

“DA spearheads country’s World Food Day Celebration”
(October 16, 2023)

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DA spearheads country's World Food Day Celebration

and different fish species.

In place of soil, hydroponics makes use of water, and a variety of media including coco coir and peat. It allows for faster growth and higher yields than traditional soil-based growing systems, and makes use of lesser water resource.

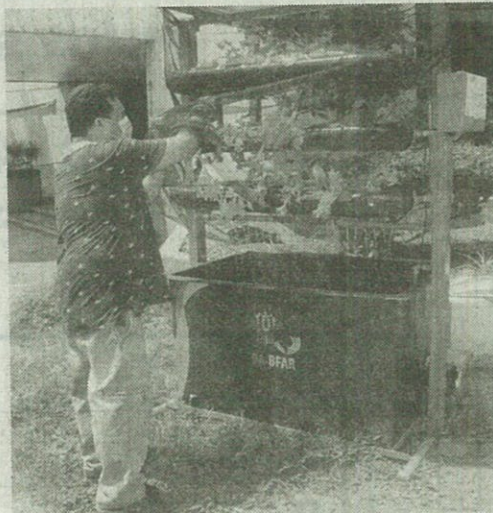
Aquaponics, on the other hand, is growing plants and fishes symbiotically. Through this system, fish waste is used as fertilizer and nutrient source of the plants grown on the grow bed, while the plants filter and clean the water for the fishes in the tank.

"Bukod po sa pagbababoy, napag-isipan po naming magtayo ng panibagong hanapbuhay—ito nga po ang hydroponics. Gusto ko kasing mapatunayan at maipakita sa lahat na kahit may maliit na space lang tayo sa bakuran, kaya po nating magtanim at magka-additional income."

— Virginia Gonzales Ronquillo
AJR Farm - Mayao Castillo, Lucena City

"Aquaponics offers opportunity for every Filipino household to produce safe, clean, and accessible food. It also conserves water, as it uses 85% to 90% less water than traditional farming."

— Dr. Joseph Christopher Rayos
DA-NFRDI



3. Fish culture/capture

Fishing has been one of the main sources of livelihood for many Filipinos.

With the vast seas and oceans, fisherfolk have abundant source of fishes to catch. Aside from these, capture fishery is intended for catching prawns, lobsters, crabs, sea cucumbers and other aquatic resources.

On the other hand, aquaculture or farming in water involves breeding, raising, and harvesting fish, shellfish, and aquatic plants in a controlled habitat. The cultivation of aquatic organism under this system is intended for human consumption.

"All bodies of water are connected, so I hope we can work together for a clean and abundant ocean. I am optimistic that by working together, we can ensure that our oceans and coastal regions continue to be a source of life, inspiration, and prosperity for all."

The livelihood of millions of our countrymen depends on our ocean. So it's fair to say that when the ocean is clean, fishing is plentiful, and livelihoods are stable."

Atty. Demosthenes Escoto,
Director, DA-BFAR

4. Fertigation and Drip Irrigation

Fertigation is the practice of applying fertilizer solutions with irrigation water, typically through a sprinkler or a drip system.

This technology, which has enabled food producers to apply precise amount of nutrients while conserving water, is fast becoming popular among Filipino farmers.

Using the drip irrigation system, farmers are able to inject fertilizers to the crops' root zone, efficiently distributing nutrients. As such, the right amount of plant nutrients are provided at the most appropriate time.

"Sa drip irrigation, napapabilis po 'yong pagtatrabaho, napapataas ang ani at kalidad ng produkto at harvest. Sigurado po na sa paggamit ng drip irrigation, masagana ang ani at kapag masagana ang ani sigurado na tataas ang kita."

— Mr. Ricky Naguiat
Morong, Bataan



5. El Nino mitigating measures/ water saving initiatives

With the increase in water surface temperature of the eastern tropical and central tropical Pacific, the Philippines will experience weather fluctuations, resulting in drought in some areas.

To mitigate the impact of the dry spell, adaptation and mitigation efforts are being carried out, including putting in place technologies that will aid in the management of water supply.

Under the government's plan to mitigate the effects of prolonged drought, rainwater harvesting (RWH) is strongly encouraged. It is the collection and storage of rain, rather than allowing it to run off. The collected water, is redirected to a tank, pit or reservoir, and may be used in the future, when water is scarce because of dry spell.

Water harvested through this system may be used to irrigate food production areas and provide plants moisture. It may also be used for livestock and filling ponds and other water features for fish culture.



"Itong rainwater harvesting ay isa sa mga adaptation measures natin or mitigation measures ng DA para makatulong tayo mag-minimize ng impact ng climate change. Iyong ating water impounding, pagka talagang tulad ngayon maulan, nagse-serve, ito na ma-prevent ang flooding. Pero pag drought naman, El Niño time, ang gamit naman ng ating water harvesting ay ma-augment o madagdagan ang kakulangan ng tubig ulan. Kasi pag El Niño, bumababa talaga ang quantity ng ulan. So iyong mga naipon nating tubig sa mga reservoir ay puwedeng gamitin ng farmers para sa kanilang irrigation requirements."


— Engr. Ernesto Brampio
DA-BSWM

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Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS




World Food Day
#WorldFoodDay
#FeedTheWorld
#NoWorldFoodDay

16 October 2023

World Food Day

**WATER IS LIFE
IS FOOD**

**LEAVE
NO ONE
BEHIND**

Water is essential to life

The annual celebration of the WORLD FOOD DAY (WFD) promotes awareness of hunger and action for the future of food, people, and the planet.

This year's theme - 'Water is Life, Water is Food. Leave No One Behind' highlights the importance of water in our lives.

Hence, a global call for the efficient use of water is underscored. Everyone is encouraged to wisely use and reuse this natural resource to prevent wastage and scarcity.

In the Philippines, the Department of Agriculture leads the celebration of WFD, and highlights the importance of water in agriculture and fishery across the nation.

In food production and processing of by-products, water is a basic ingredient. It plays a significant role in the sustainable supply of safe and quality crops, animals and fishery products, and other food items.

To attain the vision of Masaganang Agrikultura, Maunlad na Ekonomiya, the DA remains a constant partner of the farmers and fishers in the development of innovations and implementation of programs towards food security for all.

Water is Essential to Agriculture

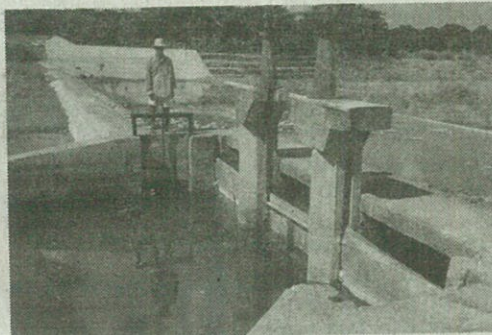
1. Irrigation

As an agricultural country, irrigation is considered very important in the Philippines.

With a third of the total population dependent on agriculture, more than nine million agricultural workers rely on a systematic water system in their farm activities.

Water as irrigation allows sustainable crop production in arid areas, as it provides soil moisture during dry season. This enables the farmers to be productive and profitable.

There are three types of irrigation in the country, the National Irrigation System, the Communal



Irrigation System, and the Private Irrigation System, which are instrumental in the expansion of production areas, and reducing the impacts of the changing climate.

"Ang No. 1 po sa 8-Point Socioeconomic Agenda ng ating Pangulo ay ang food security. Alam po natin na ang No. 1 na kailangan ng food security ay irrigation infrastructures. Kapag may irrigation infrastructure, napapababa natin ang inflation dahil tumataas ang ating production, poverty incidence, at higit sa lahat, matutugunan po natin ang paparating na El Niño."

— Engr. Eddie Guillen
Acting Administrator, DA-NIA

2. Aquaponics/Hydroponics

Aside from providing nutrients and minerals for growth, soil secures the position and foothold of a plant. It is important in the production of vegetables and many other crops, being one of the main sources of the elements needed for it to flourish and thrive well.

However, with the emergence of new farming technologies, plants can now be nurtured sans soil.

Hydroponics is the technique of growing plants using a water-based nutrient solution, while aquaponics is the integrated production of crops

A. SEC. PBBM QUOTED

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Editorial: New hope for coconut farmers

REMATE

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PILIPINO STAR NGAYON

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P40B Realigned budget for NIA to boost rice output

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SRA batting for P2-Billion budget to finance sugar industry dev’t

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REMATE

Suplay ng baboy, itlog sapat

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ASF cases expand to 13 Isabela towns

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PSA report: Growth rate of PPI for agri slows in Q2
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PH, Canada ink pact against illegal fishing

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Soy, corn slip

BUSINESS WORLD
With domestic crop damaged by rain, China searches far and wide for wheat

BUSINESS MIRROR
Food is hot campaign issue in elections from Argentina to Poland
FAO: Disaster events destroyed \$3.8-Trillion crops, livestock



EDITORIAL

New hope for coconut farmers

Last June, President Marcos ordered the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) to improve the lot of coconut farmers, the sector that has long languished at the bottom of the income pyramid. Gracing the 50th anniversary of the PCA, the President said he wanted the Philippines to be the biggest exporter of coconut products. "There is no reason why the Philippines should not be the biggest producer of export in terms of coconut products."

The problem is that every administration in the past has promised to revive the coconut industry and alleviate the plight of farmers. Yet until today, coconut farmers and families dependent on the industry remain among the poorest of the poor, notwithstanding the tens of billions of pesos earmarked for the industry that remain idle in government coffers. Their plight is rooted in the controversial coconut levy funds collected from farmers by the government under the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos from 1971 to 1982. After the Marcoses were booted out of Malacañang in 1986, lawsuits filed by coconut farmers showed that cronies of the Marcos administration had diverted the funds to finance their own business interests. In 2012, the Supreme Court ruled that the coconut levy fund belonged to the government for the benefit of coconut farmers. The Philippines used to be the world's biggest exporter of coconut products, until the lack of modernization resulted in stagnant production, eventually pushing the country to the third spot after Indonesia and India.

However, farmers have reason to be more hopeful in the current push to revive the coconut industry. Unlike in the past, there is now a more detailed plan and funding is readily available. The Department of Finance (DOF), citing a Commission on Audit report, pegged the value of coconut levy assets at P111.3 billion. Early this month, the President got the ball rolling by ordering the PCA to start rehabilitating the coconut industry with the planting of 100 million coconut trees by the end of his administration's term in 2028. Last week, a four-member House panel also listed amendments to the 2024 budget bill, which included the allocation of P2 billion to PCA for the massive replanting and planting of coconut seedlings.

