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## DA pork shortage scenario to justify lower tariff – farmers

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is creating a scenario that there is shortage in pork supply to justify the need to extend Executive Order 10 which provides lower tariffs on imported agricultural products, farmers' groups said yesterday.

In an interview with **The STAR**, Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura executive director Jayson Cainglet contradicted the claim of Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa that there will be at least 10 percent shortage in the supply of pork amid the alleged effect of African swine fever (ASF).

Cainglet added that Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno and Socio-economic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan are now pushing for the extension of EO 10 after President Marcos junked their proposal to lower the tariff on imported rice.

"The economic managers cannot use ASF as an excuse to make it appear there is a shortage. Since 1994, they succeeded in pushing for import liberation under the World Trade Organization," Cainglet said.

For his part, Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines chairman Nicanor Briones noted that as of Sept. 30, the pork stocks in cold storage facilities reached 110 million kilos, including 100 million imported meat products.

"Aside from these, at least 60 million kilos of imported pork arrive every month, that's why we are puzzled why they are claiming that there will be a

shortage in supply despite there being an oversupply," Briones said.

Briones added that the farmgate price of pork remains low at P170 per kilo.

"One of the indicators that there is an oversupply of pork is the low farmgate price. Backyard raisers are only break even or worse, suffer losses. This is the time when local hog raisers are hoping to earn with the expected increase in the demand this Christmas, but they still want to flood the market with imported meat products," he said.

Briones said that Diokno and Balisacan want to justify the extension of EO 10 by making it appear that there is shortage in pork supply, lowering the tariff on imported pork from 40 percent to 25 percent; for minimum access volume, from 30 percent to 15 percent.

According to Briones, the government loses at least P50 billion in revenues because of the lower tariffs on agricultural products.

Marcos signed EO 10 extending the implementation of EO 171 on reduced import duty rates. EO 171 issued by former president Rodrigo Duterte reduced the Most Favored Nation tariff rates for key commodities such as meat of swine (fresh, chilled or frozen), maize (corn), rice and coal until Dec. 31.

At the same time, Briones said that despite low farmgate price, the retail price of pork remains high as he backed the proposal to implement suggested retail price (SRP) on pork products.





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## Isabela rice farmers thank PBBM for agriculture dep't support

ISABELA farmers are happy these days as they are enjoying the benefits of high palay prices versus previous years.

Fresh palay fetches an average of P20 per kilogram (kg), while dry ones are sold for P26/kg, said Samuel Lugo, president of Tumauni Irrigation Pilot Area, a federation of Irrigators' Associations (IAs) in Isabela.

"Naibenta namin ang aming sariwang palay sa P20 kada kilo, kaya kami'y nakabawingayon. Ang dagdag na kita ay malaking tulong sa aming pamilya para sa pang-araw-araw na pangangailangan," Lugo said.

The other major reason why they have higher income was the good result of interventions given by the Department of Agriculture to rice farmers, added Lugo, whose group is composed of 15 IAs with more than 4,000 members tilling more than 3,000 hectares in Tumauni, Isabela.

They thanked President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., who is also the concurrent Agriculture Secretary, for the support that the government is extending to them and other rice farmers nationwide: "Sa ngalan po ng federation, ipinapaabot namin ang aming pasasalamat sa Kagalangalang na

Pangulong BongBong Marcos sa mga magagandang ayuda na ibinibigay nya sa aming mga magsasaka!"

"Ang maganda pa ngayon ay nakamenos kami dahil sa mga ibinibigay na suporta ng DA tulad ng binhi at abono. Bumaba po ang aming gastos sa pagsasaka," he explained.

He said that most of them plant hybrid rice varieties: "Puro hybrid po ang aming itinanim. Maski sa wet season, ito pa rin ang aming ginagamit, dahil mas mataas ang ani."

Noel Baquiran, Municipal Agriculturist of Tumauni, said that farmers are well-compensated this 2023 wet season. PCO

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## Kontrol sa presyo ng bigas binawi na

**OPISYAL** nang ipinag-utos ni **Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.** ang pagbawi sa Executive Order No. 39 na nagtakda ng mandated price ceiling sa regular at well-milled rice sa bansa.

Tinukoy ng Pangulo ang pagtaas ng suplay ng rice stocks at pagbaba ng presyo ng bigas sa merkado.

Sa dalawang pahinang Executive Order No. 42, nilagdaan ni Executive Secretary Lucas P. Bersamin noong Oktubre 4, nakasaad dito na kapwa inirekomenda ng Department of Agriculture at Department of Trade and Industry kay Pangulong Marcos na bawiin na ang EO 39.

Ang DA at ang DTI din ang mga departamento na nag-rekomenda sa Pangulo na magpalabas ng EO 39, o implementasyon ng mandatang P41.00 price cap sa regular milled rice at P45.00 price ceiling sa well-milled rice sa buong bansa, naging epektibo noong Setyembre 5.

Sa ilalim ng EO 42, inatasan ni Pangulong Marcos ang concerned agencies na "fortify their existing programs and initiatives to provide support and assistance to farmers, retailers and consumers" para masiguro ang katatagan ng presyo ng bigas sa bansa.

Guidelines para makatrabaho muli ang mga nasuspindeng abogado, pinasimple ng SC. Otomatikong makapagtatrabaho muli ang mga nasuspindeng abugado kung makapaghahain ito ng sinumpaang salaysay ng pagtalima (sworn statement of compliance).

Ito ang nakasaad sa resolusyon ng Supreme Court Special Second Division bilang tugon sa inihang request for clarification ng Office of the Bar Confidant sa inilabas na Administrative Circular ng Korte noong January 2023.

Sa naturang circular inilatag ang guidelines sa pag-alis ng parusang suspensyon sa isang abogado.

Nais mabatid ng OBC kung kinakailangan pa ang kumpirmasyon ng SC bago maalís ang suspensyon sa abogado.

Nilinaw ng SC na hindi na kinakailangan pa ang court confirmation para mapawalang bisa na ang ipinataw na disciplinary suspension kung magsusumite ang abogado ng sworn statement of compliance.

Nakasaad sa resolusyon na batid ng SC ang hirap ng proseso sa pagkuha ng mga kinakailangang dokumento bilang patunay na hindi ito nag-practice ng law sa panahon ng siya ay suspendido.

Dahil dito, hindi na kailangan kumuha pa ang suspended lawyer ng mga certificates of compliance sa mga korte at quasi-judicial agencies.

Gayunman, nagbabala ang Korte Suprema na papatawsn ng pinakamabigat na parusa ang abugado na mapapatunayan na gumawa ng pekeng sworn statement of compliance.

Kahit anila pinasimple ang proseso ng pag-alis ng administrative suspensions, hindi nangangahulugan na magiging liberal ang Korte sa mga magtatangka na samantalain ang proseso.

TERESA TAVARES



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## ***DOJ names DA officials facing raps over onion smuggling***

By **DAPHNE GALVEZ**

Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla yesterday identified three **Department of Agriculture (DA)** officials allegedly involved in hoarding onions and engaging in profiteering in December last year when prices soared to P587 per kilo.

In a press briefing, Remulla said the Department of Justice will file graft and corruption charges against DA Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista and Bureau of Plant In-

dustry officers-in-charge Junibert de Sagun and Glenn Panganiban.

Administrative cases will also be filed against the three officials for inefficiency and incompetence.

Remulla recalled that the National Bureau of Investigation filed criminal charges against six persons last month, which included the three DA officials and Bonena Multipurpose Cooperative, for hoarding and profiteering.

The new cases include falsification of private documents and use of falsified documents.



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## Gov't urged to liberalize feed imports instead of capping pork retail prices

ECONOMISTS said government intervention in the pork industry must focus on lowering input costs for hog raisers, mainly by making animal feed cheaper, rather than imposing retail price ceilings on pork.

Calixto V. Chikiamco, Foundation for Economic Freedom president, said that the Department of Agriculture (DA) should work to liberalize corn imports in order to reduce farmers' feed bills.

"The right measure to decrease pork prices without hurting hog farmers is to abolish the quantitative restrictions on corn and reduce tariffs," Mr. Chikiamco said in a Viber message.

He added that the Philippines has an annual deficit of about 3 to 5 million tons of corn. "Corn is the single biggest cost ingredient for hog and poultry production," he added.

DA Spokesperson and Assistant Secretary Arnel V. de Mesa said on Tuesday that the department is seeking to determine whether market "manipulation" warrants the imposition of price controls on pork.

Mr. De Mesa also said that the DA is studying a suggested retail price (SRP) scheme for pork if the gap between farmgate and market prices continues to widen.

