mitigate the impact of El Nino.

As early as last June, NIA crafted an "El Nino action plan" which includes water delivery schedule and the use of early maturing and drought-resistant crop varieties.



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Suplay ng bigas, sapat hanggang sa susunod na taon- DA

TINIYAK ng **Department of Agriculture** sa mga sambayanang Filipino na may sapat na suplay ng bigas ang bansa.

Tatagal ito ng hanggang susunod na taon dahil sa "bumper" harvest sa panahon ng wet season o tag-ulan sa bansa.

Sinabi ni Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa sa isinagawang "Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon" briefing na ang stable na suplay ng bigas ay nagsimula noong Agosto ngayong taon, at inaasahan na magtatagal hanggang sa susunod na buwan.

Winika ni De Mesa na inaasahan na nila na ang national inventory stocks ay aabot ng 77 araw ngayong buwan, inaasahan na tataas ng hanggang 94 days sa Nobyembre ngayong taon dahil sa patuloy na pag-aani ngayong tag-ulan.

Aniya pa, hindi pa naman 'included' ang pag-angkat ng bigas sa kanilang naging bilang.

"So, maaasahan po natin na maganda at malaki po iyong national inventory natin ng bigas ... Maasahan po natin na talagang sapat at maganda at matatag po ang supply ng bigas natin na maaasahan po natin hanggang sa pagpasok po ng susunod na taon na 2024," ani De Mesa.

Sa inaasahan na 'stabilization' ng suplay ng bigas, hindi naman nakikita nina De Mesa ang anumang paggalaw sa presyo ng bigas sa merkado.

Samantala, sinabi naman ni De Mesa na tinatrabaho na ng pamahalaan na tapuyan ang 'cost of production' sa Pilipinas upang sa gayon ay matiyak ang 'affordable prices' sa mga pangunahing bilhin sa merkado.

KRIS JOSE

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Food service sector predicted to expand 20% this year

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

The country's food service sector is projected to grow by 20 percent to \$13 billion this year from about \$11 billion a year prior, banking on the recovery of the tourism and hotel industry, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) said.

In a report, the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) said it is expecting the industry to recover to prepandemic lev-

els by early next year.

"Dining in restaurants, catering and events will continue to boost sales while food deliveries offer convenience," the USDA-FAS said.

"Although limited-service restaurants still form a majority of food service, street kiosks outperformed limited-service restaurants, full-service restaurants, cafés and bars in sales growth," it said.

The USDA-FAS said dine-in customers are queueing in

some restaurants, especially on weekends while event bookings are beginning to fill up hotel venues.

Certain restaurant chains fast-track the opening of stores to meet local and international franchise agreements while the majority of food establishments are launching new restaurant concepts, according to the USDA-FAS.

Customers are anticipated to continue using online delivery platforms, drive-throughs

and curbside pickups but not as frequently as during the pandemic.

Higher food sales

After outperforming all categories last year, the foreign agency is projecting street stalls and kiosk sales to reach 25 percent growth in 2023.

Sales of full-service restaurants are forecast to experience "more robust growth," overtaking limited-service restaurant sales, which are estimated to

grow slower this year after key players surpassed prepandemic sales in 2022.

Although café and bar sales registered a 26-percent increase in the previous year, the USDA-FAS is foreseeing its sales to expand though far from the prepandemic level.

Limited-service restaurants dominate the sector with a market share of 55 percent, followed by full-service restaurants with 17 percent, the report said, adding street

stalls/kiosks, and cafés and bars account for 15 percent and 13 percent, respectively.

"As the seventh-largest market for US consumer-oriented exports, the Philippine food service sector provides strong opportunities for meat products, dairy products, fruits, vegetables, bakery products, chocolate and sugar confectionery, sauces, condiments, seasonings, nonalcoholic beverages, and wines," the report said. **INQ**

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Soaring food inflation weighs on consumers

Filipinos who regularly go to the market complain about surging rice and vegetable prices. Their concerns were validated as the government reported last week that inflation quickened to 6.1 percent in September from 5.3 percent in August. This came on the back of the 9.7 percent increase in food prices.