The President has also directed the PCA to invest in new technologies and initiatives to guarantee the resilience of the coconut industry even beyond his term. He cited the need to intensify the implementation of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP) "to accelerate the modernization of the coconut industry and to improve the lives of our coconut farmers and their families." The CFIDP is the detailed road map for the revival of the coconut sector crafted in the final year of the Duterte administration. On June 2 last year, former president Rodrigo Duterte signed Executive Order No. 172, or the CFIDP, to serve as the basis for using the coconut levy fund through various programs and projects that will rehabilitate and modernize the industry and benefit 2.5 million small farmers nationwide. The CFIDP groups the action plans into social protection; coconut farmers organization and development; integrated coconut processing and downstream products; innovative research projects; support services, among others.

As then agriculture secretary William Dar noted, EO 172 "is such a formidable law that will give new life and new hope to coconut farmers in this country." The blueprint, at least on paper, can truly raise expectations among farmers. But as with any other plan, the crux is in its implementation. And the records so far look discouraging. A COA report released last September showed that only 8.78 percent of the P755-million fund for the CFIDP and the Coconut Hybridization Project was used in 2022. The PCA blamed the slow pace of implementation partly on their adjustments under the new administration, which had to reconstitute the PCA board. As such, it said projects were stalled until the new board was in place, which first met on Oct. 5, 2022. This also led to missed targets, with only 3,540 hectares of the 10,676 hectares allotted for precision farming fertilization covered, 495,472 palms fertilized out of a target of 1.53 million, and 202 of the target 2,517 personnel trained.

With the snags cited by PCA finally resolved, it must now buckle down to work double time and implement the directives of the President. By the end of the current administration's term, it is hoped that Mr. Marcos will have fulfilled his desire "to uplift [the] lives of coconut farmers and empower them to improve their conditions, break free from the chains of poverty, and dream bigger for themselves and for their loved ones."

Much of the burden in reviving the sector is indeed on the Chief Executive's shoulders. As fate would have it, the Marcos family, through the President, has been given a second chance so it can correct the injustices against the poor coconut farmers.

REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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Magsasaka sa Pinas, pabata nang pabata - DA

BUMABA ang 'average age' ng mga Filipinong magsasaka sa mas nakababatang henerasyon na mas pinili na sumali sa sektor ng agrikultura.

Sinabi ni Department of Agriculture official Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa ang dating 'average age' ng mga magsasaka sa bansa ay 57 taong gulang kung saan ay bumaba ito sa 49 hanggang 50 taong gulang, base sa kanilang registry system.

"Bumababa, ibig sabihin maraming pumapasok na mas bata kaysa iyong nauna," ayon kay de Mesa. Aniya pa, hindi naman bumababa ang bilang ng mga magsasaka at livestock growers.

"Actually, hindi bumababa iyong number of farmers, iyong registry system natin we have 12 million na magsasaka, iba-iba ito from rice, corn, coconut kasama na iyong fishers dito, kasama na rin dito iyong livestock growers," ang sinabi ni de Mesa.

Aniya, maaaring iturong dahilan dito ay iyong mga indibiduwal na maagang nagretiro at nagdesisyon na lamang ang kanilang pagmamahal sa pagsasaka.

"Actually marami rin—lalo na iyong mga nasa gobyerno nasa private nakilala ko after nilang magsilbi ay babalik sila sa love for farming," anito.

Samantala, aktibong isinusulong naman ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., sa 'younger generations' lalo na sa mga kabataan na tumulong na pataasin ang pagiging produktibo ng agriculture sector.

Kabilang naman sa mga programa ng DA na kamakailan lamang na inilunsad ay ang Young Farmers Challenge, nag-aalok ng financial grant assistance para sa mga kabataan na nais na maugnay sa bagong agri-fishery enterprises.

Patuloy rin na nag-aalok ang departamento ng scholarship para sa agriculture-related courses.

KRIS JOSE

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DA: Magsasaka sa Pinas, pabata nang pabata

Pabata na nang pabata ang mga magsasaka sa bansa na indikasyon ng pagmamahal sa pag-sasaka.

Ayon kay Agriculture Assistant Secretary Amel de Mesa, sa dating 57 anyos, bumaba sa 'average age' na 50 hanggang 40 ang mga Filipinong pinili na sumali sa sektor ng agrikultura.

"Bumababa, ibig sabihin maraming pumapasok na mas bata kasya iyong nauna," ani De Mesa.

Nabatid kay De Mesa na hindi bumababa ang bilang ng mga magsasaka na kinabibilangan ng rice, corn, coconut at livestock growers na nasa 12 milyon.

Sa katunayan, maraming retired government employees ang pumapasok sa farming.

Samantala, isinusulong naman ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., sa 'younger generations' lalo na sa mga kabataan na tumulong na pataasin ang pagiging produktibo ng agriculture sector.

Kabilang naman sa mga programa ng DA na kamakailan lamang na inilunsad ay ang Young Farmers Challenge (YFC), nag-aalok ng financial grant assistance para sa mga kabataan na nais na maugnay sa bagong agri-fishery enterprises.

Patuloy din na nag-aalok ang departamento ng scholarship para sa agriculture-related courses. (Doris Franche-Borja)



Retail price of imported rice should go down – group

The retail price of imported rice should go down amid the downward trend in the world market as its cost remains high at P60 per

kilo in Philippine markets, farmers' group Samahang Industriyang Agrikultura chairman Rosendo So said yesterday.

In a radio interview, So noted that from \$680 per metric ton in September, the buying price of imported rice in Thailand and

Vietnam went down to \$580 per MT in October 2023 or a decline of \$100 per metric ton.

"With this, from more than P60 (per kilo), the retail price of imported rice, particularly the special and premium rice should go down to P50 plus (per kilo)," So said.

He added that the bulk of the imported grains come from Vietnam and Thailand.

Data from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) showed that as of Oct. 5, at least 2.4 million metric tons of rice had been imported from Vietnam while 119,456 metric tons came from Thailand.

"We expect next month, the harvest will start in Vietnam and December for Thailand, so we expect that the buying price of imported rice will further go down," So added.

Based on monitoring of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the retail price of imported special rice ranged between P53 and P60 per kilo; imported premium rice, between P52 and P58 per kilo; imported well-milled rice, between P45 and P48 per kilo and imported regular rice, P43 per kilo.

"The price ceiling imposed last time helped in pressuring Vietnam and Thailand to bring down their prices," So said, referring to Executive Order No. 39 issued by President Marcos imposing a price cap of P41 and P45 per kilo on regular and well-milled rice, respectively.

Marcos lifted EO 39 on Oct. 4, a month after it was implemented on Sept. 5.

"The decrease in the buying price of rice from Vietnam and Thailand was big as they knew that we will not buy from them if their price is high," So said.

For DA Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa, the country will have enough supply of rice until the first quarter of 2024 amid the expected bountiful harvest.

"While we expect additional imports, our national stock inventory is very comfortable. Normally, we are eyeing between 60 and 90 days, but with our inventory plus imports going into the first quarter of next year, we will have a stable supply of rice in the whole country," De Mesa said in a forum over the weekend.

He added that the rice inventory this month would reach 77 days and 94 days in November with the peak harvest season.

"We have no additional imports for the month of September as for the third quarter, the total rice imports reached 2.4 million metric tons. This is 600,000 metric tons lower than three million metric tons of the same period last year," De Mesa said.

Based on DA monitoring, the retail price of local regular milled rice ranged between P41 and P45; regular 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.

– Bella Cariaso



SRA seeks approval of P2 B funding from SIDA

By DANESSA RIVERA

The **Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA)** hopes to get an early approval for a P2-billion funding from the Sugar Industry Development Act (SIDA) for next year to help modernize the sugar industry and make it globally competitive.

The early approval of the fund would allow the agency to have ample time to spend and allocate the funding to proper projects for the whole year, SRA administrator Pablo Luis Azcona said in a briefing here in Victorias City, Negros Occidental over the weekend.

"Before, the budget would be approved usually in August or September. It is difficult to spend

it when you get approval in August or September and you only have until December," he said.

"This year, we were able to have it approved by March, so we have a lot more time to do projects and then what we are trying to do now is before the year ends, try to seek approval already for 2024," Azcona said.

But while the higher SIDA fund was approved at an earlier time, only half of what was pushed was approved.

"This year, we tried to push for P2 billion and we lined up all projects based on P2 billion and only P1 billion was approved," the SRA chief said.

The SIDA budget has been cut over the years starting from P2 billion in 2016, P1.5 billion in 2017, P1 billion in 2018 and P500 million annu-

ally until 2022 due to its low usage.

The sugar industry has been calling on the government to revisit the SIDA as farmers found compliance in accessing programs quite challenging.

Moreover, the fund was also slashed due to delays in the procurement of equipment.

"The snag that hit us when SIDA was initially made...was because we had a big delay in the equipment side. We had a P500-million equipment purchase that was delayed by three years," Azcona said.

To avoid the same scenario, the SRA decided to take over the bidding procedures to ensure the timely procurement of equipment.

"Now, all the biddings are done by the SRA itself, so we are doing everything," the SRA chief said, noting it will be a big boost to farmers.

The SRA is also focusing on the improvement of soil laboratories to produce better yields.

"Our mandate is to improve pro-

duction so we feel that we need to rejuvenate the soil in order to do that. And we need to approach this a lot more scientifically, we have been very wasteful in practice with fertilization and everything," Azcona said.

"I think we have to slowly go more accurately and try to save every peso that we can so that the farmers will learn how to start being globally competitive," he said.

Currently, 50 percent of the SIDA funds is allocated for farm-to-market roads (FMR). For the other half of the fund, 30 percent is for research and mechanization, 30 percent for socialized credit, 30 percent for block farms development, and the remaining 10 percent for scholarships.

"Currently, the block farm budget is fully utilized. Our scholarships and FMR are also fully utilized. The only part that we hope we can fully utilize is the socialized credit," Azcona said.

If the P2-billion release of the SIDA fund is approved, this will allow the SRA to double spending for each component. "If we get P2 billion, everything will double up," the SRA chief said.

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Water board extends irrigation supply from Angat

MALOLOS – Irrigation allocation from Angat Dam for rice fields in Bulacan and Pampanga has been extended until Nov. 15 by the National Water Resources Board (NWRB).

The irrigation allocation from Angat Dam for rice fields in Central Luzon was supposed to be until Oct. 30 only.

Josephine Salazar, chief of the **National Irrigation Administration** for Central Luzon, requested the NWRB to extend the allocation from Angat to irrigate rice crops that were replanted in farms destroyed in a series of floods spawned by the southwest monsoon as well as Typhoons Egay and Falcon in July and August.

Francisco Clara, chief of the water control and coordinating unit of Bustos Dam, said the floods devastated 7,477.24 hectares of irrigated rice farms in Bulacan and parts of Pampanga.

The extension of the irrigation allocation will provide sufficient water to rice crops that were replanted, according to farmers' group leader Mel Domingo.

He said that floods and the replanting of the rice crops delayed the targeted harvest time from late October to early November. – **Ramon Efren Lazaro**

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CTALK CITO BELTRAN

Beating a dead horse, not 'stomach issues'

There are so many issues of concern for many Filipinos that we call "stomach issues" which affect our daily lives. We are all affected by food prices and inflation, and the lower you go in the economic level, the more unaffordable it is to feed your family. Directly connected to that is the problem of malnutrition among pregnant mothers, babies who ultimately become mentally and physically stunted children and non-learners and unemployable citizens.