"There could be several reasons why there's a gap between farmgate price and retail price — logistics costs among them," Mr. Chikiamco said.

Ateneo de Manila economics professor Leonardo A. Lanzona said a price ceiling would "cause more problems."

"(The) solution is to encourage more imports and local production," Mr. Lanzona said via chat.

The DA projects a deficit in the pork supply equivalent to 10 days' demand towards the end of the fourth quarter.

Philippine Institute for Development Studies Senior Research Fellow Roehl M. Briones said in a Viber message that the farmgate price for hogs "may just be taking time to increase."

"Prolonged controls may prevent this... (and) will discourage supply," Mr. Briones added.

Rosendo O. So, chairman of Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura said he sees the need for price caps on domestically grown and imported pork.

The controls are needed "*para hindi sumipa ang retail price (so retail prices do not rise)*," Mr. So told *BusinessWorld* by phone.

He added that a price cap on pork is "better" than an SRP "because nothing will really happen when you implement SRPs."

In Metro Manila markets, *kasim* (pork shoulder) retailed for between P260 and P330 per kilogram on Oct. 11, while *liempo* or belly sold for between P290 and P400, according to DA price monitors.

— **Adrian H. Halili**





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## Govt, academe lead market analysis of dairy industry

THE Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF), the **National Dairy Authority (NDA)** and University of the Philippines Institute for Small-Scale Industries (UP-ISSI) have joined hands in conducting a comprehensive market analysis that will help improve the dairy industry.

In a meeting last week, PCAF proposed the conduct of a benchmarking and evaluative study on the dairy industry of the country against those in the region.

PCAF said the study covers trends in the local dairy market, current profitability of local dairy farms and market gaps.

It said findings of the study will aid in crafting future strategies and policies that will develop the local dairy industry and stimulate consumption and demand for local dairy products.

PCAF said Ian Jester de Vera of the UP-ISSI will serve as project director.

Actual data gathering is set to begin on October 16 targetting top milk-producing provinces.

Based on data from the NDA, local production of milk in the country went up 15 percent last year to 30.28 million kilograms (kg) from 2021's 26.3 million kg., attributed to the higher volume of dairy animal herd.

NDA said local milk production came from the dairy animal herd inventory of 71,819 heads as of the end of last year, up by 3.2 percent compared to 69,616 heads in 2021.

Local production last year served 5.07 percent of the country's net supply of milk last year which totaled to 597 million kg, up by 13.81 percent from 2021's 524.54 million kg.

Bulk of the country's milk and dairy products supply are from imports, reaching 595.64 million kg in 2022, a 13.6 percent growth from 2021's 523.95 million kg. In terms of value, imports rose 37

percent to \$1.2 billion to \$1.64 billion, indicating an increase in unit import cost of 23 percent in dollar terms.

The United States was the leading source of imported dairy products in the Philippines as of end-2022, accounting for 33 percent of the total dairy import bill followed by New Zealand with 27 percent, Belgium with 6 percent and Australia with 4 percent.

Despite being not self-sufficient for milk and dairy products, the country exported a total of 28.92 million kg in 2022, up by 12.5 percent from 25.71 million kg in 2021.

*-Jed Macapagal*





## 3 DA execs in onion hoarding, profiteering racket named

BY ASHZEL HACHERO

JUSTICE Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla yesterday named three officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) as among those who have been recommended by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to be charged with hoarding and profiteering charges in connection with the smuggling and alleged price manipulation of onions last year.

In a press briefing late Wednesday afternoon, Remulla said DA assistant secretary Kristine Evangelista, Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) Director Gerald Glenn Panganiban, and Director Junibert de Sagun, officer-in-charge of the DA's Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service, will be charged with violation of Republic Act 3019, or the Anti-Graft and Cor-

rupt Practices Act.

Ombudsman Samuel Martires has earlier suspended Evangelista, along with DA Administrative Officer V Eunice Biblanias, DA OIC-chief accountant Lolita Jamela, Food Terminal Inc (FTI) vice president for operations John Gabriel Benedict Trinidad III, and FTI budget division head Juanita Lualhati, in relation to the investigation of the Office of the Ombudsman into the onion supply mess that caused prices to shoot up last year.

The Ombudsman alleged they were involved in the onion shortage and price manipulation, as well as the questionable procurement of the agricultural produce last year.

Martires said the NFA had an

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### 3 DA

agreement with the FTI for the Kadiwa Food Hub project of the government, while the latter had a deal with Bonina Multi-Purpose Cooperative for the delivery of 8,845 bags of onions, with about 28 kilograms per bag, for Kadiwa.

In suspending the said officials, the Ombudsman said they allegedly violated procurement rules, made questionable advance payment of 50 percent of the contract price, non-compliance with the Memorandum of Agreement, partial implementation of the contract and doubtful deliveries by the cooperative.

#### INITIAL PROBE

Aside from the graft raps, Remulla said Evangelista, De Sagun and Panganiban will also be indicted for "inefficiency and incompetence in the performance

of official duties under the Administrative Code of 1987."

"Sa RA 3019, ay meron tayong dini-demanda dito. Ang pinakamataas dito assistant secretary ng DA, si Kristine Evangelista, si Junibert de Sagun at saka si Glenn Panganiban, at kasama pa rin ang mga officials ng Bonina Multi-Purpose Cooperative (For RA 3019, the highest official to be charged is assistant secretary of DA Kristine Evangelista, Junibert de Sagun and Glenn Panganiban as well as officials of Bonina Multi-Purpose Cooperative)," Remulla said.

He also said that Bonina Multi-Purpose Cooperative chairperson Israel Reguyal, and executives Mary Ann dela Rosa and Victor dela Rosa Jimenez will be charged for violation of RA 7581, or the Price Act, for hoarding, and Section 5, Paragraph 2 for profiteering.

Remulla said they will also be charged for falsification of documents and use of falsified docu-

ments under Article 272 of the Revised Penal Code.

Remulla said the list of charges is only the start, pointing out that an investigation is still ongoing regarding the smuggling of onions and the connivance of past and present DA officials.

"Tuloy tuloy po ang pag iimb-estiga natin and the noose is tightening. We expect warrants of arrests to be issued once we file this in the courts," he said, adding that with thousands of pages of testimonies and documentation coming from congressional committees which conducted investigations into the issue, the DOJ "expected this to be properly acted upon by the courts once we filed."

"So far, ito 'yung nakuha ng ating effort but marami pa tayong pinag-aaralan na puwedeng kasuhan na past and present officials of the DA and other offices (This is the result of our initial investigation. We are still studying what

other cases can be filed against past and present officials of the DA and other office)," he said.

He said the cases will be filed before regional trial courts and the Office of the Ombudsman.

Justice Assistant Secretary Geronimo Sy earlier said the NBI has recommended the prosecution of six individuals who the agency claimed were behind the supply and procurement of more than 8,000 bags each of 25 kilos of onions worth P134 million in December 2022.

Sy said the onions were offered to the government at a very high price of P537 per kilo by a private supplier, despite the prevailing farm gate prices of onion at P8 to P15.

He said there was an apparent collusion between some government officials and the supplier as based on the NBI probe two of the three firms that participated in the bidding for the supply of onions were fictitious.





## EDITORIAL

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## Small committee with a huge task

**A**T the height of incendiary debates about a request of Vice President Sara Duterte for confidential and intelligence funds (CIF) of her office and the Department of Education, totaling P650 million, various arguments were made in favor and against the VP's proposal.

Duterte's contention draws from her belief that the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), are recruiting members in both city and provincial schools and colleges aside from teaching their brand of democracy in indigenous "lumad" schools in the hinterlands. The DepEd then needs its confidential and intelligence funds to counteract the rebels' program.

On the other hand, critics of her proposal pointed out that internal security is the mandate of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and similar law enforcement units, with the help of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. These are the agencies that need funds for intelligence, so that we no longer have to suffer the embarrassment and degradation such as the "Marawi siege."

**'We support this particular resolution of the CIF issue as taken by the House's small committee which has measured up to its huge task. We are confident that the House plenary and the Senate will do the same.'**

Also, intelligence funds along with operational and physical infrastructure budgets are best given to the Armed Forces units stationed in the West Philippine Sea as they are the frontier forces of the nation tasked to defend our sovereignty in case of attacks from other nations.

To resolve the problem, Speaker Martin Romualdez formed a "small committee" composed of leaders of the majority and minority blocs in the chamber to study and ultimately resolve the issue. It is, after all, the mandate of Congress to scrutinize and pass the budget following its submission by the Executive department.