Rice, vegetable prices upset household budgets

The uptick in food inflation was mainly caused by faster inflation for rice (+17.9 percent), vegetables (+29.6 percent), and fruits (+11.6 percent). Housewives and home budgeters lamented that high fish and vegetable prices have forced them to use chicken as a cheaper alternative and the designated staple for helpers. Aside from rice, certain vegetables (squash, cabbage, Baguio beans, petchay Baguio) have posted high double-digit inflation rates. Rice and vegetables account for 8.9 and 2.8 percent, respectively, of the inflation basket.

PHILEQUITY CORNER



WILSON SY

ers lamented that high fish and vegetable prices have forced them to use chicken as a cheaper alternative and the designated staple for helpers. Aside from rice, certain vegetables (squash, cabbage, Baguio beans, petchay Baguio) have posted high double-digit inflation rates. Rice and vegetables account for 8.9 and 2.8 percent, respectively, of the inflation basket.

Looming fare hikes inflationary

Transport inflation was at 1.2 percent in September after falling to negative levels in the middle of the year. This was brought about by an initial tranche of transport fare hikes. These would likely be followed by additional increases as regulators have previously delayed fare adjustments to avoid fanning inflation further. Transport inflation accounts for nine percent of the inflation basket and is susceptible to movements in global oil prices. Nonetheless, the recent pullback in crude caused by the lifting of Russia's export ban on diesel should provide some respite to consumers.

Stronger case for off-cycle rate hike

In recent statements, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Eli Remolona said that they are considering an off-cycle rate hike ahead of the November policy meeting. Remolona explained that this would be prompted by the emergence of upside risks to inflation caused by supply shocks. The latest inflation outturn would, thus, give the BSP a stronger reason to hike its policy rate again. While the central bank sees the need for government intervention measures to address supply shortages, it said that further tightening should arrest potential second-round effects that could dislodge inflation expectations. Additional policy rate hikes would also preserve the country's interest rate differential and support the resilience of the peso.

Inflation battle continues

The battle against inflation is clearly not over, and this can be seen in the reemergence of inflation last month. Persistent and elevated inflation brings about uncertainty for everyone. This includes financial market investors, policy-makers, businessmen, restaurant owners, consumers, and households. High inflation, especially for key food staples, would dampen domestic consumption which accounts for about 75 percent of the country's GDP. This would explain the urgency of managing inflation and the need for more policy rate hikes. However, higher interest rates would temper bank lending and slow down the economy. More importantly, keeping rates higher for longer is not conducive to strong financial market performance and would usher continued market volatility.

Turn to B4

PHILEQUITY From B2

Miracle team

Rising inflation has clearly hit the pockets of Filipinos while dampening investor returns. However, there was a moment of pride and joy as the national team unexpectedly won in the country's favorite sport.

Last Friday, Gilas Pilipinas won the gold medal at the Asian games after toppling Jordan. This is the country's first basketball gold medal since the 1962 Asian games. It surpasses the memorable silver medal finish achieved by a team of PBA stars in the 1990 Asian games.

The expectations were set low for this Gilas team due to the shortage of available players, the lack of preparation time, and the last-minute appointment of the head coach. Despite these, the team was led by the adept coaching of Tim Cone and the scoring heroics of Justin Brownlee. Gilas played with a never-say-die attitude throughout the tournament. The team's fighting spirit was in full display in its thrilling battle with China when Gilas had to overcome a 20-point deficit

to achieve a miraculous victory against the hometown team.

A quote from Tim Cone perfectly summarized his team's epic run: "After beating Iran by a point, finding a way to the miraculous win against China by one point, and to turn around and win this, it's unexplainable, the feeling we all have. This is seemingly coming from nowhere to win this gold medal."

We would like to thank Ramon Ang and Manny Pangilinan for being avid patrons of Philippine basketball and for throwing their full support behind Gilas. We also congratulate Filipino athletes that have made the country proud by winning gold medals in their respective individual sports: EJ Obiena in pole vault, Meggie Ochoa and Annie Ramirez in jiu-jitsu. Go Pilipinas!