We are all affected by the high price of fuel that limits our mobility and effectively reduces the Filipino's take-home pay. As a societal adjustment, millions of Filipinos have turned to motorcycles and bicycles in order to get to work or some destination. These riders go about with "one foot in the grave" because our road system is not designed or safe for two-wheeled vehicles.

The roadways are unsafe, law enforcement almost non-existent, many are unregistered or have expired registration and no proper insurance to cover theft or accidents, all because our legislators have not thoroughly addressed the decades-old problem.

Worst of all is that almost every week, we read or watch road rage being committed by active or expelled police officers, abuse and impunity of elected officials and self-styled government VIPs who violate multiple laws on the road, from blinkers, sirens and police escorts, or drivers attacking enforcers or each other.

And while there has been a public outcry against POGOs, we now learn from former senator Ping Lason about POGO police escorts, while three senators are pushing for the postponement or three-year delay of the ban on POGO in the Philippines. Add to that, the continuing escort services at the Bureau of Immigration that smuggle Filipinas to dubious jobs abroad.

Personally, I have been calling attention to the deplorable state of Philippine public hospitals while members of Congress and the Senate "robbed" the DOH of funding for capital expenditures for buildings, equipment and specialty centers we all need. If I remember correctly, Cong. Ralph Recto said P10 billion in total. As a result, many poor Filipinos just have to suffer in silence and die because they are poor!

But here is how Congress and the Senate kick all of us in the face: instead of focusing on the gut issues or problems very close to our stomachs, hearts and pockets, congressmen and senators have been glued to talking and recycling the already settled issue of confidential intelligence funds. Like a cruel *kutsero*,

they have been "whipping the dead horse" that they shot by declaring no more confidential intel funds to non-essential departments or agencies.

They spent countless hours and resources investigating a husband and wife of cruelty and abuse of workers, they travel across the country to investigate a cult and malinger on their investigation in aid of legislation, when such cases could have been and should have been handled by the Department of Justice, the NBI and the DILG! The Congress and the Senate malingered on these "issues" as if they were trying to squeeze blood out of a turnip. And they want to interpolate the proposed ban on POGO that even China wants shot down for the damage it does to its citizens remotely.

Before Congress gorged or made a fiesta out of humiliating Sara Duterte, the Speaker of the House Martin Romualdez pushed for the suspension of the excise tax on fuel, but nothing came out of it except his press release and lip service. Since then, prices have gone down a little on its own and no thanks to the Romualdez suggestion. Clearly, Romualdez was no match to the DOF secretary or to the many economists in government who have sacrificed Philippine agriculture to comply with trade agreements as well as loan conditions.

Now Romualdez is talking about the repatriation of Filipinos trapped in the Gaza Strip as if it was as simple as issuing a press release or statement as he has become fond of doing. If Romualdez really feels for the trapped Filipinos, he should go to Egypt and work out a border crossing if he can get to the Filipinos there, instead of constantly tight guarding PBBM in his travels abroad. PR or empty press statements create false hopes and cause injury to those in dire straits.

Equally disappointing are the so-called Makabayan block or "leftist" legislators who were gatekeepers against abuse, corruption and impunity. They too have become pit bulls that have not let go of the confidential intel funds issue while we count the dead Pinays in Israel and Gaza. Now we have a potential disaster involving an estimated 70 Filipinas married to Palestinians trapped in the war zone.

From the looks of it, "the leftists" or "progressives" are trying to capitalize on political and commercially sensitive topics such as the false claims of corruption at the LTFRB and spread the dirt all the way to DOTr and Secretary Jimmy Bautista, even after the so-called squealer recanted his false accusations that did not include Bautista. When word leaked out that businessman and fishing magnate Francis Tiu Laurel was being considered as **DA secretary**, another leftist group rose out to oppose him for being in the fishing sector.

But what caught my attention was how the oppositors casually hooked on the issue of "reclamation projects." Both the confidential intelligence funds and reclamation projects were both legal, approved by law, Congress and government. As far as I know, there is no new law that made them illegal. Once again, we have political sensitivity, popular opinion and ignorance making what is legal into illegal. If laws can be overcome by popular opinion, then the defect is in our lawmakers and the people who voted for them.





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World Food Day 2023: Dealing decisively with hunger, malnutrition

As the Philippines joins today the world-wide observance of World Food Day, two imperatives emerge. First, there is need to end involuntary hunger; and second, proper nutrition of newly born children must be assured.

In the latest Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey held mid-year, at least 10.4 percent of Filipino families experienced involuntary hunger at least once in the past three months, higher than the hunger prevalence rate in March 2023. This scenario evokes even greater urgency when taken in the context of rising inflation in food prices.

According to the latest Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data, food inflation rose to 8.9 per cent in August compared to 6.5 percent in July. Higher rice prices was the leading inflationary factor. The growth rate in the rice index increased to 7.5 percent in August 2023 compared to 2.1 in the previous month. Prices of vegetables, tubers, plantains, cooking bananas and pulses posted an inflation rate of 37.8 percent during the month from 28.5 percent in July 2023.

The government went into high gear to stabilize rice prices. President Marcos imposed price ceilings for a one-month period as an interim measure to minimize hoarding and overpricing. The price cap was lifted as soon as the Department of Agriculture ascertained that the rice harvest would provide sufficient buffer stocks. As a complementary measure, the government launched the food stamp program and distributed additional cash aid to beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program for the poorest families.

A Children's First 1,000 Days Coalition headed by former Senator Jose D. Lina, Jr. is actively addressing the serious malnutrition problem in the country.

As noted by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Philippines, 95 Filipino children die daily from malnutrition with 27 every 1,000 children not getting past their fifth birthday. Moreover, one third of all Filipino children are stunted or short in height for their ages; stunting by age two can be permanent, irreversible or can be fatal. The World Bank has pointed out that "stunting in the first 1,000 days is associated with poorer performance in school, both because malnutrition affects brain development and also because malnourished children are more likely to get sick and miss school." Among countries in East Asia and the Pacific Region, the Philippines posts the fifth highest number of stunted children.

Five years after Congress' enactment of the First 1,000 Days Law, or Republic Act 11148, in November 2018, much still needs to be done in terms of dealing decisively with the twin problems of hunger and malnutrition. The first 1,000 days covers the period from a child's conception to the second birthday. If a child is malnourished in the womb of an unhealthy mother, reversing this condition would be a herculean task.

This year's observance of World Food Day provides a good opportunity for creating heightened awareness on food issues, reducing food waste, supporting local farmers, and supporting advocacy for policy reform that will address priority hunger and malnutrition concerns.



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SRA: Efforts being made to secure SIDA funding

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) is seeking early approval of next year's funding for the Sugar Industry Development Act (SIDA) so it can start implementing projects for the industry.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona said during a briefing with reporters over the weekend that the budget for SIDA is approved in August or September.

With the annual SIDA funding required to be utilized until December, he said that "it is hard to spend it when you only get approval by then."

"This year, we were able to have it approved by March, so we have a lot more time to do projects, and then what we are trying to do now is, before the year ends, try to seek approval already for the 2024 [funding] so when the new year starts, we can already start moving," Azcona said.

Only P1 billion was approved for SIDA this year despite SRA's request for P2 billion. Azcona said that the budget for SIDA has been inconsistent for the past years as farmers were not able to comply with requirements for loans, ending up with funds not

utilized.

He also cited the delay in the purchase of P500 million worth of sugar equipment for three years as one of the reasons that caused lesser allocations for SIDA in the past years.

According to the SRA, 50 percent of SIDA's budget is allocated for the construction of farm-to-market roads (FMR). The remaining balance is for research and mechanization, socialized credit, block farm development, and scholarships.

"Currently, the block farm budget is fully utilized; our scholarships and FMR are also fully utilized. The only part that we hope we can fully utilize is the socialized credit," Azcona said.

He added that there are also actions being done to further develop soil laboratories in the country to increase sugar production.

"We have been very wasteful in practice with fertilization and everything. I think we have to slowly go more [scientifically] accurate and try to save every peso that we can so that the farmers will learn how to start being globally competitive," Azcona said.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



Rice now selling at P25/kilo in Bacolod, says PCO

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

RICE is now available at P25 per kilo in Bacolod City in Negros Occidental, the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said yesterday quoting a report from the National Irrigations Administration (NIA).

The PCO, in a statement, said the low-priced rice is being sold at the Bigasan Bayan in Bacolod City by members of the Federation of Irrigators Association of Central Negros-Bago River Irrigation System (FIACN-BRIS).

The FIACN-BRIS said 10 percent of their total rice production was allotted for the Negrenses in the vulnerable sectors, including senior citizens, indigents, and persons with disabilities (PWDs).

Consumers are limited to 5 kilos each per purchase.

President Marcos Jr., during the presidential campaign in 2022, has promised to bring down the per kilo price of rice to P20 during his administration.

NIA Administrator Eduardo Guillen said the lower prices of rice in Negros Occidental was a result of the combined efforts of the FIACN-BRIS, the provincial and local government units, and the NIA, as a "testament to the PBBM administration's vision of combating hunger and poverty and achieving food sufficiency and security across the country."

"NIA continues its commitment to developing efficient and sustain-

able irrigation systems to uplift the lives of the Filipino farmers with the aim of propelling wealth creation opportunities in the agricultural sector of the country," Guillen said.

PCO said at least 455 individuals have already availed of the P25 per kilo of rice during the first day of selling at the Bigasang Bayan.

Meanwhile, Department of Agriculture (DA) assistant secretary Arnel de Mesa, on Saturday, said the average age of Filipino farmers has gone down to 49 to 50 years old from 57 years old, based on their registry system.

De Mesa said this means that more younger people are joining the agriculture sector, including those who have availed of early retirement and pursued farming.

He said based on the DA's registry records, there are around 12 million farmers in the country with most of them involved in rice, corn, and coconut farming.

He said the figures also include fishermen and livestock growers.

Marcos, who is also the DA Secretary, has been actively advocating for younger generations, especially the youth, to help increase the productivity of the agriculture sector.

Apart from offering scholarship for agriculture-related courses, the DA also implements the Young Farmers Challenge (YFC) which offers financial grant assistance for the youth who will engage in new agri-fishery enterprises.



P40B realigned budget for NIA to boost rice output

BY JED MACAGAPAL

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) said the additional P40 billion that Congress realigned for the agency's 2024 budget can irrigate an additional 57,000 hectares of rice lands which can produce 570,000 metric tons more palay each year.

Eduardo Guillen, NIA administrator, said in a statement if palay price is computed conservatively at P19 per kilo, the additional production can generate P10.83 billion per year with a payback period of four years or less.