After much deliberation, the House of Representatives' small committee has decided to give zero confidential funds to civilian agencies of the government, namely the Office of the Vice President (OVP), Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Information and Communication Technology, Department of Foreign Affairs, and **Department of Agriculture.**

Marikina 2nd District Rep. Stella Quimbo, a member of the committee tasked to resolve individual amendments to the proposed 2024 national budget, made the announcement. Quimbo said all the confidential funds proposed by OVP, DepEd, DICT, DFA, and **DA** will be given to agencies at the forefront of protecting the West Philippine Sea and maintaining peace and order in the country.

Rep. Quimbo said a total of P300 million was added to the allocation of the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA), P100 million to the National Security Council (NSC), P200 million to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) for its intelligence activities and ammunition, and P381.8 million to the Department of Transportation (DOT) for airport development and expansion of Pag-asa Island Airport.

Quimbo clarified that P3 billion was set aside for the development and expansion of the Pag-asa Island Airport but the P381 million "was the only portion taken from confidential funds."

We support this particular resolution of the CIF issue as taken by the House's small committee which has measured up to its huge task. We are confident that the House plenary and the Senate will do the same.





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## Polyculture viable for tilapia, prawns

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

**P**OLYCULTURE is proving to be viable in cultivating freshwater prawns, or ulang, and tilapia in Cagayan province.

The Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Region 2 (BFAR-Cagayan Valley) office said aquaculture's viability was showcased during the recently held harvest field days among four project beneficiaries from Peñablanca, Gattaran, Solana and Ballesteros in Cagayan.

The recently conducted harvest

field days brought together fish farmers, extension agents and other stakeholders.

Randy Taccad, a project cooperator from Peñablanca town, stocked 2,000 pieces of tilapia fingerlings and 1,300 pieces of ulang in his 650-square meter pond.

Taccad said he is now reaping the fruits of his labor after five months of culture with around three to four pieces a kilo of tilapia harvested dur-

ing the harvest field day.

In Gattaran town, project cooperator Rommel Manuel said 2,100 pieces of tilapia and 1,400 pieces of ulang were stocked in his 700-square-meter production area, another successful polyculture venture in the province.

Manuel said he also received full support from BFAR, just like the rest of the project beneficiaries. This was in the form of tilapia

fingerlings, ulang post-larvae, commercial feeds, fertilizers and technical guidance.

Margie Pagulayan, a cooperator from Solana, thanked BFAR for the support in making her fish farming venture productive.

Pagulayan said her family's pond area, measuring 650 square meters, was stocked with 2,000 pieces of tilapia fingerlings and 1,300 pieces of ulang.

In the coastal town of Ballesteros, Mario Domingo said his 1,000-square-meter fish pond has become productive after five months. Domingo also thanked the BFAR for the 3,000 pieces of tilapia and 2,000 pieces of ulang as livelihood assistance.

BFAR Region 2 said the four demonstration projects in Cagayan yielded about 617 kilograms of tilapia and ulang from their partial harvest.





## The upcoming El Niño episode is no joke

BASED on the latest forecast of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa), the chances of the El Niño weather disturbance occurring toward the end of this year is "strong."

Pagasa added that this will likely cause below-normal rainfall conditions persisting until next year. It warned months earlier that the El Niño will persist from the last quarter of this year to the first quarter of 2024.

The weather bureau said that it anticipates "the most severe effects of El Niño, with a high probability of below-normal rainfall conditions in most parts of the country" from January to March next year, and that the weather disturbance will start escalating in November.

Pagasa added that the El Niño will cause dry spells and droughts in many areas of the Philippines, adding that 28 provinces could experience dry spells, while 45 provinces may face drought con-



### MOVING FORWARD

WILLIAM D. DAR

ditions by March next year.

However, what I believe can hopefully reduce partly the impact of the impending El Niño is the four to seven tropical cyclones forecasted by Pagasa to enter the Philippines until the end of this year, while the western parts of the country are projected to get above-normal rainfall during the southwest monsoon (habagat) season.

Such weather occurrences have proven to mitigate water shortages by increasing the water in large dams. And how I wished there were more rainwater harvesting facilities in the Philippines.

But what also worries me is the **National Irrigation Administration (NIA)** saying that the Philippines may lose up to 1.46 million metric tons of rice per harvest season from the onset of El Niño.

The figure was calculated based on the 267,000 hectares of rice farms that will potentially be affected by the dry spells and droughts.

The NIA said that Central Luzon, the country's rice granary, will be the hardest hit with about 85,000 hectares of rice farms, NIA Deputy Administrator Josephine Salazar said.

The other regions that have large swathes of land devoted to rice that can be affected by the El Niño are: Soccsksargen with 27,000 hectares; Ilocos with 24,000 hectares; Mimaropa with 17,000 hectares; Western Visayas with 15,000 hectares; Central Visayas with 14,000 hectares; and Zamboanga Peninsula with 13,000 hectares.

### Impacting sovereign debt levels

What also worries me is that El Niño can affect the debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) level of countries that are more vulnerable to the weather disturbance.

This is according to the latest research by MSCI, a leading provider and researcher of critical decision support tools and services for the global investment community.

In September, MSCI released results of its research saying that the upcoming El Niño can have an impact on the debt-to-GDP ratios of emerging or developing economies, including the Philippines.

It added that the likelihood of the El Niño occurring by the end of this year is now at 95 percent.

"The likelihood of an El Niño event forming by the end of 2023 has increased to over 95 percent. Such an occurrence could cause suboptimal weather, leading to lower yields and rising prices for staple food crops," MSCI said in its report titled "The Potential Impact of El Niño on Sovereign Debt."

"The debt-to-GDP ratio for global sovereigns, especially in emerging markets, tends to deteriorate during the year following El Niño due to lower economic

growth and higher government spending," it added.

Hence, countries that will be severely impacted by the El Niño will be needing the assistance of global or international financial institutions, but MSCI said that countries with poor fiscal situations may have a hard time coping with the effects of the weather disturbance.

When it came to its Financial Governance Risk/Score index, MSCI gave the Philippines a score very little above 5.0 out of 10, meaning the government may find it hard to service its debt load if the country is hit hard by the upcoming El Niño.

MSCI also said that lower economic growth can be a factor that can worsen the debt-to-GDP ratios for countries that will be affected by the weather disturbance.

"MSCI determined that the median debt-to-GDP increase for the years following an El Niño event was 0.6 percent of GDP globally and 2.1 percent for emerging markets based on data between 1994

and 2021," it said.

Among the regions in the world, MSCI said Southeast Asia was among those vulnerable to the effect of El Niño, adding the weather disturbance can badly affect rice production.

"For countries in Southeast Asia, the impact of the El Niño is expected to be more pronounced on their agricultural production, most especially rice that is a major staple among the populations in the region," it said.

However, MSCI made a disclaimer saying that its forecast on how El Niño will affect the debt-to-GDP ratio of developing or emerging economies may be in need of more historical data.

"Given the limitations of the historical analysis, we are curious to see whether developments during this period support our hypothesis that debt-to-GDP ratios rise in the year after an El Niño event," it added.

From what I have discussed, I can say one thing: The upcoming El Niño episode is no joke.





# DOJ names DA officials, cohorts allegedly behind onion price manipulation last year

By JOEL R. SAN JUAN  
@jrsanjuan1573

THE Department of Justice (DOJ) on Thursday named three officials of the Department of Agriculture and several other individuals allegedly behind the price manipulation of onions last year.

At a news briefing, Remulla said graft charges would be filed

against Agriculture Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista; officer-in-charge of DA-Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service (AMAS) Junibert De Sagun; and DA-Officer-in-Charge of the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) Gerald Glenn Panganiban for giving unwarranted benefits or preference to Bonena Multi-Purpose Cooperative for the supply and procurement of onions.

The said DA officials are also facing administrative charges for inefficiency and incompetence in the performance of official duties under Section 46 of the Revised Administrative Code of 1987.

Aside from graft Bonena representatives namely Israel Reguyal, Mary Ann Dela Rosa and Victor Dela Rosa Jimenez are also facing hoarding and profiteering charges under R.A. 7581

or the Price Act and falsification of private documents and use of falsified documents before the DOJ.

Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla said the justice department and the NBI are likely to file more charges in the future.

Remulla also said the DOJ expects the issuance of arrest warrants against the respondents

once they filed the cases in court.

Earlier, DOJ Undersecretary Geronimo Sys said the NBI recommended the filing of a complaint against the six individuals who were allegedly behind the supply and procurement of 8,000 bags each containing 25 kilos of onions amounting to P134 million in December 2022.

A supplier allegedly offered the onions to the government

at a very high price of P537 per kilo.

Their names, however, were withheld pending further review of the NBI's complaint.