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Farming with flies: Bukidnon farmer's innovative approach to sustainable feeding and waste management using black soldier fly

By JAMES TABABA

In an agriculture industry that constantly seeks innovative solutions to combat food shortages and reduce waste, Omar Tubungbanua, the owner of Green Manna Farm, a farmer from Valencia, Bukidnon offers a sustainable solution by farming an insect called the black soldier fly.

Omar used to be an aircraft maintenance engineering instructor in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE). However, the pandemic prompted Omar and his family to return to the Philippines, as they feared a potential food crisis. Back in the Philippines, he initially ventured into aquaponics, a farming method that combines plant and fish cultivation. However, he realized that the operational costs associated with aquaponics were considerably high, so he made the choice to temporarily suspend his aquaponics occupation and shift his focus to black soldier fly farming. During this transition, he turned his attention to raising ducks and chickens as well, as this proved to be a more financially viable venture compared to aquaponics.

The great potential of the black soldier flies

The benefits of employing black soldier flies in waste management are numerous. These flies can serve as a valuable protein supplement feed for a variety of livestock, including chickens, ducks, rabbits, aquaculture fishes, cows, and goats. This is achieved by converting black soldier flies into a powder form that can be easily incorporated into animal feed.

Furthermore, black soldier flies have been shown to boost the immune systems of avian livestock, making them more resilient against diseases, and ultimately improving animal health.

Lastly, the use of black soldier flies contributes significantly to addressing the ongoing garbage problem, par-



OMAR TUBUNGBANUA is the owner of Green Manna Farm. Feeding chickens a diet enriched with black soldier fly larvae can enhance their nutrition. (Green Manna Farm)

ticularly in managing organic waste within communities. The natural decomposing abilities of these insects can reduce waste.

Black soldier flies as poultry feed

Black soldier flies, like other common flies such as dragonflies, butterflies, and fruit flies, have distinct characteristics. Unlike house flies, which are notorious for scavenging for up to 60 days and often associated with uncleanness, black soldier flies have a different life cycle. They live as adults for only 7 to 10 days, lacking mouthparts and relying on nutrients gathered during their larval stage. Their sole purpose as adult flies is to mate, reproduce, lay eggs, and then naturally die. This unique life cycle makes them cleaner in comparison to houseflies.

During their larval stage, which spans 14 days, black soldier fly larvae exhibit a voracious appetite. "A single kilogram of black soldier fly larvae can devour one kilogram of chopped food within an hour," Omar said.

Omar takes an active role in producing black soldier fly eggs and rearing the larvae. Approximately 90 percent of these larvae are utilized as a high-protein feed source for their chickens and ducks, supporting their nutritional needs. The remaining 10

percent of the larvae are returned to the insect colony to perpetuate the breeding process, ensuring a continuous cycle of production.

Omar currently maintains a flock of 200 ducks and 100 chickens on his farm. The ducks are primarily for egg production, used in making balut, while the chickens are raised for meat.

"I'm delighted to share that I haven't had to purchase commercial feeds since September of last year, and I'm extremely satisfied with the outcomes," Omar said.