Guillen said the realignment is a "wise investment on Philippine agriculture" by the House of Representatives as it can benefit not only rice farmers but also consumers since it resolves connected issues of food security, palay production and irrigation.

"This significant sum of P40 billion will also play a crucial role in addressing both climate change and sustainability concerns. Solar-powered pump irrigation systems will revolutionize our nation's irrigation coverage, reaching previously inaccessible areas while mitigating the impending effects



P57K hectares more. The P40 billion budget serves as an "investment" the return of which can be realized in four years. (Reuters photo)

of climate patterns like El Niño," Guillen added.

Guillen also said the budget realignment for NIA focuses on agricultural productivity, which is among the government's current top priorities.

"Ensuring long-term food security is a paramount objective for NIA. To address the growing

demand for food in our country, it is imperative to accelerate the development of new irrigation areas. Our strategic approach involves the establishment of multi-purpose dams, small reservoirs, small-scale irrigation systems and the promotion of solar-driven pump irrigation systems, which offer cost-effective and sustain-

able alternatives to traditional diesel- or electric-driven pumps," Guillen said.

Last week, the House Committee on Appropriations amended the proposed P5.768-trillion national budget for 2024 and realigned a total of P194-billion to fight inflation and "invest in people and the country's future."



Early approval of SIDA sought

VICTORIAS CITY, Negros Occidental. – The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) is seeking approval before the end of the year funding for the Sugar Industry Development Act (SIDA) in 2024.

Pablo Azcona, SRA administrator, told reporters in a briefing here over the weekend this will give the agency a good start for the year and have ample time to spend the budget for SIDA which provides a yearly fund of P2 billion starting 2016.

However, allocations for the fund have been fluctuating as it has not been utilized efficiently mainly because farmers fail to comply with requirements of banks for loans.

For this year, only P1 billion was approved.

In previous years, SIDA allocation have been reduced due to a three-year delay in the purchase of P500 million machineries and equipment. The SRA has since taken over the bidding of the materials to facilitate the acquisition.

The SRA said at present, 50 percent of the SIDA fund goes to the construction of farm-to-market roads (FMR) and the other 50 percent for research and



Early start. SRA says early approval of the SIDA budget will give them ample time to spend the fund in 2024. (SRA Photo)

mechanization, socialized credit; block farms development and scholarships.

“Currently, block farm budget is fully utilized, our scholarships and FMR are also fully utilized. The only part that we hope we can fully utilize is the socialized credit,” Azcona said.

SRA said it also hopes to improve soil laboratories to boost

local sugar production, citing the need to approach the sector “a lot more scientifically.”

“...We have been very wasteful in our practices on fertilization and everything. We have to (be) more (scientifically) accurate and try to save every peso that we can so that the farmers will (be) globally competitive,” Azcona said. **Jed Macapagal**



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As farmgate prices drop, sugar farmers deal with dwindling earnings for their cane harvest

By Adrian H. Halili
Reporter

THE decline in sugar farmgate prices is squeezing small farmers, who have no choice but to take what traders are willing to bid for the cane they harvest from their handful of hectares.

Loreta Inson, a sugar farmer from La Carlota City, Negros Occidental, told *BusinessWorld* that traders offered about P30,000 for the 13 metric tons of sugarcane harvested from her land.

"From our 38.5-hectare farm, we were able to harvest about 13 metric tons of sugarcane...we spent about P25,000 on fertilizer, labor, and hauling," she told *BusinessWorld*.

She said she netted between P4,000 and P5,000 from the sale.

"Whatever is left we would use it again for capital because sugar prices are low... If prices were steady, maybe we could break even," she said.

Ms. Inson said that with the onset of the dry conditions brought on by El Niño, yields are likely to decline.

Farmer incomes are on the line with every government decision to import sugar, adding to the supply of the commodity, which in turn reduces their bargaining power with the traders buying their crop.

The government, in turn, blames high sugar retail prices for its import decisions, suggesting that it has had to weigh the interests of producers against those of consumers.

Against this backdrop lie allegations of price manipulation somewhere along the supply chain, with the low

farmgate prices not showing in the retail selling prices.

Vimaca Farmers Producers Cooperative Regional Manager and Corporate Secretary John Pedrosa said imports are mainly behind the decline in selling price for raw sugar.

"At the start of milling season, there were about 10 million bags of refined sugar with an additional of 2 million coming in, so you can just imagine how its going to affect the prices (at the farm level). There are excessive imports of refined sugar and it has also affected the cost of raw," Mr. Pedrosa told reporters in a briefing organized by the Sugar Regulatory Agency (SRA) over the weekend.

He said importers are selling the commodity at a much lower price than domestic sugar, reflecting the more efficient sugar industries of the source countries.

As such, imports effectively deny domestic farmers access to a segment of the consumer market, leaving Philippine farmers to sell mainly to processors, the main market for raw sugar.

He said instances of "failure of bidding" are not uncommon if the prices offered by traders are too low.

"Sometimes we just give advances to the planters so that they have money for the next bidding round; that's the worst-case scenario," he said.

The SRA reported that raw sugar is trading below its target of P3,000 per bag. Raw sugar is averaging between P2,500 to P2,700 per bag.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said that even though farmgate prices for sugar are declining, retail prices remain stable.



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SRA batting for P2-billion budget to finance sugar industry dev't

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said it is batting for funding of P2 billion in 2024 to help it implement the Sugar Industry Development Act (SIDA).

"What we are trying to do now is before the year ends, is to try to seek approval for the 2024 budget so when the new year starts, we can start moving," Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said at a briefing last week.

Currently 50% of SIDA funds go to the construction of farm-to-market roads (FMR). The remaining funds are allocated to research and mechanization, socialized credit, block farm development, with 10% dedicated to scholarships.

"Currently, the block farm... scholarship and FMR (budgets are) fully utilized... The part that we hope we can fully

utilize is socialized credit," he said.

He added that the regulator is also pushing to improve soil laboratories to boost sugar production.

He pushed for more scientific methods of farming to make the industry more cost-efficient and globally competitive.

Mr. Azcona said that one of the reasons for the decline in SIDA

funding was a three-year delay in purchasing of P500 million worth of machinery and equipment.

He added that this has been remedied by overhauling the procurement process.

SIDA, also known as Republic Act 10659, seeks to raise the competitiveness of the sugarcane industry and improve incomes of farmers and workers. — **Adrian H. Halili**

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Give P2-B mandated fund in full, SRA asks lawmakers

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

@jearcalas

BACOLOD CITY—The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) is urging lawmakers to fully restore its P2-billion fund next year to boost its efforts in developing the sugar industry and combating weather threats.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said the government-owned and -controlled corp. would push for the restoration of its Sugarcane Industry Development Act (SIDA) budget during its Senate budget hearing this Tuesday.

"This year, we tried to push for the P2 billion and we lined up all projects based on P2 billion and only P1 billion was approved," Azcona said in a recent press briefing here. "We will continue to push for the P2 billion."

The SRA is the primary im-

plementing agency of the SIDA of 2015, which earmarks a P2-billion fund for the development of the local sugarcane industry.

However, the only time that the SRA received the full amount was in 2016 during its first year of implementation.

Since 2017, the SIDA fund has been slashed continuously due to budget utilization woes, especially on the equipment component of the fund.

This year the SRA received P1 billion, just half of the SIDA fund. Nonetheless, the amount is about 40 percent higher than the P712 million that the GOCC got last year.

In 2018 and 2019, the SRA received only P500 million of the P2 billion SIDA fund.

Azcona pointed out that the reduction in SIDA budget was caused by the GOCC's dismal performance in equipment procurement.

SEE "GIVE," A2

Give...CONTINUED FROM A1

"The snag that hit us when SIDA was initially made, which caused our allocation to decline, is the big delay in the equipment side," he said.

"We had a P500-million equipment purchase that was delayed by three years," he added.

The delay was caused by procurement challenges stemming from a memorandum of agreement between the SRA and the Philippine International Trading Corp. in 2018. Under the agreement, the PITC would procure the necessary items under SIDA on SRA's behalf.

Azcona said one of the adjustments that SRA did to fast-track procurement is to conduct solely the bidding.

"Today all of our biddings are done by the SRA itself. We are doing everything," he said.

The SRA is also now fast-tracking the approval of its spending plan so that it can implement the SIDA programs as early as the start of next year.

"This year, we were able to have it approved by March so we have a lot more time to do projects and then what we are trying to do now is before

the year ends, try to seek approval already for 2024," Azcona said.

"So when the new year starts, we can start moving [already]," he added.

The SRA chief emphasized that having the full SIDA budget would be a "big help" for sugarcane farmers who have been challenged by rising production costs and climate threats like El Nino.

"If we go back to P2 billion everything will double up," Azcona said, noting that the SRA has fully utilized the block farm funding, scholarships allocation and the infrastructure budget of the SIDA.

"The only part that we hope we can fully utilize is the socialized credit," he added.

The present P1-billion budget is allocated as follows based on the law: 50 percent for infrastructure support (P500 million), 15 percent for block farm (P150 million), 15 percent for credit (P150 million), another 15 percent for research and development (P150 million) and scholarships at 5 percent (P50 million).

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The Sugar Regulatory
Administration (SRA)
has decided to
indefinitely hold the release
of over 100,000 metric
tons (MT) of imported
sugar to the domestic
market to arrest falling
farm-gate prices.



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Suplay ng baboy, itlog sapat

TINIYAK ng Department of Agriculture na sapat ang suplay ng baboy at itlog sa bansa sa panahon ng Christmas season.

Ito'y dahil na rin sa bumuti na 'local production' at nakatakdang pag-angkat ng karne.

Sinabi ni Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa na magpapatuloy ang pork importations lalo na sa fourth quarter, base sa iskdeyul na inayos ng Bureau of Animal Industry noong nakaraang buwan.

"Iyong nabanggit ko dati na, iyon nga na inayos ko ngayon... iyong import naman ay tuloy-tuloy iyan dahil parating ngayong fourth quarter - ito iyong naproseso noong mga nakaraang buwan pa ng Bureau of Animal Industry," ayon kay De Mesa.

"May mga pumapasok naman regularly ng importation. Iyong ASF [African Swine Fever] naman ay narito na sa atin, nagsimula ito noong August 2019 sa Rodriguez, Rizal, noong Regional Director pa ako at marami nang lugar na tinamaan ng ASF iyong napa-graduate na natin from infected zone o red zone into pink zone, iyong buffer zone natin hanggang yellow zone," dagdag na wika nito.

Para kontrahin ang epekto ng ASF, sinabi ni De Mesa na ang DA ay mayroong bitbit na "BABay ASF" program, karagdagan ito sa "pest control, prevention, biosecurity at repopulation initiative" ng departamento.

Layon nito na tiyakin na ang mga lugar na tinamaan ng ASF ay maaaring makapagsimula ng produksyon.

Binigyang diin ni De Mesa na ang panibagong "promising development" ay ang development ng ASF vaccine.