"The cases have already been evaluated and now ready for filing [before the Department of Justice] for the conduct of preliminary investigation," Senior Deputy State Prosecutor Richard Anthony Fadullon said.





# Sales of street stalls, kiosks seen rising by 25%

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS  
@jearcalas

STREET stalls and kiosks could increase their sales by a quarter to a 5-year high of \$1.973 billion this year on the back of a higher demand for milk teas and fruit shakes due to resumption of face-to-face classes, according to an international report.

A Global Agricultural Information Network (Gain) report projected that sales of street stalls and kiosks this year would grow by 25 percent from last year's \$1.578 billion.

With the expected growth this year, the industry's gross sales would return to and even surpass prepandemic levels. The

industry posted sales of \$1.926 billion in 2019, which fell to \$1.027 billion in 2020 when the pandemic hit.

"Street stalls and kiosks provide convenience and budget food to commuters in transportation hubs and malls," according to the Gain report, which was prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) in Manila.

"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."

Despite the projected record sales this year, the Gain report

cautioned that year-on-year growth would be slower than the rate posted in 2022 due to more expensive raw materials.

The street stalls and kiosks' sales grew by 33 percent to \$1.578 billion last year from the \$1.185 billion recorded in 2021, according to the Gain report.

"Due to the higher cost of raw materials and thrifty spending of consumers, a slower increase this year is expected."

Based on its computation, Angel's Burger leads the street stalls and kiosks industry with about 1,300 stores last year and sales of about \$134 million.

It was followed by Tender Juicy Hot at \$110 million (1,100 stores) and Turks with \$93 million in sales and about 600

stores nationwide, according to the Gain report.

Wrapping up the top five in the industry were Infinita with an estimated \$88 million estimated sales and Zagu with \$76 million, it added.

The report noted that the annual sales estimates were based on the firm's percentage share in the industry, which may differ from the firms' reported annual sales.

The Gain report also disclosed that local cafes and bars would continue to see growth for the fourth consecutive year since the pandemic but total sales would remain below prepandemic level.

The report projected that total sales of cafes and bars in the country this year would rise

by 20 percent to a 4-year high of \$1.657 billion from \$1.381 billion last year.

"As more cafes and bars opened, café and bar sales reached 26-percent growth last year. FAS Manila foresees further café and bar sale growth in 2023, though far from the pre-pandemic level," the report read.

The Gain report said Starbucks remained as the leading café in the country with a 56-percent market share in 2022.

It noted that more and more coffee shops are opening stores with drive-throughs as well as kiosks in malls to cater to the growing needs of local consumers.

It added that other coffee shops are opening stores located in office buildings while some are establishing a presence in gas stations to cater to traveling customers and motorbike and bicycle riders.

Based on the Gain report, Starbucks led the café industry last year with estimated sales of \$775 million followed by Dunkin' Donuts with \$142 million. McCafe of McDonald's Corp. had sales of \$86 million last year while Mary Grace and Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf recorded \$64 million and \$62 million, respectively.

The report's sales estimates for the coffee shops were based on their respective market share in the industry.





## Go reiterates need for govt to focus on food security

SENATOR Christopher "Bong" Go, a member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Vice Chair of the Senate Committee on Finance, urged the Department of Agriculture (DA) to strengthen government support for agricultural workers to help ensure food security in the country while also expressing his support to the current efforts of the department as well as its proposed budget and programs for the next year.

Go's statement follows the result of a recent Pulse Asia survey, which identified assistance to farmers, increased pay for workers, and poverty reduction as urgent national issues.

The senator said he believes that a well-funded DA can help bolster food security and improve the lives of agricultural workers. It is for this reason that Go extended his support for a substantial proposed budget for the agriculture department during the Senate Finance sub-committee hearing on Thursday, October 5, which was presided by Senator Cynthia Villar.

"Dapat po ay masaya ang ating mga farmers, dapat po sa pagtitinda nila ng kanilang mga produkto ay dapat po (may) sapat na kita (sila). Alam mo kapag hindi masaya ang ating mga farmers, marami pong maaapektuhan, marami pong maghihirap. Government intervention (ang dapat palakasin)," said Go in an interview after his visit to Antipolo City on October 5.

"Itulong n'yo po sa mahihirap nating kababayan. Ibigay n'yo po sa mga farmers, ibigay n'yo po sa mahihirap, sa mga poor and indigents na ating mga kababayan. Dapat po mapakinabangan nila ang pondo ng bayan. At wala pong masayang na pondo, wala pong ma-underutilized na hindi nagagamit. Gamitin n'yo po ang pondo, pera po ng tao 'yan, pera ng gobyerno 'yan. Ibalik n'yo po sa tao ang pera ng gobyerno sa pamamagitan ng maayos na serbisyo. Sa panahon ng krisis, dapat government intervention kaagad," he urged.

Recognizing their immense contributions to the country's food production, Go stressed that the backbone of the country's food supply is the dedicated agricultural workforce, and it is essential to provide them with adequate support and resources.

Go was one of the authors of Republic Act No. 11901, which expanded the financing framework for agriculture, fisheries, and rural development. Additionally, the lawmaker was a co-sponsor and co-author in the Senate for the legislation that later became RA 11953, also known as the New Agrarian Emancipation Act. This law condones loans incurred by agrarian reform beneficiaries, including the associated interests, penalties, and surcharges.

Moreover, Go introduced Senate Bill No. (SBN) 2117, which seeks to provide comprehensive crop insurance coverage for agrarian reform beneficiaries. He also proposed SBN 2118 to enhance insurance coverage and services for farmers, thereby helping to mitigate the impact of natural disasters on the agricultural sector should these bills become laws.

"Nais kong hikayatin ang lahat ng mga lingkod-bayan na makiisa sa pagtulong sa ating mga magsasaka. Ang kanilang mahalagang papel sa ating pagkain at ekonomiya ay di-matatawaran. Suportahan natin sila sa pamamagitan ng pagpapalakas ng kanilang sektor at pagpapalaganap ng mga programa na tutugon sa kanilang mga pangangailangan. Sa pagkakaisa, makakamit natin ang mas maunlad at masaganang buhay para sa ating mga magsasaka," said Go.

"Sa lahat ng ito, ang importante ay sikapin nating walang magutom na Pilipino," he appealed.

Go also underscored the significance of enhancing competitiveness and protecting domestic farmers and industries following the recent approval of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement.

Go said with increased competition as a result of RCEP, the cost of goods should decline, and the Filipino population, particularly those in vulnerable economic circumstances and the agricultural sector, should reap the rewards.

Furthermore, Go supported initiatives aimed at

transforming unused government lands into agricultural zones to promote food production within the

country.

"Importante walang magutom na mga kababayan natin. Alam n'yo

importante po tiyan ng bawat Pilipino lalong-lalo na po 'yung mga mahihirap po na kailangan munang makabangon

kaagad 'pag tinamaan sila ng sakuna tulad ng krisis, bagyo o pagbaha," he ended.





# LOOK! Even cows and carabaos, pigs too, TURNING TO AI

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

**T**HE livestock sector has long embraced AI even before the inception of ChatGPT and the Yearbook Trend. ♦ But this AI is not fueled by machine learning. It is driven by heat. It is not artificial intelligence, but artificial insemination (AI).



Date: 12 OCT 2023

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For more than a decade now, the Department of Agriculture (DA)—through its attached agencies—has been using AI to boost local meat production.

Dubbed the Unified National Artificial Insemination Program or UNAIP, the DA sees AI technology as one of the means to improve raisers' profit.

"The UNAIP aims to provide better opportunities for livestock farming communities by enhancing productivity and competitiveness through institutionalized AI delivery systems at the village level," the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), which spearheads the UNAIP, told the *BusinessMirror*.

The UNAIP is a collaboration of multiple attached agencies of the agriculture department that are involved in livestock and dairy production.

These agencies include the BAI, Philippine Carabao Center, National Dairy Authority, and all DA regional field offices.

"Artificial insemination is one of the most efficient tools in effecting animal genetic improvement in contribution to farmer raiser productivity," the BAI explained.

## Targets for AI

UNDER the UNAIP, the bull frozen semen are produced by the BAI and PCC, and are then distributed through the DA's regional field offices (RFOs).

The RFOs would be the ones responsible for the distribution of the semen straws to their respective provincial veterinary and agriculture offices down even to the municipal agriculture offices.

"The LGU AI technicians and village-based AI technicians will serve the frontline services to farmer clients. The same network for the reporting and monitoring system," the BAI explained.