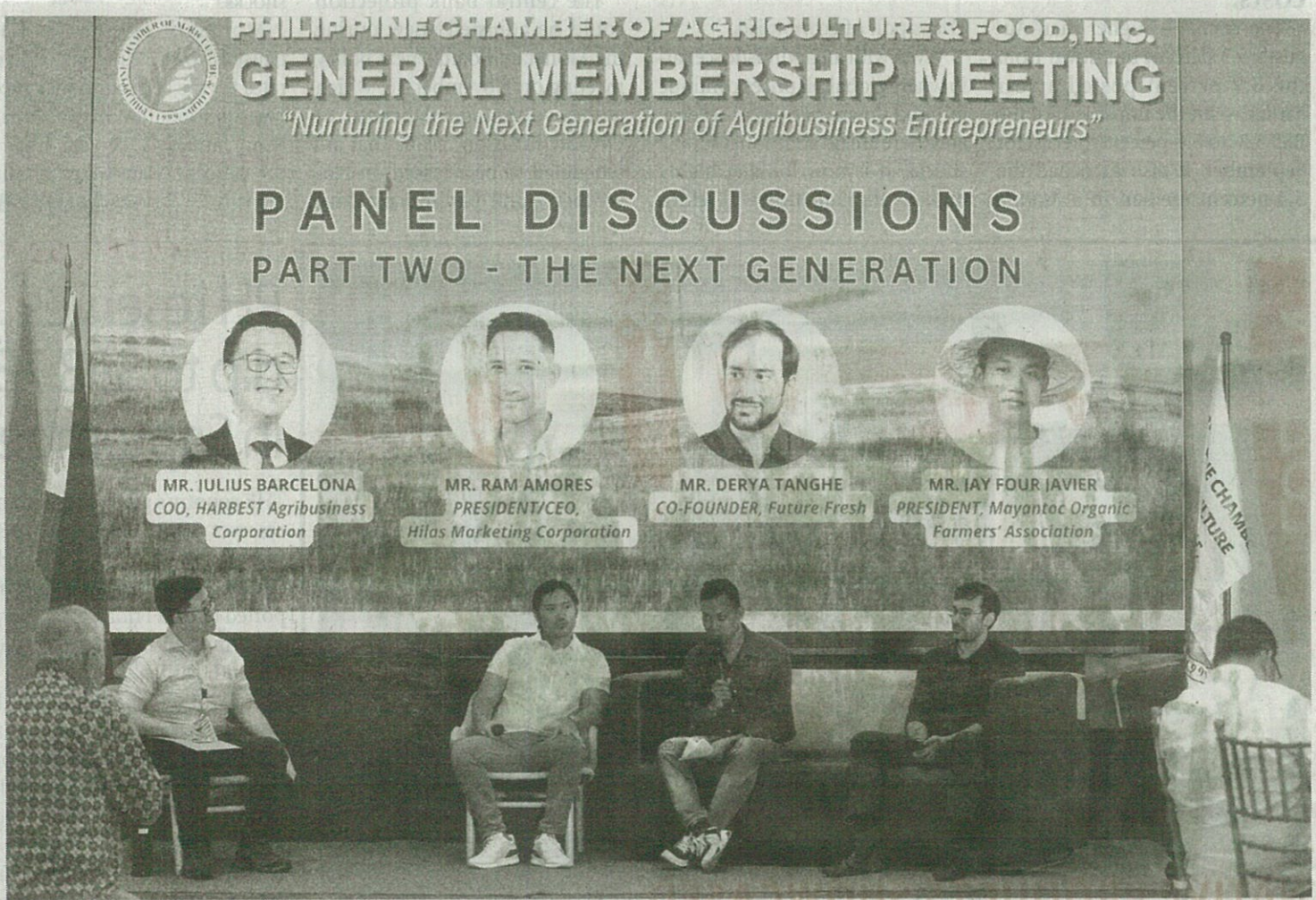
Omar has implemented a well-balanced dietary strategy for his ducks and chickens. He relies on black soldier fly larvae to provide 60 percent of their dietary requirements. This approach is carefully designed to avoid any potential health issues that could arise from an excess of protein in the animals' diets. To complement the larvae's protein-rich diet, the remaining 40 percent of their nutrition comes from corn or rice bran.

Challenges and opportunities

Omar aims to teach the community how to use black soldier flies for eco-friendly waste disposal and resource utilization. While some people want to visit his farm, he's currently declining because it mainly deals with organic waste decomposition, which can be unpleasant due to the odor. However, Omar is still dedicated to sharing his knowledge and promoting black soldier flies for sustainable waste management.

"I've been operating manually, hoping for a potential investor to provide financial support for purchasing a shredder and dehydrator on the farm," Omar said. "These machines are essential because improper drying of food scraps and organic agricultural waste can lead to unpleasant odor. While black soldier flies can consume a wide range of materials, optimizing the farm's operations involves reducing the moisture content in the materials fed to them."