"Ito ay tuloy-tuloy... tapos ngayon iyong bakuna para sa ASF at sa AI ay undergoing iyong ating testing at maganda iyong resulta and hopefully ay magtuloy-tuloy po ito," ayon kay De Mesa.

Hinggil naman aniya sa suplay ng itlog sa bansa, lalo na ngayong Christmas holiday, tinuran ni De Mesa na wala siyang nakikitang anomang problema o pagkagambala.

"Pero dahil stable iyong ating supply pati iyong production natin ng day-old pullets na magiging layers pagdating ng panahon ay maganda iyong population so wala tayong nakikitang problema," ang pahayag ni De Mesa sabay sabing "At iyong Avian Influenza na nakaapekto sa Central Luzon, bagama't may ilang naapektohan ay unti-unti na rin ang naka-recover."

Aniya, madalas na tumataas ang pagkonsumo sa itlog tuwing nagbubukas ang klase dahil mas maraming estudyante ang mas nais ang itlog para sa kanilang almusal o agahan.

Mayroon din aniyang mataas na demand mula sa hotels, restaurants and industrial users.

Tinatayang 40% ng suplay ay napupunta sa industrial users, habang 60% naman ay sa 'household consumption. **KRIS JOSE**



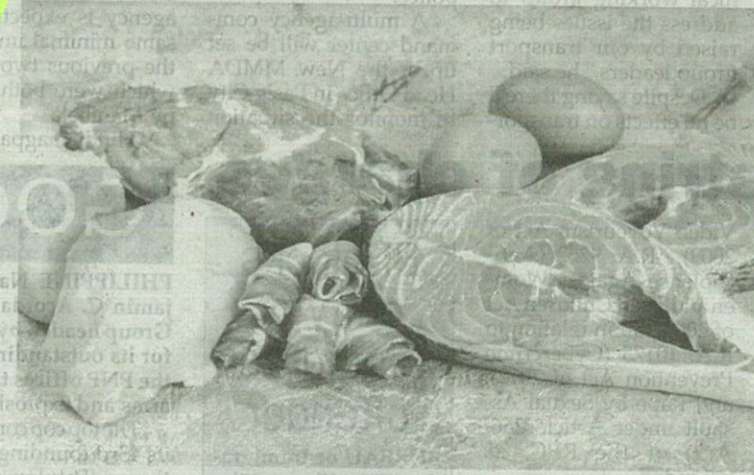
NO PORK, EGG SHORTAGE THIS CHRISTMAS -- DA

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said that there will be enough pork and egg supply in the country in time for the Christmas season with improved local production and scheduled meat imports.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said in a news forum in Quezon City that pork importations are continuing especially in the fourth quarter, based on the schedule arranged by the Bureau of Animal Industry (BPI) last month.

"Iyong nabanggit ko dati na, iyon nga na-inayos ko ngayon... iyong import naman ay tuluy-tuloy iyan dahil parating ngayong fourth quarter—ito iyong naproseso noong mga nakaraang buwan pang Bureau of Animal Industry," De Mesa said.

"May mga pumapasok naman regularly ng importation. Iyong ASF [African Swine Fever] naman ay nandito na sa atin, nagsimula ito noong August 2019 sa Rodriguez, Rizal, noong Regional Director pa ako at marami nang lugar na tinamaan ng ASF iyong napa-graduate na natin from infected



zone o red zone into pink zone, iyong buffer zone natin hanggang yellow zone."

To counter the effect of the ASF, De Mesa said that the DA has been carrying out the "BABay ASF" program, in addition to pest control, prevention, biosecurity and re-

population initiative by the department.

This is to ensure that those areas hit by ASF could restart production, De Mesa said, stressing that another promising development is the development of ASF vaccine.

"Ito ay tuluy-tuloy... tapos ngayon iyong bakuna para sa ASF at sa AI ay

undergoing iyong ating testing at maganda iyong resulta and hopefully ay magtuluy-tuloy po ito," he said.

With regard to egg supply in the country, especially with the Christmas holiday, De Mesa said they don't see any problem or disruption.

"Pero dahil stable iyong ating supply pati iyong production natin ng day-old pullets na magiging layers pagdating ng panahon ay maganda iyong population so wala tayong nakikitang problema," De Mesa told the forum about egg supply.

"At iyong Avian Influenza na nakapekto sa Central Luzon, bagama't may ilan naapektohan ay unti-unti narin ang nakaka-recover."

According to the agriculture official, egg consumption usually increased during the opening of classes as more students prefer egg for breakfast.

There is also high demand from hotels, restaurants and industrial users (HRIs). About 40 percent of the supply go to industrial users, while 60 percent for household consumption. **PCO**



NATIONAL SECURITY

By Ryan Ponce Pacpaco

THE decision to realign some P1.23 billion in confidential funds from several government agencies was made in the "best interest of national security," especially with the rising tensions with China in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

This was the statement of "political party leaders" in the House of Representatives in response to the recent attacks by former president Rodrigo Roa Duterte against the chamber for redistributing the confidential funds asked for by his daughter, now Vice President and Education Secretary Sara Duterte-Carpio, to national security agencies.

"The decision to reallocate confidential funds to security agencies, especially in the context of escalating tensions with China, was taken in the best interest of national security," said the statement released by House Secretary-General Reginald Sagun Velasco, speaking for "political party leaders."

"It is essential to understand that this decision was made for the benefit of the nation and not as a personal affront to any individual, including Vice-President Sara Duterte-Carpio," it added.

According to the statement, the decision to realign confidential funds did not only affect the OVP and the Department of Education that the vice president concurrently heads, but also that of other civilian departments in-

cluding Agriculture (DA), Foreign Affairs (DFA), and Information and Communications Technology (DICT).

"Casting these decisions in a light of personal vendettas is a disservice to the diligent members of the House of the People and the very essence of our democratic process," the statement read.

In defending the confidential funds asked by his daughter, the Vice President, ex-president Duterte made insinuations that the House of Representatives has hidden "pork barrel," a controversial practice that has already been prohibited by practice. He also said the Commission on Audit should take a look into the use of funds of the House.

The statement said political leaders in the House of Representatives found it unfortunate that the former president chose to attack instead of calling for unity by maligning an institution that had supported his legislative agenda for the entirety of his term as the highest official of the land.

"We, leaders of all political parties in the House of Representatives, take utmost exception to the remarks made by former President Rodrigo R. Duterte. Our institution, the House of Representatives, has been unwavering in its dedication to the Filipino people," the statement said.

"It is deeply unfortunate that the former President chose to malign the very institution that for years supported many of his own legislative priorities," it continued.

They said it is "critical" to remember that the pork barrel system that the former chief executive was alluding to has already been deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

"Our Members are firmly committed to respecting and upholding this ruling. Rather than making sweeping allegations in the media, we advise the former president, if he has tangible evidence of wrongdoing, to present it to the appropriate authorities," the statement continued.

The House of Representatives recently decided to divert some P1.23 billion in confidential funds from several government agencies to efforts to boost security in the WPS. Among the agencies that were stripped of confidential funds are the Office of the Vice President (P500 million) and the Department of Education (P150 million).

The confidential funds were realigned, among others, to these government agencies: National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (P300 million); National Security Council (P100 million); Philippine Coast Guard (P200 million); Department of Transportation (P351 million); DepEd's Government Assistance to Students and Teachers (P150 million); DICT's Cybercrime Prevention, Investigation and Coordination Program (P25 million); Department of Foreign Affairs operations (P30 million); Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources' MOOE (P30 million); and Office of the Ombudsman's MOOE (P50.4 million).



More Kadiwa stores sought

A NEOPHYTE solon urged the government to prioritize setting up more Kadiwa stores to provide the people with an alternative where they could buy food items at a cheaper price.

AGRI Party-list Representative Wilbert T. Lee made the suggestion following the sentiments aired by nine out of ten Filipinos saying they are now spending more on food.

"Hindi nakapagtataka na mas malaki ang bilang ng mga Pilipinong mas malaki ang ginagasta para sa pagkain ngayon dahil sa pagtaas ng presyo ng mga pangunahing bilihin," Lee said.

According to Lee as a former businessman he fully understand the conditions of the retailers who have no option but to adjust prices due to increase in the cost of production such as the fuel products.

A Pulse Asia household expenditures survey conducted last month re-



vealed that 95 percent of Filipino adults spent more on food in the past three months, representing a 6 percent year-on-year increase.

"Kaya ang pinakamainam na solusyon para mabigyan ng access sa mas murang mga bilihin ang ating mga kababayan ay ang pagtatayo ng mga Kadiwa stores sa bawat bayan at lungsod," he said.

Lee explained that "prices in Kadiwa centers are lower by 10 to 20 percent since bringing the products won't entail high transportation costs."

The Kadiwa centers or Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita Program is the agribusiness and marketing initiative of the Department of Agriculture to help link local farmers and fishers directly to consumers.

Lee had previously urged the government to add more Kadiwa centers to make affordable food accessible to more costumers and curb food inflation.

The survey revealed that 83 percent of Filipinos said they spent more on rice while 61 percent identified non-rice food items in particular.

Jester Manalastas



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PH farmers getting younger -- DA

THE average age of Filipino farmers has decreased with more younger generation opting to join the agriculture sector, according to a Department of Agriculture official on Saturday.

DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa disclosed that the previous average age of farmers in the country was 57 years old and this has decreased to about 49 to 50 years old, based on their registry system.

"Bumababa, ibigsabihin maraming pumapasok na mas bata kasya iyon nauna," he said in a news forum in Quezon City.

De Mesa also said that the numbers of farmers and livestock growers are not decreasing.

"Actually, hindi bumababa iyon number of farmers, iyong registry system natin we have 12 million na magsasaka, iba-iba ito from rice, corn, coconut kasama na iyon fishers dito,



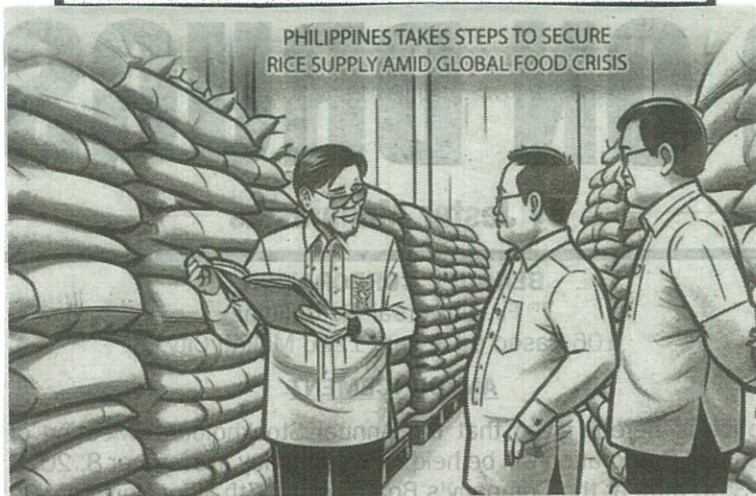
kasama na rin dito iyong mga livestock growers," he said.