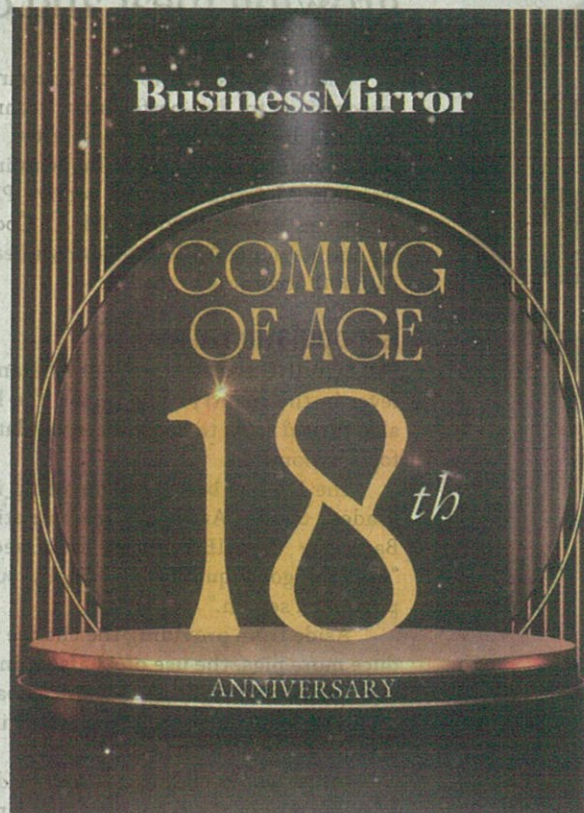
The UNAIP program plans to accelerate AI diffusion to 30 percent of the breedable population of cattle and carabaos nationwide.

It also aims to increase the conception rate of cattle and carabaos at the field level to 65 percent and 45 percent, respectively.

The PCC provides AI services to interested raisers through its village-based AI technicians or VBAITs. The going rates for AI services range between P300 and P1,000, whichever is the "existing acceptable price" in the concerned locality, according to the PCC.

For areas that do not have VBAITs, the conduct of AI service will be on a per schedule basis agreed upon between the PCC and the LGUs.

"The strategy is to cross the native swamp buffaloes with the dairy breed following a sustained backcrossing to at least four generations to produce animals with milk- and meat-producing potentials equivalent to the purebred dairy parents," the PCC said.



## The need for registry

AGRICULTURE Undersecretary for Livestock Deogracias Victor Savellano took cognizance of the potential and opportunities that AI as a breeding technology can provide to the livestock sector.

However, Savellano emphasized that part of the success of such a program would depend on the state having an established livestock animal registry.

The registry, which would be a database about the country's livestock population, would be helpful in delivering the government's programs including AI, Savellano noted.

"That program is good. But we need the registry so we will have a basis for our service," Savellano, a former governor and congressman, told the *BusinessMirror*.

"We need all the options [to boost livestock]. If it is effective, then we use it," he added.

## Challenges and incentives

ONE of the primary challenges being faced by the UNAIP is the lack of AI technicians nationwide, particularly at the LGU and village levels.

CONTINUED ON J2





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CONTINUED FROM J1

"To address the said challenge, the program continues to link and coordinate different NLAs with local units to provide AI training for frontline AI service providers," the BAI said.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is also providing cash incentives to AI technicians through every calf born using the technology. From P100, the DA is now giving AI technicians a P500 incentive for every calf born.

"With the aim to [help them cope] with the changing times, the 400-percent incentive increase hopes to beef up financial support and further motivate AI technicians to deliver and render more AI services at the local and village levels, increase the program's AI diffusion rate in target breedable cattle and carabao populations, and further improve on AI efficiency," the DA said.

## The BAI foresees a bright future for AI technology in the country's livestock sector, noting its importance in meeting the country's growing meat and dairy demand.

The DA is also set to provide awards and recognition to top-performing technicians who will be nominated and selected by the UNAIP management group. The winning outstanding AI technician will receive P20,000 while the winning Provincial AI Coordinator and Regional AI Coordinator will each get P10,000, according to the DA.

### Repopulation after ASF

FOLLOWING the aftermath of African swine fever in the country's hog sector, the DA has also turned to AI to boost its repopulation efforts nationwide.

The DA has been implementing its Upgraded Swine Artificial Insemination sa Barangay (SWAIB) project that seeks to "produce good quality genetically superior processed semen."

Aside from providing the chance to produce more pigs, the use of AI also minimizes the transmission of diseases since boars will no longer be transported to service gilts and sows.

"This would eliminate the traditional boar for hire in the barangays wherein boars are transported to service gilts and sows, a practice that is prone to disease transmission, lower fertility and poor quality genetics," the DA said.

"With this project, disease transmission is prevented, one boar can service many gilts and sows through collected, processed and stored semen, and can provide improved quality genetics," the DA added.

The DA allotted P3.95 million for the establishment of bio-secure AI centers including the laboratory equipment and animals. Last year, the DA allocated P62.5 million for the creation of 19 Upgraded Swine AI centers in key LGUs nationwide.

Each SWAIB package is worth P4.75 million, which is broken down as follows: bio-secured housing and facilities (P3.35 million), 10 breeder boars (P1 million) and AI laboratory equipment (P400,000), according to the DA.

With the existing concerns of the livestock industry related to emerging diseases that compromise the supply, demand and income of the poultry and swine industries, artificial insemination in large ruminants can

provide a venue to develop the cattle industry's population and income generation."

### Technological advancements

JUST like AI, the artificial intelligence one, the technology behind artificial insemination has also been advancing.

The new reproductive techniques are deemed to be more cost-efficient as they promise higher pregnancy rate at lesser time and effort needed.

One of which is the fixed-time artificial insemination (FTAI), which, according to literature, is a form of precision agriculture wherein the performance of AI—a single dose—is done at the most appropriate time.

"It provides greater chance for cows to be pregnant in a short period of time," according to Bionova Livestock Group, one of the local companies providing FTAI to farms. "It generates long-term impacts as it improves the genetics of the succeeding herd production," it added.

A study by Canada's Beef Cattle Research Council (BCRC) showed that the use of FTAI could be more expensive than natural breeding services on a per cow basis.

But FTAI would bring more profit to cattle raisers due to "improvements in calving span, calving rate, and calf weaning rate," according to BCRC.

The other advancements in reproductive biotechnology are multiple ovulation and embryo transfer technology (MOET) and in-vitro fertilization, according to the BAI. The MOET involves the fertilization of multiple eggs from a donor, with the embryos being removed to be put in various surrogate recipients.

Meanwhile, in in-vitro fertilization eggs are removed from a cow and are externally fertilized and once they become embryos they are implanted to recipient cows.

The BAI foresees a bright future for AI technology in the country's livestock sector, noting its importance in meeting the country's growing meat and dairy demand.

"[There will be] increasing demand for AI activities in the country and to achieve full-scale adoption of the AI technology and other advances in reproductive biotechnology in the country," it said.





## More Nueva Ecija farmers sell rice to NFA due to higher prices

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO, Pampanga – More farmers and cooperatives in Nueva Ecija prefer to sell their palay harvest to the **National Food Authority (NFA)** rather than private traders due to the government's newly imposed buying prices.

Eugenio Balmores, a farmer in Guimba town, Nueva Ecija who is president of La Morito Farmer's Association, said on Tuesday they gained profit in selling their palay to the NFA which buys at better prices.

Balmores said he is happy with the price adjustment per kilo of palay regardless of whether it is wet or dry.

NFA now pays PHP19 to PHP23 per kilo for buying dry palay and PHP16 to PHP19 per kilo for wet palay.

"Nagpapasalamat po kami kay Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. at sa NFA sa pagbibigay ng karagdagang insentibo. Malaking bagay po ito sa aming mga maliliit na magsasaka (We are thankful to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and to the NFA for providing additional incentive. This is a big matter for small farmers like us)," he said in a

video interview.

He likewise thanked the NFA for directly going to their area to procure their palay harvest which gave them savings on transport expenses.

"Nagpapasalamat din kami sa NFA dahil sila mismo ang pumupunta para bilhin ang aming mga palay (We are also thankful to the NFA because they are the ones who are coming to procure our palay)," Balmores added.

Retired general and former general manager of the Philippine Charity Sweepstake Office Alexander F. Balutan, who has a ricefield in his hometown in Zaragoza, Nueva Ecija, said he sold 315 bags of freshly harvested palay to the NFA.

"Kaya sa mga kapwa ko magsasaka, magbenta na po sa NFA para kakakuha ng mataas na presyo (So to my fellow farmers, sell your produce to the NFA to get a high price)," he said.