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PUSHING AGRICULTURE The Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. held its general membership meeting and panel discussion with the theme 'Nurturing the Next Generation of Agribusiness Entrepreneurs' at the Philippine Trade Training Center in Pasay City on Saturday, Oct. 7, 2023. Photo shows panelists during the open forum (2nd to 4th from left): Hilas Marketing Corp. President and Chief Executive Officer Ram Amores, Mayantoc Organic Farmers' Association President Jay Four Javier, and Future Fresh co-founder Derya Tanghe. Harbest Agribusiness Corp. CEO Julius Barcelona (left) acted as forum moderator. PNA PHOTO



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USDA sees 20% growth for PH food service sector

FOOD service revenues in the Philippines are expected to increase at a rate of 20 percent annually by the end of 2023, a report from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) showed.

The USDA-Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) Manila forecasts consumer food service sales to reach around \$12.6 billion or about P714.4 billion this year.

"FAS Manila anticipates the sector will grow as the tourism and hotel industry improves. Dining in restaurants, catering and events will continue to provide growth while food deliveries offer convenience," the report said.

The USDA added that restaurant

chains continue to open new local and international stores and franchises.

"With the recovery in the service industry, restaurants and hotels are expected to become more profitable in 2023," the USDA said.

The agency also noted that the food service industry is estimated to recover to pre-pandemic levels by early 2024.

It added that the use of online delivery platforms, drive-throughs and curbside pickups will continue to appeal to customers, though not as often compared to the pandemic.

The growth in the food industry, the USDA said, opens opportuni-

ties for the supply of meat and dairy products, condiments, beverages, and bakery products, among others.

FAS Manila, meanwhile, foresees full-service restaurants' sales growth overtaking limited-service restaurant sales.

In 2022, full-service restaurants accounted for 17 percent of total food service sales, while limited-service restaurants got 55 percent.

However, the USDA warned of the effects of elevated inflation on the industry.

"Elevated food inflation and higher fuel costs contributed to higher restaurant menu prices," said the USDA.

"The price increases and scarcity of ingredients of rice, fruits, and vegetables resulted in higher menu prices, smaller servings, or alternative ingredient options for customers," it added.

It also noted lower household consumption as one of the factors affecting the market outlook for the Philippines.

On hotel occupancy rates, the USDA said this reached 80 percent in January 2023, fueled by local demand.

"Once international tourism recovers, the hotel industry will present further growth," the agency said.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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Philippine food services industry sales expected to grow 20% in 2023, USDA says



RUSSEL JHON-SEARES-UNSPASH

GROWTH in the Philippine food services industry is projected at 20% this year amid a revival of hotels and tourism, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

"With the recovery in the service industry, restaurants and hotels are expected to become more profitable in 2023," the USDA said in a report.

It added that dining in restaurants, catering, and events will continue to boost sales, with food delivery also established as a convenient option for consumers.

Restaurant chains are also seen continuing to open new stores and franchises.

The USDA also sees full-service restaurants overhauling limited-service restaurants in terms of sales, with growth of 25% in 2023.

Limited-service restaurants, which accounts for more than half

of the industry, are expected to post sales growth of 20% this year.

Café and bar sales, on the other hand, are estimated to expand 20% as more establishments open. The forecast suggests a slowdown from the 26% reported in 2022.

The USDA said sales growth of street stalls and kiosks is expected to decelerate during the year, due to the "higher cost of raw materials and thrifty spending by consumers."

"The USDA projects the Philippine food service industry to recover to pre-pandemic levels by 2024," it said.

It said that the Philippines presents "a substantial opportunity" for US processed food, with the country becoming the seventh-largest export market for the US in 2022.

US consumer-oriented exports to the Philippines were the highest in Southeast Asia last year at \$1.6 billion. — **Adrian H. Halili**



USDA says PH consumer food service sales to hit up to \$13B this year

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) projects the total consumer food service sales in the Philippines to grow by 20 percent this year to around \$13 billion.

In a report dated October 4, the USDA said recovery in the service industry, restaurants and hotels is expected to become more profitable in 2023, although it is slower than the 26.6 percent growth recorded in 2022 when sales hit \$10.42 billion from the previous \$8.23 billion.

The USDA's monitoring of consumer food service records sales from full-service restaurants,

limited-service restaurants, cafes and bars, and street stalls and kiosks.

The report said some restaurants experience queues of customers dining in and event bookings are starting to fill up hotel venues.

It also mentioned that while most food establishments are launching new restaurant concepts, some restaurant chains fast-tracked store openings to meet local and international franchise agreements.