He added that this could also be attributed to those individuals who have retired early and decided to pursue their love for farming.

sue their love for farming.

"Actually marami rin -- lalona iyong mga nasa gobyerno nasa private nakilala ko after nilang magsilbi ay babalik sila sa love for farming," he said.

The agency also continues to offer scholarship for agriculture-related courses.
PCO



EDITORIAL

Good news

AWARE that rice is the staple of almost all the Filipino people, the government ought to ensure that the price of the grain should not be beyond the reach of the poor.

And so we, like other people, are happy to hear that there's sufficient supply of rice until next year.

Coming from a top executive of the Department of Agriculture the assurance without doubt, "good news" to everybody.

Admittedly, a rice shortage in the country is seen to worry not only the ordinary Filipinos but also national and local government authorities at a "time of economic hardship."

Note that many businesses are still trying to recover their losses after two years of crippling lockdown brought about by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

In fact, many small business establishments are still unable to rehire their displaced workers because of financial difficulties.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa made the assurance after expecting an abundant palay harvest this wet season and the expected arrival of rice imports.

Once the wet season harvest ends next month, the DA expects about 94 days of national stock inventory.

"Although we expect additional (rice) imports, our national stock inventory is at a very comfortable level. Normally, we expect between 60 to 90 days," according to the DA official.

Despite the assurance of a sufficient rice supply early next year, there's still that need to go after the country's rice smugglers and hoarders as ordered by President Marcos.



EDITORIAL

Water is life, water is food

World Food Day is marked today as millions of Filipinos continue to suffer from involuntary hunger along with malnutrition and undernourishment, which have been blamed for stunting and poor academic performance.

Despite being largely agricultural, the Philippines remains heavily reliant on importations of basic agricultural commodities, from its staple rice to sugar and various types of meats. Domestic dairy production is so low that millions of families cannot afford high-nutrition baby formula and growing-up milk for children.

In the past year, the biggest problems in the country, apart from the surge in oil prices due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, were mainly food-related: supply shortages and consequently price spikes in agricultural items including sugar, dressed chicken, eggs and onions. Food inflation has accounted for much of the consistently high inflation rate. In recent months, rice prices have jumped, prompting a half-baked effort to cap the prices of two varieties.

Experts have warned that El Niño could worsen food insecurity in the coming months. The weather phenomenon can intensify flooding during the wet season and cause drought during the dry season. It may

aggravate the global problem of freshwater sources, which is the focus of this year's observance of World Food Day.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization points out that while water covers about 71 percent of the Earth's surface, only 2.5 percent of the water is fresh and suitable for drinking and agriculture. The FAO points out that agriculture accounts for 72 percent of global freshwater utilization.

In the past decades, however, freshwater resources per person have declined by 20 percent. The FAO attributes this to rapid population growth, urbanization, economic development, climate change, overextraction of groundwater, pollution and poor water management. These problems can still be reversed, with planned development and efficient water utilization and management.

Proper freshwater allocation can also improve agricultural production and boost food security. The country can take to heart this year's theme for World Food Day: "Water is life, water is food. Leave no one behind." And policy makers can heed the warning of the FAO on freshwater: "We risk stretching this precious resource to a point of no return."



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Rice prices up in September

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

PRICES of well-milled rice went up in September, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said in a report on Sunday.

PSA data showed that the average retail price of well-milled rice reached P48.14 per kilogram on September 1 to 5, higher by 5.6 percent than the P45.57 per kg posted in August.

This is higher than the rice price cap of P45 per kg on well-milled rice imposed on September 5 to October 4. The price cap for regular-willed rice is P41 per kg.

"Among regions, Zamboanga Peninsula (Region 9) reported the highest average retail price of regular milled rice at P53.42 per kg," the PSA said.

Region 6 (Western Visayas) posted the lowest average retail price of the staple at P43.18 per kg during the period.

The average price of regular milled rice also went up by 5.63

percent to P48.14 per kg in the same period, compared to the P45.57 per kg posted from August 15 to 17.

The PSA report also showed that the price of red onions went down by 3.8 percent to P199.97 during the same period, lower than the P206.79 posted in the latter days of August.

"Northern Mindanao (Region 10) had the highest average retail price of red onion at P240 per kilogram during the first phase of September 2023," PSA said.

The Ilocos Region recorded the lowest average retail price of onions at P154.17 per kg.

A kilogram of tomato, meanwhile, had an average retail price of P131.74 per kg during the first two weeks of September. It increased by 25.8 percent relative to the price rate of P104.76 per kg.

"Moreover, the average retail price per kilogram of tomato accelerated by 72.7 percent during the first phase of September 2023 from its price level of P76.27 per kg in the first phase of August 2023," PSA said.

At the regional level, the highest average retail price of a kilogram of tomato was registered in Region 4A (Calabarzon) at P186.80 during the first period. The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim

Mindanao (BARMM) logged the lowest retail price at P74.75 per kg.

Fisheries products such as galunggong (round scad) also posted increases in its retail prices, averaging P208.39 during the first phase of September.

"Compared with its average retail price of P202.89 per kilogram in the second phase of August 2023, it increased by 2.7 percent during the period," PSA said.

The National Capital Region recorded the highest average retail price per kilogram at P264.12, while the lowest was reported in Zamboanga Peninsula at P136.33 per kg in the said period.



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ASF cases expand to 13 Isabela towns

CAUAYAN CITY, Isabela: The African swine fever (ASF)-afflicted towns rose to 13 but veterinary officials believed the cases have been mellowing in Isabela.

The Isabela provincial veterinarian's office reported on Friday, Oct. 13, 2023, that the first 12 towns in Isabela to register cases include Gamu, Angadanan, Alicia, Ramon, Roxas, Luna, Quirino, Aurora, Echague, Mallig, San Isidro and Burgos.

Cabagan was the last to be included.

The City of Ilagan has no confirmed cases yet despite ASF symptoms reported in the past days.

The slowdown in cases is possibly a result of restrictions made by the local government units (LGUs) to prevent the disease from entering their areas.

Backyard hog raiser Maripaz Palomares said she was wary of the ASF scare despite her decades of experience in raising pigs.

"Cleanliness is still the best way to avoid the virus. I bathe

them daily while they should not be overfed. I ensure that their pigpens are clean always," she added.

Dr. Belina Barbosa, provincial veterinarian, earlier reported that the government collects blood samples from the pigs and tests these in the laboratory to confirm if they carry the ASF virus. When it is confirmed that ASF is the cause of illness and death of pigs, they immediately perform culling to prevent the disease from spreading further, she said.

The affliction was minimal, she also said in her report, adding that even a single town has only six hog raisers affected.

The ASF mortality rate also dropped to 2.5 percent, down from previous high cases in the past years.

The veterinary office technicians continue their information drive as they remind the hog raisers to avoid spreading the virus in the barangay so that the swine disease does not spread, Barbosa said.

VINCE JACOB VISAYA



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Millers seek 'less harsh' penalties

SAN JOSE CITY, Nueva Ecija: Led by its president Elizabeth Vana, 80 members of the Nueva Ecija Rice Millers Association (Nerma) have renewed their appeal to the government to reconsider what they have described as "harsh" provisions of Senate Bill (SB) 2342.

"We are not an enemy of the government and we will always support President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. against rice smugglers, profiteers and hoarders," Vana said in an interview with *The Manila Times* on Friday, Oct. 13, 2023.

SB 2342, among other provisions, sets a P1 million "threshold" for suspicious rice-trading activities to be classified as "economic sabotage" through "rice smuggling, hoarding and profiteering."

In a separate interview with *The Times* also on Friday, Ferdinand "Dindo" Dysico, a member of the Nueva Ecija provincial board, said they have a pending appeal before the office of Sen. Joseph Victor "JV" Ejercito on the reconsideration that they were seeking.

Ejercito told them that the Senate was still reviewing if SB 2432 could already be amended.

The Senate version seeks to revive the Anti-Smuggling Act of 2016 to penalize agricultural smuggling, hoarding, profiteering and carteling as economic sabotage, to include sugar, corn, pork, poultry, garlic, onion, carrots, fish and vegetables, and subject to at least one million pesos in penalty.

Any of the four offenses is non-bailable and punishable with life imprisonment.

Part of the Nerma appeal

requested an amendment to require rice millers to sell a percentage of their total purchased rice per harvest season within a time period to ensure that the rice is in circulation.

It is important to properly determine the amount of stock from the agencies to charge one for hoarding.

Instead of a set number such as P1 million, the rice millers said, it is better to determine the percentage of the total supply of rice that will negatively impact the market.

To do this, they also said, "We must check the total supply of rice produced against the amount of consumer demand and determine how much rice is required to be in active circulation so that there are no shortages and prices are kept low."

Hoarding or undue accumulation by a person or combination of persons of any basic commodity beyond his or their normal inventory levels or the unreasonable limitation or refusal to dispose of, sell, or distribute the stocks of any basic necessity of prime commodity to the general public or the unjustified taking out of any basic necessity or prime commodity from the channels of reproduction, trade, commerce and industry.

There shall be prima facie evidence of hoarding when a person has stocks of any basic necessity or prime commodity fifty percent higher than his usual inventory and unreasonable limits. Vana said Nerma has a legitimate member in the person of 2nd District Rep. Joseph Gilbert Violago.

CELSO M. CAJUCOM

Malaya Business Insight

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Regulations to fill gaps in halal industry

TWO senators have noted the lack of knowledge and regulations on halal certification and dietary principles of Muslims in the country.

Sen. Robinhood Padilla called on government agencies, including the DTI and the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos to clarify the role of agencies in the certification of halal food products while Sen. Win Gatchalian noted the gaps in existing laws on the halal sector.

Gatchalian underscored the need for an airtight legislation to ensure that domestic halal products are compliant with the dietary requirement and Islamic lifestyle of Muslim communities.

Republic Act No. 10817, or the Philippine Halal Export Development and Promotion Program Act of 2016, regulates halal products in the country, but policy makers said the law lacks teeth to penalize manufacturers who falsely

claim they offer halal products or services.

Halal is an Islamic concept that connotes that a product or service is free of impurities and can be consumed by Muslims.

Gatchalian said a new law is needed to regulate, promote and clarify the roles and responsibilities of agencies in halal certification.

The Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) national strategy to develop the local halal

industry targets to generate P230 billion in investments and creating 120,000 jobs in the sector within five years.

The DTI noted the growing demand for halal products and services in the Philippines and export markets consisting of 57 countries across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and the Americas.

DTI Secretary Alfredo Pascual said the Philippines seeks to expand its participation in the halal

economy by being more active in the multitrillion US-dollar industry that is growing at a rapid pace.

Data show the global Muslim population now stands at 1.9 billion, while the global halal market is estimated to rise to \$7.7 trillion in market value by 2025.

Pascual said maximizing the country's potential in the halal industry will help gain more investments, better quality jobs and improved life for Filipinos.