NFA-Nueva Ecija's mobile procurement team and buying stations have so far procured a total of 2,179 bags of dry and wet palay from individual farmers and farmers' cooperatives.

PNA





## Go after smugglers, support local farmers -- Bong Go

SENATOR Christopher "Bong" Go, a member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, outlined a two-fold strategy to address the ongoing concerns about rice prices and food security in the country.

"As a member of the Committee on Agriculture, two things ang dapat nating gawin. Unang-una, dapat po ay labanan natin, go against hoarders and smugglers. Dapat po ay walang makinabang na mga smugglers dito," Go told reporters in an interview after assisting poor residents in Makato, Aklan.

Go emphasized the need to focus on providing assistance to farmers to increase agricultural productivity and protect their welfare amid the challenges they face due to rising prices.

"Dapat po masaya po ang ating mga farmers. Dapat po ay kumita ang ating mga farmers," he said.

He urged the government to improve its interventions for local producers, particularly small farmers.

"Sila po ang dapat suportahan ng gobyerno," he insisted.

Go also called on the Department

of Agriculture, as well as other concerned government entities such as the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), to expedite the distribution of assistance to struggling farmers and qualified indigents especially in rural areas.

"Kung may ayuda po na dapat ibigay, ibigay po sa kanila. May peraman po ang gobyerno. Wag tayong maging selective," he said.

"Nandiyan ang programa. Nandiyan ang pondo na aprubado ng Kongreso, siguraduhin dapat ng gobyerno na mapakinabangan ang mga ito ng mga pinakanangailangang mga kababayan natin tulad ng mga magsasakang naghihirap ngayon," he asserted.

Go said this dual strategy aims to strike a balance between market forces and government intervention, focusing on both law enforcement against hoarders and smugglers and uplifting ordinary workers in the agricultural sector.

Citing the crucial role of farmers in ensuring food security, Go has been consistently pushing for stronger agri-

cultural support systems and infrastructure.

He was one of the co-authors of the measure that became Republic Act No. 11901, expanding the agriculture, fisheries, and rural development financing system. He has also been advocating for other programs to support farmers and fisherfolk in the country, such as the enhancement of the irrigation of farmlands and expansion of the National Rice Program.

Go also co-sponsored and co-authored Senate Bill No. 1850—the Senate version of RA 11953, also known as the New Agrarian Emancipation Act. The measure seeks to condone loans that agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) incurred in owning lands under the government's agrarian reform programs.

The senator also filed SBN 2117 which aims to provide full crop insurance coverage for agrarian reform beneficiaries, as well as SBN 2118 which aims to provide better insurance coverage and services to farmers and help mitigate the impact of natural disasters on the agricultural sector, if enacted into law.



# REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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## GO: ISMAGLER HABULIN, MAGSASAKA TULUNGAN

**U**pang matugunan ang patuloy na alalahanin tungkol sa presyo ng bigas at seguridad sa pagkain sa bansa, sinabi ni Senador Christopher "Bong" Go, miyembro ng Senate committee on agriculture, na dapat sugpuin ang hoarders at smugglers ng bigas at tulungan ang mga lokal na magsasaka na mapalaki ang kanilang produksyon.

"Two things ang dapat nating gawin. Unang-una, dapat po ay labanan natin, go against hoarders and smugglers. Dapat po ay walang makinabang na mga smugglers dito" ani Go matapos niyang tulungan ang mga mahihirap na residente sa Makato, Aklan.

Idiniin ni Go ang pangangailangang bigyan ng tulong ang mga magsasaka upang mapataas ang produksyon sa agrikultura at maprotektahan ang kanilang kapakanan sa gitna ng mga hamong kinahaharap dahil sa pagtaas ng presyo.

"Dapat po masaya ang ating mga magsasaka. Dapat po ay kumita ang ating mga magsasaka," ayon kay Go.

"Sila po ang dapat suportahan ng gobyerno," giit pa niya.

Nanawagan din si Go sa Department of Agriculture, gayundin sa iba pang concerned government entities tulad ng Department of Social Welfare and Development na pabilisin ang pamamahagi ng tulong sa mga naghihirap na magsasaka at kwalipikadong indigents lalo na sa mga rural na lugar.

Sinabi ng senador na kung may ayuda na dapat ibigay ay ibigay sa kanila dahil may pera naman ang gobyerno at huwag maging selective sa pamamahagi ng tulong.

Sinabi ni Go na ang dalawahang diskarte na ito ay naglalayong magkaroon ng balanse sa pagitan ng mga puwersa ng pamilihan at interbensyon ng gobyerno, na nakatuon sa parehong pagpapatupad ng batas laban sa mga hoarder at smuggler at pag-angat ng mga ordinaryong manggagawa sa

sektor ng agrikultura.

Binanggit ang mahalagang papel ng mga magsasaka sa pagtiyak ng seguridad sa pagkain, patuloy na itinutulak ni Go ang mas malakas na sistema ng suporta at imprastraktura sa agrikultura.

Isa siya sa co-author ng panukala na naging Republic Act No. 11901, na nagpapalawak sa sistema ng pagpopondo sa agrikultura, pangisdaan, at rural development.

Kasama rin si Go sa nagsulong ng Senate Bill No. 1850—ang bersyon ng Senado na RA 11953, mas kilala bilang New Agrarian Emancipation Act.

Inihain din ng senador ang SBN 2117 na naglalayong magbigay ng full crop insurance coverage sa agrarian reform beneficiaries, gayundin ang SBN 2118 na naglalayong magbigay ng mas magandang insurance coverage at serbisyo sa mga magsasaka para mabawasan ang epekto ng mga natural na kalamidad sa sektor ng agrikultura, kung maisabatas.

RNT





# Food security thru agro-industrial investments

**O**fficial numbers released by various economic agencies have validated the sentiments of Filipinos about food being a primary concern—literally, a gut issue. For example, we learned that overall inflation again increased in August, after being told a few months ago that prices had been stabilizing. Inflation rose to 5.3 percent in August 2023, from 4.7 percent in July. The up-tick was due to higher increase in the price of food and nonalcoholic beverages, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Complementing these are the findings of two survey firms. According to the Social Weather Stations (SWS), 10.4 percent of Filipino families experienced involuntary hunger at least once in the past three months during the second quarter of this year. Involuntary hunger is defined as being hungry and not having anything to eat. Related to this is another SWS finding for the same quarter, that 34 percent of Filipino families—estimated at 9.2 million families—feel “food poor.” Some 38 percent feel they are on the borderline (between being food poor and not).

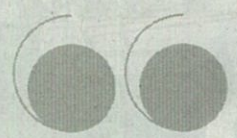
Pulse Asia also conducted a survey in September this year which quoted 74 percent of respondents nationwide as saying that controlling inflation is their worry. The sentiment, which showed an increase of 11 percentage points from the previous quarter, was observed in every geographical area and socioeconomic class.

Other urgent national concerns unearthed by the Pulse Asia survey are: increasing the pay of workers (49 percent); creating more jobs (27 percent); reducing poverty (25 percent); fighting graft and corruption in government (22 percent); addressing the problem of involuntary hunger (14 percent); and providing assistance to farmers (13 percent).

It is clear that people are worried about not being able to afford food to sustain them and their families, notwithstanding the pronouncements and initiatives of our government leaders.

Our economic profile provides a basis for some introspection. For the second quarter of

## COMMENTARY DINDO MANHIT



IT IS CLEAR THAT PEOPLE ARE  
WORRIED ABOUT NOT BEING  
ABLE TO AFFORD FOOD TO  
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THE PRONOUNCEMENTS  
AND INITIATIVES OF OUR  
GOVERNMENT LEADERS

2023, gross domestic product rose by 4.3 percent, a slower pace that brings the average for the first half of the year at 5.3 percent. All sectors grew, albeit at different paces: agriculture, forestry, and fishing rose by 0.2 percent, industry by 2.1 percent, and services by 6 percent.

The services sector has, for many years, driven the growth of the economy but has also exposed its weaknesses in the event of disruptions. This was very clearly demonstrated three years ago at the height of COVID-19-driven lockdowns. As people were forced to stay indoors for fear of contracting the virus or violating mobility restrictions, the economy ground to a halt. The services sector was unable to contribute its share during this period, resulting in economic contraction of as much as 16.5

percent in the second quarter and 9.6 percent for the full year 2020. Personal consumption, which drove the economy from the demand side, likewise took a beating.

These numbers were the worst for the Philippines since World War II.

This pandemic experience gives us a peek into possibilities. What could happen if the economy were less dependent on services and more on agriculture, forestry, and fishing, as well as industry? And what if our growth were fueled by something aside from personal consumption, which also makes the economy susceptible to external developments and other disruptions that are out of our control?