Even if not as frequent as during the pandemic, use of online delivery platforms, drive-thru and curbside pickups will continue to appeal to customers, but elevated food inflation and higher fuel costs

contributed to higher restaurant menu prices, the report added.

The USDA also projects that full-service restaurants' sales growth in the Philippines will overtake limited-service restaurant sales with most top restaurants selling chicken, pizza and burgers, providing opportunities for US food and beverage exports.

The report said full-service restaurant sales this year may go up by 25 percent to \$2.28 billion from \$1.82 billion. Last year, pizza stores contributed the most with a 24 percent sales increase, followed by Asian restaurants led by Max's.

Meanwhile, limited-service restaurants will see slower growth compared to full-service restau-

rants in 2023 at 20 percent or from 2022's \$5.72 billion to this year's \$6.86 billion.

The USDA said more than half the number of restaurants in the Philippines are considered limited-service restaurants which present volume opportunities for US ingredients, especially chicken leg quarters.

The report also noted that Jollibee Foods Corp. represent half of the limited-service restaurants industry, with three out of five of the top belonging to the firm including Jollibee, Mang Inasal and Chowking.

As for Philippine cafes and bars,

See USDA > Page A2



A kitchen helper prepares to cook at a restaurant in Quezon City. (Reuters Photo)

USDA

sales this year is projected by the USDA to grow by 20 percent to \$1.66 billion from \$1.38 billion in 2022.

The report identified Starbucks as the leading café in 2022 with a sales share of 56 percent equivalent to \$775 million while for local bars,

Barcino leads with \$14 million sales in 2022.

However, the report said its basis on the sales of the companies are from the percentage share in the industry and may differ from reported annual sales.

For street stalls and kiosks, the USDA report said 25 percent

growth is possible this year at \$1.97 billion from last year's \$1.58 billion. This year's growth is deemed slower due to the higher cost of raw materials and thrifty spending of consumers.

With the face-to-face resumption of classes and work, street stalls and kiosks selling potato

fries, hot dogs, milk teas and fruit shakes will contribute to sales growth, it noted.

Among the top three food street stalls and kiosks monitored by the report in 2022, Angel's Burger, Tender Juicy Hotdog and Turks are on top in terms of sales for the period. - *Jed Macapagal*



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Arabica coffee dips to 9-month low; raw sugar up 2%

NEW YORK — Arabica coffee futures traded on the ICE exchange hit a nine-month low on Friday, under pressure from a weak Brazilian real currency, worries over demand and benign weather in Brazil.

Raw sugar futures, meanwhile, rose more than 2%.

COFFEE: December arabica coffee gained 0.65 cent or 0.4% to \$1.4605 per pound (lb), recovering after earlier hitting its lowest since early January at \$1.4445.

Dealers said there was less rain forecast in the week ahead for top producer Brazil, but there

was still some around and a new round of flowering is expected.

Meanwhile, Rabobank said the coffee market is increasingly worried about demand after US green coffee imports fell 17.5% in July, while EU plus UK imports dropped 10.7%.

Also weighing on coffee, the real is trading at a six-month low versus the US dollar, spurring Brazilian exporters to sell by raising returns in local currency terms.

November robusta coffee fell 0.8% to \$2,359, after hitting a six-month low of \$2,323.

SUGAR: March raw sugar settled up 0.58 cent or 2.2% at 26.74 cents per lb.

Sugar is consolidating near recent 12-year peaks thanks to tight global supplies and despite a weak Brazilian currency that usually drives mills to sell, while concerns over macroeconomic growth are keeping gains in check.

Most of the record physical delivery of sugar at the expiration of the October contract on ICE will head to China, according to traders with knowledge of deals.

Dealers said the fact that the

large delivery is mostly sold, along with potential logistical problems in Brazil to load all of that sugar, could take the market higher.

December white sugar rose \$11.90 or 1.7% to 709.20 a ton.

COCOA: March London cocoa rose £34 or 1.2% to £2,954 per ton. December New York cocoa rose \$53 or 1.6% to \$3,453 a ton.