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PSA report: Growth rate of PPI for agri slows in Q2

THE annual growth of the Producer Price Index (PPI) for agriculture at the national level slowed in the second quarter, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

In a report published last October 11, PSA said the annual growth rate of the PPI for agriculture reached 12 percent, slower than the 24.7 percent recorded in the first quarter.

"The country's year-to-date 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 Region 5 (Bicol Region) at 6.8 percent. Meanwhile, the highest annual increment was registered in Region 6 (Western Visayas) at 27.8 percent.

In the second quarter, PSA said the PPI of the three major commodity groups exhibited downtrends.

"The year-on-year growth in the PPI for crops slowed down to 18.8 percent from 32.4 percent in the previous quarter. Moreover, the PPI for livestock and poultry recorded an annual decline of 5.1 percent from a year-on-year increase of 0.4 percent in the first quarter of 2023," it said.

"Likewise, an annual decrement of

2 percent was registered in the PPI for fisheries from an annual uptrend of 14.4 percent in the previous quarter."

Data from the PSA showed that the PPI for crops exhibited an annual decline of 18.8 percent in April to June from an annual increment of 32.4 percent in the first quarter.

Slower annual increments were observed in the PPI of the following commodity groups: beans and legumes 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.

"Faster annual increases were registered in cereals at 8.1 percent from 7.3 percent and rootcrops at 20.8 percent from 12.9 percent."

PSA also said the PPI for livestock and poultry recorded an annual decline of 5.1 percent in the second quarter from a 0.4 percent increment in the previous quarter. "Its annual growth in the second quarter of 2022 was posted at 13.1 percent."

At the national level, the PPI for fisheries recorded an annual decline of 2 percent from its annual increment of 14.4 percent in the previous quarter.

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D&L receives Golden Arrow award from ICD

By VG CABUAG

[@Villygc](#)

CHEMICAL and food ingredient manufacturer D&L Industries Inc. was recognized alongside other top local publicly listed companies by the Institute of Corporate Directors (ICD) for its outstanding corporate governance practices based on the ASEAN Corporate Governance Scorecard (ACGS).

This is the fourth consecutive year that D&L received the Golden Arrow award from the ICD.

"We are honored to receive such prestigious recognition from the ICD," D&L President and CEO Alvin Lao said.

"As a company, it's our top priority to uphold the highest standards of good corporate governance. We see it as the solid foundation for a sustainable and lasting organization."

The ACGS measures the performance of the companies in the areas of facilitating the rights and the equitable treatment of shareholders, how they relate to their different stakeholders, ensuring transparency and accountability thru timely disclosure

of material information, and how the board guides the company strategically, monitors the management and ensures the board's accountability to the company and the shareholders.

ICD is a nonstock, not-for-profit national association of corporate directors and other stakeholders engaged in corporate governance. Its mission is to champion good corporate governance and stewardship for the benefit of the society. It aims to be the key catalyst in the Philippine corporate governance ecosystem for inclusive and sustainable development.

D&L said its income fell by 28 percent to P1.24 billion in the first half from the previous year's P1.71 billion on higher inflation and the cost it incurred due to the pre-operation of its new plant in Batangas.

Despite this, Lao said the company is looking forward to its expansion.

"It's really to emphasize that this [Batangas plant opening] is a game changer for us. This is really a big reason to be very optimistic about the company," Lao said.

"When it's finally up and running, it will more than offset a lot of these costs. And as we get to being fully operational, that's when we will start to see the benefits coming in."



STK, LEADS Agri ink deal on organic fungicides

By REINE JUVIERRE S. ALBERTO

ISRAEL-BASED STK Bio-ag Technologies has partnered with local manufacturer and distributor of agricultural chemicals LEADS Agri Agricultural Products Corp. to bring organic and botanical-based fungicides to the Philippine market.

Through its subsidiary Stockton-Agrimor Philippines Inc., STK signed an exclusive distribution agreement with LEADS Agri last October 12 at Acacia Hotel Manila in Alabang, Muntinlupa.

LEADS Agri CEO Jofer Malveda and STK Country Director Kristle Aguilar-Hawod led the signing, while STK's CEO Arye Tenenbaum and other officials were present via Zoom.

Tenenbaum, who was supposed to physically attend the signing of the pact, is optimistic about the partnership.

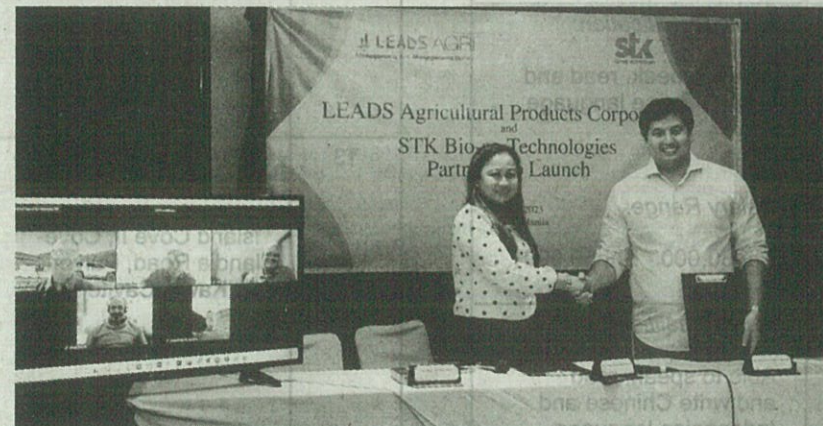
"We really believe that we have the

right technology, the perfect products for the benefit of Filipino farmers, and LEADS is the perfect partner to distribute and develop these products in the Philippines."

"As your representative in the Philippines, we [assure you] that all our efforts and resources will be at your disposal in order to serve the Filipino agriculture industry," Malveda added.

STK developed the tea tree oil-based fungicides TIMOREX GOLD and REGEV, pioneering the development of botanical-based solutions for a sustainable agricultural environment.

TIMOREX GOLD contains tea tree oil as its active ingredient to control Black Sigatoka, one of the major diseases of banana, which causes the banana leaves to turn yellowish and brown. It is the first registered organic fungicide for Black Sigatoka in the Philippines pursuant to Republic



STK Bio-ag Technologies Country Director Kristle Grace Aguilar-Hawod (left) shakes hands with LEADS Agri Chief Executive Officer Jofer Malveda after signing an exclusive distribution agreement to bring STK's botanical-based fungicides to the Philippines. They are joined by STK's Chief Executive Officer Arye Tenenbaum and other officials in Israel via Zoom. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Act 10068 or the Organic Agriculture Act of 2010 and certified organic by the Organic Certification Center of the Philippines.

REGEV is the world's first hybrid fungicide that combines botanical and synthetic ingredients, namely,

tea tree oil and difenoconazole, in a single formulation.

With the Philippines as an agricultural country, plant diseases are considered economic threats endangering food supply as they reduce quantity and quality and increase spending

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on disease management leading to reduced income for farmers.

Other plant diseases, such as Fusarium wilt, are caused by the lethal fungus *Fusarium oxysporum*, which can lead to the yellowing and death in banana plants. As the second-largest exporter of Cavendish bananas, the Philippines faces serious threats from this disease since it could potentially wipe out a plantation, and consequently, the whole industry, if left unmanaged.

STK said its products, REGEV and TIMOREX GOLD, have established their efficacy against important diseases of economically important crops after they successfully demonstrated Induced Systemic Resistance/Systemic Acquired Resistance in plants.

When the products are applied to the plants, the tea tree oil activates its defense mechanism, making the whole plant resistant to infection and able to bear fruits normally.

With a focus on creating balanced, cleaner, and sustainable options for farmers, Aguilar-Hawod of STK said, "We're very proud to say that the tea tree oil's formulation has been perfected."

"The brands are already known globally, so it's been recognized and certified by third-party organic certifying bodies and the process is very stringent," she told the BUSINESSMIRROR.

Malveda said LEADS Agri hopes to expand other products and help the banana, rice, fruits and vegetables industries.

"We want the reach of the products to be felt by the Filipino farmers," Malveda told the BUSINESSMIRROR.

Despite the Israel-Hamas war, Malveda is not worried about the manufacturing and delivery processes of STK's products, "They are very resilient people. Whatever happens, it's business as usual," he said.

Abante

UNA SA BALITA

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Kadiwa outlet bet paramihin

MATAPOS lumabas ang survey kung saan siyam sa bawat 10 Pilipino ang nagsabi na mas malaki na ang kanilang ginagastos ngayon sa pagkain, itinulak ng isang mambabatas na paramihan ang mga Kadiwa outlet.

Ayon kay AGRI party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee mas mababa ng 10 hanggang 20 porsyento ang presyo ng mga ibinebentang produkto sa mga Kadiwa outlet na makatutulong sa mga mahihirap na Pilipino.

Sinabi ni Lee na naiintindihan

nito ang mga retailer kung mataas ang kanilang presyo dahil mataas din ang kanilang gastos.

"Naiintindihan natin na wala ring magawa ang ating retailers kundi magtaas ng presyo dahil sa sunud-sunod na pagtaas ng presyo ng krusdo," sabi ng kongresista.

"Kaya ang pinakamainam na solusyon para mabigyan ng access sa mas murang mga biling ang ating mga kababayan ay ang pagtatayo ng mga Kadiwa store sa bawat bayan at lungsod," dagdag pa nito. **(Bily Begas)**



PH, Canada ink pact against illegal fishing

THE Philippines signed an agreement with Canada that will allow the former to access for free Ottawa's satellite-based technology to detect dark vessels or ships that turn off their location transmitter often to engage in illegal fishing.

The Canadian Embassy

in Manila on Saturday said the two states signed the deal during the 6th Canada-Philippines Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation meeting in Canada on Oct. 13.

"Canada and the Philippines held bilateral talks in Ottawa this week. (They) signed an agreement to

deploy Canada's Dark Vessel Detection program to enhance Philippine maritime domain awareness," Colin Townson, Canadian Embassy head of political affairs office, said in a statement.

Canadian Ambassador to the Philippines David Hartman told reporters last

month that Canada is prepared to deploy the system once the agreement is signed.

Canada and the Philippines began the negotiations in January, a few months after Ottawa identified the Philippines as a core partner in its Indo-Pacific Strategy. PNA



Soy, corn slip

CHICAGO- US soybean futures retreated on Friday on profit-taking after hitting two-week highs in the previous session and as souring consumer sentiment and inflation worries hung over the market.

Corn futures followed soybeans lower, but wheat rallied after the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported stronger-than-expected weekly export sales and confirmed a large sale to China.

US corn and soybean harvest downgrades in a monthly USDA report on Thursday had lifted some grain and soy contracts to multi-week highs, leaving the market vulnerable to a profit-taking

pullback ahead of the weekend.

"The pullback today has a lot to do with the negative consumer sentiment ... and the macro sentiment that we are going to lose demand worldwide," said Mike Zuzolo, president of Global Commodity Analytics.