Another component for growth is investments, with long-term and multiplier effects like increased productivity, higher consumption, more jobs and livelihood opportunities, a stronger, more vibrant economy—and, yes, food security for the people.

This is our basis for promoting investments in the manufacturing sector, specifically for the domestic market, in the agro-industrial sphere. This initiative will contribute to increasing the country’s productivity and provide the growing domestic market with more affordable goods and essential commodities like food. This also strengthens our position in the global supply chain. We have seen the negative effects of heavily relying on a single country for manufacturing activities.

Stratbase ADR Institute will have a business roundtable discussion called “Cultivating Investments in the Philippine Agro-Industrial Manufacturing for Food Security” on Oct. 16 at the Pin Wei Room, Seda Vertis North, Quezon City, to expound on this. I look forward to hearing how stakeholders can work together toward investment-led growth, cultivate an environment that is conducive for the economy to grow sustainably, and ensure that no Filipino ever goes food-poor.

Dindo Manhit is founder and CEO of the Stratbase Group.





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## CSAP defers price increase

SARDINE manufacturers may have to wait until February to seek for a price increase.

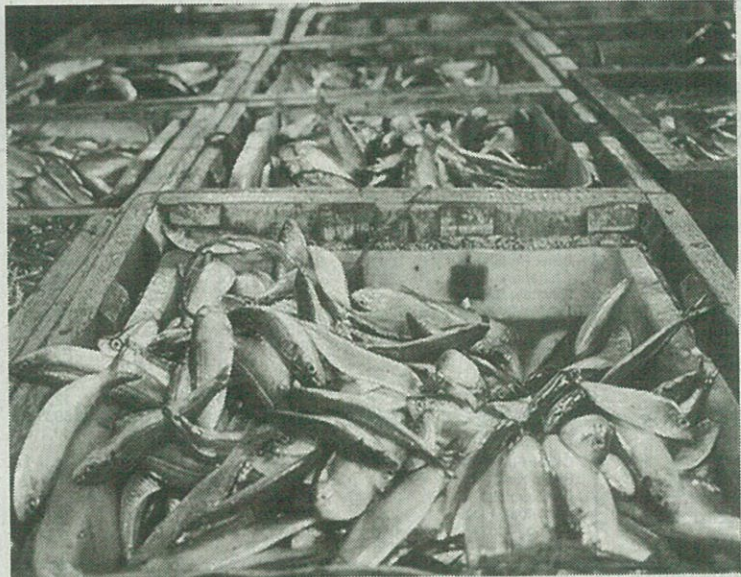
The Canned Sardines Association of the Philippines (CSAP) said it will wait until the closed fishing season is over to file a new petition for a price increase.

The closed fishing season imposed annually between November 15 to February 15 of the following years prohibits catching of sardines, herrings and mackerel.

Meanwhile, CSAP members will stick to the prevailing prices.

CSAP in January asked for a P3-increase in the price of sardines to cover the increase in fuel costs for 2022. The petition was not granted.

CSAP said it has asked the Department of Trade and Industry to help the canners solve their rising costs such as fuel which is used to run their fishing boats and aggravated by weakening of the peso that increases



The closed fishing season implemented annually between November and February of the following year bans fishing of sardines. (File Photo)

their import costs for tin and tomato paste.

The group said most canners have either closed or cut down

their operations as a result of rising costs even ahead of the three-month closed fishing season.

- Irma Isip





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## PPI for agriculture slows in Q2

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

**P**RICES of agricultural products procured directly from farmers and fisherfolk went down in the second quarter, the government reported on Wednesday.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that the producer price index (PPI) for agriculture slowed down to 12.0 percent in April to June, lower than the 24.7 percent recorded in the first three months of 2023.

Likewise, the second quarter's rate was lower than the 15.7 percent posted in the same period of 2022.

Year to date, the country's average growth rate of PPI for agriculture was registered at 18 percent.

"Among the 16 regions in Areas Outside the National Capital Region (AONCR), the highest annual drop in the PPI for agriculture was recorded in the Bicol Region at 6.8 percent," the PSA said on Wednesday.

The highest annual increase was registered in Western Visayas (Region 6) at 27.8 percent.

The PPI for crops went down to 18.8 percent from the increase of 32.4 percent in the previous quarter.

Slower annual increments were observed in commodity groups such as fruit and vegetables, recording a double-digit decline of 24.3 percent from an annual increase of 1.0 percent in the previous quarter.

Beans and legumes also decreased at 6.5 percent from 23.6 percent; condiments at 91.8 percent from 102.8 percent; leafy vegetables at 11.1 percent from 22.7 percent; fruits at 4.2 percent from 7.0 percent; and commercial crops at 29.8 percent from 55.2 percent.

On the other hand, annual growth rates were posted in cereals at 8.1 percent from 7.3 percent, and root crops at 20.8 percent from 12.9 percent.

Ilocos Region (Region 1) registered the highest annual decline in the PPI for crops at 4.0 percent in the second quarter.

This was followed by Zamboanga Peninsula (Region 9) at 2.6 percent and Davao Region (Region 11) at 1.3 percent.

The highest annual increases in the PPI for crops, meanwhile, were posted in Central Visayas (Region 7) at 35.6 percent; Western Visayas at 34.7 percent; and Northern Mindanao (Region 10) at 24.6 percent.

The PPI for livestock and poultry also slowed down to 5.1 percent from a 0.4-percent increase in the previous quarter.

"The annual drop observed in the PPI for livestock and poultry during the quarter was due to the year-on-year decrease in the PPI for livestock at 7.2 percent and poultry at 1.3 percent relative to their annual rates of 0.2 percent and 0.9 percent in the previous quarter, respectively," the PSA said.

Bicol Region (Region 5) recorded the highest annual drop of 22.9 percent during the quarter of 2023, followed by Cagayan Valley (Region 2) at 22.2 percent and Mimaropa (Region 4B) at 18.4 percent.

Meanwhile, Soccskargen (Region 12) and Zamboanga Peninsula (Region 9) registered the highest annual increments at 19.9 percent and 11.8 percent, respectively.

The fisheries sector also recorded an annual decline of 2.0 percent from the 14.4-percent increase recorded in the first quarter.

"The fastest year-on-year decline was posted in the PPI for inland municipal fisheries at 28.3 percent from 15.8 percent," said the PSA.

Commercial fisheries posted a de-

cline of 1.6 percent during the period from the last quarter's 19.9 percent. Marine municipal fisheries also went down at 1.1 percent from 9.3 percent.

Aquaculture posted the highest decline at 1.9 percent during the quarter from the previous three months' 21.1 percent.

The largest annual declines in the PPI for fisheries during the second quarter of 2023 were observed in Central Visayas at 12.9 percent; Bicol Region at 12.3 percent; and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao at 10.1 percent.

Cagayan Valley (Region 2), meanwhile, logged the highest increase at 14.9 percent, followed by the Cordillera Administrative Region at 10.0 percent and Calabarzon (Region 4A) at 5.1 percent.



## FEATURE

# 'Chocolate princess' recalls challenges, seeks more success



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ABOUT a year ago, Dalareich Polot was in California to receive the Goldman Sachs Global Women Leader Award, the first Filipina to win the recognition.

Polot, known as the "Chocolate Queen of Bohol," said the award was the highest recognition she got in her life and was timely as she was deep into helping communities in Bohol devastated by Super Typhoon "Odette."

"I got several awards over the past 10 years, but the Goldman Sachs Global Women Leader Award and attending the Fortune Most Powerful Women Summit in California was a very emotional moment I had after all the challenges we experienced during Super Typhoon 'Odette' in my province," she added.

Fast forward to today, Polot continues to involve three communities in various districts in her province comprising more than 100 farmers in supplying her with raw materials for Dalareich Chocolate House located in Tagbilaran.

"We funded the training, fertilization and technical assistance for the farmers. We are also doing cacao inventory with the help of the PLDT-Smart Foundation and Huawei (Philippines). We put QR codes on the old cacao trees left after the typhoon to have the accurate number of cacao trees in the province. We hope we can do it in all municipalities in Bohol," she said.

Also, the Philseed Foundation, founded by her and friends,



■ Dalareich Polot (right) during the awarding of the Goldman Sachs Global Women Leader Award in California in October 2022. Also in photo are (from left) Hend Osama of Egypt, also an awardee and project manager of Almentor; Ruth Umoh, Leadership editor of Fortune and moderator; and Asahi Pompey, global head of Corporate Engagement and president of Goldman Sachs Foundation. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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started a cacao project in Zamboanga Sibugay to support farmers of the province. Polot hopes to undertake similar initiatives in different parts of Zamboanga and other provinces.