New York December cocoa, however, may break a support of \$3,383 per metric ton, and fall into a range of \$3,303-\$3,353, said Reuters technical analyst Wang Tao. — **Reuters**



World food price index little changed in September despite surge in sugar

ROME — The United Nations (UN) food agency's world price index was largely stable in September, as declines in the indices for vegetable oils, dairy and meat offset a surge in sugar and maize prices.

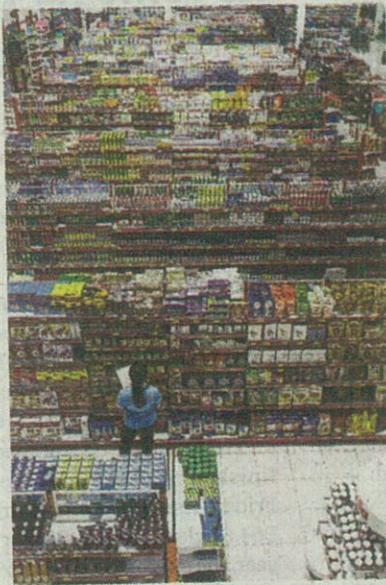
The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) price index, which tracks the most globally traded food commodities, averaged 121.5 points last month against a revised 121.6 for August, the agency said.

The August reading was initially given as 121.4.

The September figure was 10.7% down year on year and 24% below an all-time high reached in March 2022 in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

FAO's cereal index rose 1.0% from the previous month, with maize prices surging 7%, pushed up by strong demand for Brazilian supplies, slower selling in Argentina and increased barge freight rates in the US.

International wheat prices dropped 1.6%, thanks to strong supplies and good production prospects in Russia. Rice, which had rocketed



BERNARD HERMANT-UNSPLASH

almost 10% in August, dipped 0.5% last month amid low import demand, FAO said.

The sugar index jumped 9.8% from August, hitting its highest level since November 2010 amid growing concerns over a tighter global supply outlook in the upcoming season,

tied to worries about the impact of the El Niño weather pattern on production.

Vegetable oil prices fell 3.9%, while dairy prices dropped 2.3% — the ninth successive monthly fall, as lackluster global import demand and ample stocks in leading producing regions continued to weigh on the sector.

Meat prices dipped 1.0%.

In a separate report on cereal supply and demand, the FAO forecast world cereal production this year at 2.819 billion tons, up slightly from a previous estimate of 2.815 billion and some 0.9% higher than 2022 levels, the FAO said.

The higher forecast was almost entirely driven by more positive yield estimates for Russia and Ukraine, owing to continued favorable weather conditions, the FAO said.

The UN agency said its cereal supply and demand brief pegged global wheat output at 785 million tons, coarse grain production at 1.511 billion tons, up 2.7% from 2022, and world rice output at 523.1 million tons. — **Reuters**



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ASEAN ministers commit to eventual elimination of crop burning

KUALA LUMPUR — Southeast Asian agriculture and forestry ministers have agreed to take collective action to minimize and eventually eliminate crop burning in the region, amid deteriorating air quality and concern about cross-border haze.

In a statement after a meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in

Malaysia, members recognized “the adverse environmental and health impacts of crop burning practices,” and committed to collectively reduce and phase it out.

“The meeting recognized the need for sustainable alternatives to crop burning, including the adoption of innovative and environmentally friendly agricultural practices,” it said.

The pledge comes as air quality hit unhealthy levels in several parts of Malaysia in recent days and after weeks of elevated pollution in Indonesia.

Malaysia’s environment minister in an interview with Reuters called on Indonesia and ASEAN to take action as air quality worsens, blaming it on fires from crop burning in Indonesia.

Almost every dry season, smoke from fires to clear land for palm oil and pulp and paper plantations in Indonesia blankets much of the region, bringing risks to public health and worrying tourist operators and airlines.

Many of the companies that own these plantations are foreign or foreign-listed. Jakarta has de-

nied detecting any smoke drifting over its borders into Malaysia.

The ASEAN meeting agreed to develop and implement educational campaigns and training programmes on sustainable agricultural practices, providing technical guidance on alternative methods for land clearing.