"The trade, because of those outside market factors, are taking some profit off the table."

Soybean export news was mixed as the USDA announced another daily "flash" sale and reported stronger-than-expected weekly sales last week, but China's customs data showed a sharp drop in soy imports. **-Reuters**



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With domestic crop damaged by rain, China searches far and wide for wheat

CHINA is scouring the globe for wheat, with annual imports on track to hit record levels, as buyers scoop up cheap supplies after heavy rains damaged the domestic crop.

Following a splurge on Australian wheat earlier in the year, large quantities have been booked this month from some of the other main exporters, including the US, Canada, and France, according to traders, who declined to be identified discussing private business.

The buying spree comes after international wheat prices dropped to a three-year low at the end of September. Although that signals supplies are ample for now, China's growing appetite adds an element of uncertainty to supply chains that have become increasingly vulnerable to war and protectionist trade policies.

"China's wheat imports will be strong going forward, and for sure they will exceed the annual quota," said Darin Friedrichs, co-founder of Sitonia Consulting Co. "It seems like China's bought up all of the easily exported supplies



PAZ ARANDO-UNSPASH

from Australia and is now needing to go further afield."

Beijing uses quotas to manage imports of staples like wheat. It allows 9.636 million tons a year of the grain at a 1% tariff, with 90% of the allocation going to government firms. Above that cap, the tariff rises to 65%, a level usually out of reach for private buyers but not for the state-owned giants.

For years, the quota was never used up. But that changed in 2020 as Beijing's trade deal with the Trump administration boosted purchases from the US. Last year, total imports hit a record 9.96 mil-

lion tons as buyers swapped in wheat for other ingredients in animal feed, and Chinese citizens eat more bread. China now vies with Egypt as the world's top importer.

Overseas purchases in the first eight months of 2023 have hit 9.56 million tons, with more than 60% sourced from Australia. Buyers are surveying the southern hemisphere nation's upcoming harvest for future supplies, as well as watching crop conditions in alternative origins like Kazakhstan, the traders said.

Ever mindful of ensuring food security for its one-billion-plus

population, Beijing is keen to build up its grain stockpiles, particularly against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine — another big exporter — and increasingly frequent bouts of extreme weather as the planet warms.

China's recent buying activity is largely tied to the weather problems it experienced as this year's crop approached harvest, said Arlan Suderman, chief commodities economist at StoneX Financial, Inc. He estimated that persistent rains reduced the quality of 30 million to 40 million tons of wheat, leaving it suitable for livestock feed but not human consumption.

"That increased the need for China to buy higher-quality milling wheat from the world market, to blend with its own wheat to meet its goals for food quality," Mr. Suderman said.

China's summer wheat crop, which makes up the bulk of the harvest, fell 0.9% to 134.53 million tons this year, according to official data. That's the first decline in seven years. — **Bloomberg**



Food is hot campaign issue in elections from Argentina to Poland

WHETHER it's bread or onions, food has the power to make or break a country's leadership. How nations secure their staples is looming large in elections across the world with war in Ukraine and now the Middle East.

Starting with New Zealand and Poland, at least a quarter of the global population will head to the polls over the next eight months or so. Those countries will be followed by Argentina, the Netherlands and Egypt, and then Indonesia and India in 2024. Among them are some of the top suppliers of everything from rice and palm oil to milk and soymeal. Others are strategic locations for the flow of staples like wheat.

Politicians have an eye on two core constituents: consumers and producers. Some governments aiming to stay in power are restricting exports of foodstuffs, proposing measures to protect rural communities, or slowing the pace of climate policies that would affect farmers.

Food is just one of a long list of electoral issues, but it has global repercussions. The politics threaten to impact global trade, prices and the economies of import-dependent nations. Erratic weather, meanwhile, has ravaged agricultural land from the United States to China, and the phenomenon known as El Niño is back, risking further damage to crops.

Then there's war. Before Russia's invasion, Ukraine exported more grain than the entire European Union combined and supplied half of the globally traded sunflower oil. The conflict between Hamas

and Israel pushed up the price of crude oil, which could have a knock-on effect for food production. The expectation is that Israel is preparing a ground war after vowing to wipe out the Iran-backed militants.

"We are in a world where everybody's pandering to domestic issues," said Tim Benton, a research director at Chatham House in London specializing in food security. "That world of protectionism driven by elections and polarization and inward-looking domestic politics might well play out large."

Politicians have reasons to be nervous. Food price spikes can trigger food riots around the world. In 2011, they contributed to the Arab Spring uprisings in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, a region in turmoil again. Meanwhile, central bankers and governments everywhere are struggling to contain food costs that are outpacing core inflation.

Climate politics have emerged as a defining line between the left and right. In Europe and the Americas, the issue of conflating climate change, globalization and the protection of local production is aligned with the resurgence of more radical parties, according to risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft.

"When you're talking about very polarized and tight elections, this thematic campaigning for specific groups can make the difference between a victory and a loss," said Jimena Blanco, chief analyst at the firm.

These are some of the countries to watch.

Curbing emissions

THE world's biggest milk exporter, New

Zealand vowed to curb the devastating impact on the environment from agriculture, but farmers aren't happy because taxing greenhouse gas from cows threatens their business.

Ahead of the election on October 14, the government delayed the implementation of so-called emissions pricing until toward the end of 2025. The main opposition party wants to push it back until 2030.

In the Netherlands, the world's second-largest exporter of agricultural produce, farmers have turned into a political force before elections in November. A goal to halve nitrogen emissions by 2030 led to protests, and the upstart Farmer-Citizen Movement, or BBB, is now the largest party in the Dutch upper house and fourth in opinion polls. The governing coalition retracted their emissions goal.

Grain feud

FOOD costs and production have been key themes in the bitter political campaign in Poland ahead of election on October 15. Last time, about two-thirds of farmers backed the nationalist Law and Justice party, which is trying to secure a third term in power. The war next door in Ukraine, surging costs and drought have made the group critical for the ruling party again.

To calm restive farmers, the government defied the European Union and extended an embargo on Ukrainian grain. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskiy filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization and questioned Poland's solidarity. Polish

leaders warned Zelenskiy that his rhetoric could jeopardize future weapons shipments.

Law and Justice, which has been battling to protect a narrow lead in the polls against its more pro-EU, liberal opponent, is also luring farmers with promises to make supermarkets offer more local food.

Opposition leader Donald Tusk, an ex Polish premier and former European Council president, has sought to mollify the radical leader of the farmers. In a media briefing last month, they spoke in front of a cabbage field, promising to deliver a compromise with the EU over the ban on Ukrainian grain imports.

Unshackling farmers

THE presidential election in Argentina takes place on October 22. The nation is a top global supplier of beef as well as soybean meal and corn to feed livestock in other countries. But farmers haven't been able to fully tap the potential of vast flatlands because of years of export taxes to boost revenue and efforts to curb inflation still running at more than 100 percent.

Libertarian candidate Javier Milei, the shock frontrunner, plans to unleash an export boom and dismantle policies that have held back agricultural investment. Milei would scrap export taxes and quotas and remove direct meddling in food prices. That's in addition to his controversial policy of switching Argentina's currency from the peso to the US dollar.

Critical to farmers is whether they end up with more cash to invest in planting, and in turn provide the world with another source of food. **Bloomberg News**



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FAO: Disaster events destroyed \$3.8-trillion crops, livestock

OVER the last 30 years, an estimated \$3.8 trillion worth of crops and livestock production has been lost due to disaster events, according to a new report released by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) last Friday.

FAO said the amount corresponds to an average loss of \$123 billion per year or 5 percent of annual global agricultural GDP.

A new FAO flagship report titled "The impact of disasters on agriculture and food security," brings the first-ever global estimation of the impact of disasters on agricultural production focused on crops and livestock.

It also notes that the figure may be higher if systematic data on losses in the fisheries and aquaculture and forestry subsectors were available.

The report stressed the need for "urgently improving" data and information on the impact of disasters on all subsectors of agriculture to create data systems that can serve as the foundation upon which effective action can be built and informed.

"Agriculture is one of the most highly exposed and vulnerable sectors in the context of disaster risk, given its profound dependence on natural resources and climate conditions. Recurrent disasters have the potential to erode gains in food security and undermine the sustainability of agrifood systems," said FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu in the foreword to the report.

"Leveraging FAO's technical expertise, this publication showcases opportunities to proactively address risks in agrifood systems while demonstrating ways to mainstream disaster risk management into agricultural practices and policies."

The report revealed that over the last three decades, disasters—defined as serious disruptions to the functioning of a community or society—inflicted the highest relative losses on lower and lower middle-income countries, up to 15 percent of their total agricultural GDP.

Disasters also had a significant impact on Small Island Developing States (SIDS), causing them to lose nearly 7 percent of their agricultural GDP.

Product groups

THE report also indicated that losses related to major agricultural products are showing increasing trends. Thus, losses in cereals amounted to an average of 69 million tons per year in the last three decades—corresponding to the entire cereal production of France in 2021—followed by fruits and vegetables and sugar crops, with each approaching average losses of 40 million tons per year.

For fruits and vegetables, losses

corresponded to the entire production of fruits and vegetables in Japan and Vietnam in 2021.

Meats, dairy products and eggs showed an average estimated loss of 16 million tons per year, corresponding to the whole production of meats, dairy products and eggs in Mexico and India in 2021.

Regional differences

GLOBAL losses mask significant variability across regions, subregions and country groups. According to the report, Asia experienced by far the largest share of the total economic losses.

Africa, Europe and the Americas also displayed a similar order of magnitude. However, losses in Asia only accounted for 4 percent of the agricultural added value, while in Africa they corresponded to nearly 8 percent. The variability was even higher across subregions.

In absolute terms, losses were higher in high-income countries, lower-middle-income countries and upper-middle-income countries, but low-income countries, and especially SIDS, suffered the highest incidence of losses in agricultural added value.

'Cascading impacts'

DISASTER events have increased from 100 per year in the 1970s to around 400 events per year worldwide in the past 20 years. Not only are disaster events increasing in frequency, intensity and complexity but their impact is also expected to worsen, as climate-induced disasters amplify existing social and ecological vulnerabilities.

The report noted that when hazards manifest, they can produce cascading impacts across multiple systems and sectors. Underlying disaster risk drivers include climate change, POVERTY and inequality, population growth, health emergencies caused by pandemics, practices such as unsustainable land use and management, armed conflicts and environmental degradation.

The amount of loss and damage produced by a disaster depends on the speed and spatial scale at which a hazard interacts with vulnerability and other preexisting risk factors, along with the amount of exposed assets or livelihoods.

In extreme cases, disasters result in the displacement and outward migration of rural populations. Massive flooding triggered by abnormal monsoon rains in Pakistan's southern province of Sindh is an illustrative example of how the combination of slow and sudden onset hazards triggered displacement, negatively impacting agrifood systems and increasing food insecurity.