Not surprisingly, she used her cash prize from her Goldman Sachs award to assist farming communities in Bohol. Polot was also supported by corporate foundations who believed in her work for farming communities.

"I would say I'm so happy with the progress I saw since last year in our farming communities. I feel more positivity in terms of the

quantity and cacao I get from the cacao farming communities here in Bohol," she added.

On the business side of things, Polot's Dalareich Chocolate House continues to gradually expand its market reach, including for exports. The business has three main product lines: unsweetened chocolate (tableya), artisan chocolate bars (Ginto Chocolates), and chocolate-coated fruits like mangoes, pineapples and cacao nibs coated with chocolate.

The Dalareich Unsweetened Chocolate, the tableya product, is exported to Sweden and Australia.

Polot said they hope to export their tableya to the Middle East soon.

The tableya product received an international award in 2019 at the Academy of Chocolate Awards in London.

## Humble beginnings

Polot still fondly remembers her elementary days delivering the tableya her mother made from home. Her mother learned how to make tableya from Polot's grandmother.

"Every time I went out to school, my mom waited for me at the school gate and asked me to

deliver 10 packs of tableya to a supermarket. Every Saturday, I also did collections in all the deliveries," she said.

That was what they did until Polot was in college. She said that eventually, her mother branded the tableya she made as "Dalareich."

She said her mother served as her inspiration because her mother worked hard to send her and her siblings to school.

"When my ate (older sister) and I went to college already, and the small tableya business and the simple work of my dad

couldn't sustain us, my mother decided to work as a contractual in the city. My mother worked as a street sweeper. She used to wake up early in the morning at 3 a.m. to go to work and clean the streets in Tagbilaran City, go home at 8 a.m., roast cacao, and go back to work at 1 to 5 p.m. And at night, she was molding tableya. That was her routine for six years," she added.

Sustaining the family's tradition in tableya making, Polot founded Dalareich Chocolate House, and never forgetting her humble roots, she continues to assist communi-

ties of farmers in Bohol, who are her raw material suppliers. Also, her social outreach programs have gone beyond Bohol.

Polot also continues to aim high and is seeking to increase the export of their chocolate products.

"We are aiming to increase the export market, and we are hoping to open a chocolate and cacao village near the Chocolate Hills [so that] every tourist in Bohol can appreciate the craft of Bohol chocolate and cacao and experience being a cacao farmer on the island of the Chocolate Hills," she said.

**CONRAD M. CARIÑO**





## TeaM Energy empowers abaca farmers in Capiz with hybrid solar-powered machine



**A** GROUP of small scale abaca farmers with 70 members in Jamindan, Capiz are now able to produce higher quality abaca fibers that will help increase their income after they received a state-of-the-art hybrid-solar-powered abaca spindle machine donated by TeaM Energy.

In partnership with the Department of Energy (DOE) Visayas Field Office, the local government of Jamindan, Capiz Electric Cooperative, Inc. (CAPELCO), and the Philippine Fiber Industry Development Authority (PFIDA), TeaM Energy Foundation Inc. (TEFI, the social development arm of TeaM Energy), funded the purchase of the abaca spindle machine that was turned over to the Pasol-o Small Coconut Farmers Association (PASCFA).

"This hybrid solar powered system donated by TeaM Energy uses the abundant sunlight in the community during daytime to drive the spindle machine. Unutilized energy or excess solar power when not in use will be credited to the account of the community association which serves as the net metering component of the project. This reduces the reliance

on conventional energy sources and benefits both the environment and the local economy," explains Deanna B. Maningding, Program Manager of TEFI.

Traditionally, farmers in Barangay Pasol-o where PASCFA is based have employed manual methods to process abaca fibers, laboriously pulling the fibers by hand. This manual approach typically results in thicker abaca strips, which fetch a lower market price, averaging around 50 pesos per kilo. With TeaM Energy's donation of the hybrid solar-powered abaca spindle machine, farmers will now have access to advanced technology that yields more refined abaca strips, which command a significantly higher price of approximately 90 pesos per kilo. These abaca strips are mainly used as raw material for barongs and other local garments.

The hybrid solar-powered spindle machine not only enhances the quality of the abaca fiber; it also increases the efficiency and productivity of the farmers.

TeaM Energy also organized training sessions for members of PASCFA on the operation and maintenance of the abaca spindle machine and the solar power system. Through these training programs, the farmers will be able to maximize the benefits of the new equipment while ensuring its long-term sustainability.

"TEFI's donation of the abaca spindle machine represents a significant step forward in enhancing the livelihood of farmers in Jamindan, Capiz," says Maria Teresa C. Lopez, Vice President of TEFI. "By modernizing abaca fiber production and harnessing the power of renewable energy, this initiative elevates the economic prospects of the community," she adds.

TeaM Energy Foundation is the social development arm of TeaM Energy, which operates two coal-fired power plants: the 1,200 MW Sual Power Station in Pangasinan, and the 735 MW Pagbilao Power Station in Quezon Province. It also has a 50% stake in the 420 MW Pagbilao Unit 3 Power Project in Quezon.





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## Soybeans, wheat steady

CANBERRA- Chicago soybean futures held steady on Wednesday after data showed a rise in US export inspections and a slight deterioration in the condition of US crops, although gains were capped by a record harvest in top exporter Brazil.

Wheat and corn futures were little changed.

Soybean traders are also watching energy markets, with higher oil prices boosting ethanol made from plants, including soy, and supply from Brazil, said Ole Houe at brokerage IKON Commodities.

Crude rose sharply after vio-

lence flared between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas, but has since stabilized.

"Near term, there's probably a little more downside for soy, but longer term, it's quite likely to find support when we start to question production estimates in South America," Houe said.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was flat at \$12.71 a bushel after rising 0.6 percent in the previous session.

Corn was unchanged at \$4.85-1/2 a bushel and wheat also flat at \$5.58-1/4 a bushel. - Reuters





## Rice market braces for more stress as El Niño starts to bite

**E**L NIÑO has started to cause some concerns in Asia, and it's a strained rice market that's facing the first test from the weather phenomenon.

The market has already been upended by export restrictions from top shipper India and drier weather from El Niño threatens to cause more chaos. Any loss of production risks tightening global supply, and could prompt a renewed rally in prices which have cooled recently from the highest in almost 15 years.

Across Asia, nations are warning of El Niño. Major importer Indonesia has flagged a marginal hit to output, while Vietnam has told farmers to plant their next crop earlier than usual to avoid water shortages. The Philippines is also giving aid to growers to cope with the weather as rice inflation soars.

The weather worries rippling across the rice market are the first signs of real concerns about the im-

pact from El Niño. The cyclical climatic phenomenon can parch crops, strain power grids, impact fishing and cut off access to mines due to flooding across regions in Asia and Africa to South America.

"Many crops, especially those highly dependent on water supply, will be badly affected by El Niño," said Muhamad Shakirin Mispan, an associate professor at Universiti Malaya's Institute of Biological Sciences. Lower output from key producers will "significantly impact global rice supply, affecting not only Southeast Asia but also reverberating across the world," he added.

The rice market has seen weeks of turmoil after India ramped up restrictions on its shipments in

late July. The move has worried governments from Asia to Africa, led to a flurry of supply deals and diplomacy, prompted warnings about hoarding, and fueled inflation in the Philippines and Indonesia.

El Niño typically brings hotter and drier conditions across parts of Asia, and can lead to drought and wildfires. Indonesia plans to import more of the grain this year and next, and says its 2023 output may drop by 1.2 million tons. Unhusked rice production was expected at 54.5 million tons, slightly lower than 2022.

Vietnam, the third-biggest rice exporter, asked growers in a section of the Mekong Delta that accounts for 26% of the region's winter-spring crop to start planting from early this month, rather than November. The directive was given to avoid water shortages at the end of the harvest, in part due to El Niño.

El Niño is a naturally occurring phenomenon but it's coinciding with more extreme and hotter weather due to the impact of increasing greenhouse gas emissions on the climate. The global average temperature in September broke the heat record after the warmest Northern Hemisphere summer ever.

Australia expects El Niño to persist until at least the end of February, and ranchers are expected to prepare for the drier conditions by ramping up cow sales for slaughter. That's weighed on the Eastern Young Cattle Indicator, a benchmark price, which recently tumbled to the lowest level in nine years.

Some crops do benefit from El Niño, such as almonds and avocados in California that get higher rains, but many food staples from rice, cocoa, sugar, wheat and palm oil tend to face more challenging growing conditions. *Bloomberg News*