“This will require collective efforts, sustained commitment, and

collaboration among (ASEAN members) farmers, local communities, and relevant stakeholders,” it said.

The ministers also agreed to review and update existing regulations and guidelines with the aim of phasing out the use of antimicrobials in food production, they said. —

Reuters



Soybeans, corn decline

NEW YORK- Chicago soybeans and corn futures fell on Friday following a rally a day earlier, pulled down by a sell-off in equities and forecasts of idyllic harvest weather in much of the US farm belt over the weekend.

The most-active Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) soybean futures were down about 1 percent at \$12.68-1/2 a bushel and CBOT corn was 0.7 percent lower at \$4.94.

The slide came after a report from the US Department of Labor showing the country added 336,000 jobs in September, compared with forecasts of 170,000, which lifted expectations the US Federal Reserve would further hike interest

rates and prompted a drop in US equities markets.

November soybeans rallied in the prior session, closing above \$12.80 a bushel for the first time in a week, a level that may have prompted some producers to lock in profits and hedge risk in the midst of the harvest.

"Soybeans are expecting a very big harvest weekend. Sometimes you'll get some selling prior to what these commercial (producers) will buy," said Jason Ward, the managing director of Northstar Commodity in Minneapolis.

December corn prices rose to \$4.99 a day earlier before retreating, a level they have not seen since August and where they have met repeated resistance. **-Reuters**

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Sugar, corn prices higher in September—FAO report

INTERNATIONAL sugar prices went up in September due to increasing concerns over a tighter supply outlook in the upcoming 2023/2024 season, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

In its latest report, FAO said its sugar price index averaged 162.7 points in September, up 14.5 points or 9.8 percent from August. This marked the second consecutive monthly increase and pushed the index to its highest level since November 2010.

"The hike in prices mostly stemmed from increasing concerns over a tighter global supply outlook in the upcoming 2023/24 season," FAO said.

"This mainly reflects early forecasts pointing to production declines in key sugar producers, Thailand and India, due to drier-than-normal weather conditions associated with the prevailing El Niño event."

FAO said higher international crude oil prices also contributed to the increase in world sugar prices.

"However, the large crop currently being harvested in Brazil, amidst favorable weather conditions, combined with the weakening of the Brazilian Real against the United States dollar, limited the month-on-month increase in world sugar prices."

As for maize, international prices rose by 7 percent in September, driven by a number of factors, including strong demand for Brazil's supplies. Also putting pressure on prices are slower farmer selling in Argentina and increased barge freight rates due to low water levels on the Mississippi River in the US.

"Among other coarse grains, world sorghum prices also firmed in September, in line with maize price trends, while barley prices remained essentially stable," FAO said.

"By contrast, international

wheat prices continued to drop, falling by 1.6 percent month-on-month, underpinned by ample supplies in the Russian Federation, where production prospects were lifted in September."

However, the FAO Food Price Index was stable in September as increases in sugar and maize prices were offset by the declines in quotations for vegetable oils, dairy and meat.

The FAO Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in the international prices of globally-traded food commodities, averaged 121.5 points in September, compared to 121.4 points in August. At this level, the index is 10.7 percent below its value a year ago and 24.0 percent below its all-time high reached in March 2022.

The FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index declined by 3.9 percent from August, with international quotations for palm, sunflower, soy and rapeseed oils all down, driven in part by elevated seasonal production and

abundant global export supplies.

"The FAO Dairy Price Index declined by 2.3 percent from August, its ninth drop in a row, impacted by lackluster global import demand and ample stocks in leading producing regions. The euro's relative weakness against the US dollar also weighed on international dairy prices."

FAO also said the meat price index dipped by 1 percent from the previous month, with a mixture of weak import demand and ample global export availabilities pushing down quotations for pig, poultry, and ovine meats.

"By contrast, international bovine meat prices rebounded on the back of a strong import demand for lean beef, especially in the US."

FAO said the rice price index fell by 0.5 percent month-on-month in September, while remaining as much as 27.8 percent above its year-earlier value.

"The slight decline in September was driven by generally low import demand, although price falls tended to be capped by lingering uncertainties regarding India's rice export restrictions and progressively thinning supplies ahead of new-crop harvests in Asia."