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TARIFF COMMISSION FINDINGS CLASSIFIED AS 'CONFIDENTIAL'

## AGRI PRODUCERS, TARIFF BODY IN POLICY TUSSLE

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**  
[@jordeenelagare](#)

Industrial stakeholders are urging the Tariff Commission (TC) to publicly release the findings and recommendations of the agency on proposals to adjust tariffs for transparency purposes.

The TC, however, said all their findings were classified as "confidential" as a Supreme Court ruling prohibits them from publishing the recommendations made by the commission.

Federation of Free Farmers board chair Leonardo Montemayor, a former agriculture secretary, said industry players were asking the TC to reveal only their "major findings" for the "information and education of everybody."

Montemayor, who was a four-term congressman, said both the House of Representatives and the Senate release position papers and findings of the committees concerned when they conduct public hearings.

"It is news to me because we have no idea as to what were the findings, recommendations of the TC," he added.

The point of contention is the Sept. 28 recommendation submitted by the TC to the National Economic and Development Authority and the Department of Trade and Industry on a proposal to temporarily reduce the tariff on imported rice, which was then rejected by **President Marcos** himself. **INQ**



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## DSWD distributes rice in BARMM

DEPARTMENT of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Rexlon "Rex" Gatchalian thanked the local leaders in the provinces of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) for their warm welcome during the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) rice distribution.

Gatchalian and Special Assistant to the President (SAP) Secretary Antonio Lagdameo Jr. were present during the rice distribution on Monday to 4Ps recipients in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, and Jolo, Sulu.

Tawi-Tawi Gov. Ysmael Sali and Sulu Gov. Abdusakur Tan supervised the rice distribution.

Secretary Gatchalian stated in his brief statement that the distribution of rice is part of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s directive to prioritize food security and a stable supply chain by tackling concerns of hoarding and smuggling.

"President Marcos instructed the Bureau of Customs to conduct a raid and confiscate these rice stocks to ensure that those taking advantage of the situation were taught a lesson," Gatchalian said.

Gatchalian also stated that the rice provided to 4Ps recipients was part of the 42,000 sacks of smuggled rice seized by the Bureau of Customs (BoC) in Zamboanga

City last May that were donated to the DSWD for distribution.

According to Gatchalian, the DSWD will continue to distribute confiscated commodities throughout the country in order to guarantee that they reach people in need, particularly 4Ps households.

"Rest assured that our President will continue to monitor the price of rice to ensure that there is affordable rice for Filipino families," Gatchalian said.

The beneficiaries of 25 kilograms of premium-quality jasmine rice included around 3,000 poor households, the majority of which were 4P members from the three BARMM provinces of Tawi-Tawi, Sulu and Basilan.

The first destination for the DSWD team was in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, where they were welcomed by Gov. Ysmael Sali and Vice Gov. Al Syed Sali.

This was followed by rice distribution in Jolo, Sulu, which was made possible by Governor Tan's support.

Later in the day, Gov. Hadjiman Hataman and Lamitan City Mayor Roderick Furigay were present as the DSWD's Field Office-9 (Zamboanga Peninsula) delivered rice to the people of Lamitan City in Basilan province.

**MOISES CRUZ**



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## ASF threat waning – DA exec

BACOLOD CITY – The threat of African swine fever (ASF) is waning, according to an official of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

In his speech at the 9th Regional Organic Agriculture Congress held at Negros Residences in this city, DA Undersecretary Zamzamin Ampatuan, however, said it remains a challenge for the government to contain the spread of ASF until a vaccine against the swine disease is developed in the country.

To address the anticipated shortage of pork during the

holiday season, Ampatuan stressed the need to enhance swine production in areas which remain ASF-free.

He said importation would also address the expected surge in the demand for pork.

Negros Occidental provincial veterinarian Dr. Placeda Lemana said hog mortalities were recently reported in La Castellana and Hinobaan towns.

Negros Occidental, which has a P6-billion swine industry, has recorded 18,000 hog mortalities since April this year, with losses estimated at P200 million.

– Gilbert Bayoran





## Dairy product demand seen rising

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

**THE Philippines is expected to produce more dairy milk next year as local consumption is increasing, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) said.**

In its Global Agriculture Information Network report, the USDA forecast Philippine dairy milk production to reach 29 million metric tons (MT) for 2024, higher than this year's estimated volume of 28 million MT. However, it noted that dairy herd growth was still slow.

"Production growth has been slow in recent years because of

the inability to increase the dairy herd, mostly due to insufficient funding and little investment from the private sector," the USDA said.

The previous forecast for 2023 dairy production was 32 million MT.

Demand for dairy in the country, meanwhile, is expected to increase by 3 percent to 3.5 million MT in

the form of liquid milk for 2024. However, the USDA said that high prices of dairy milk was slowing down growth in consumer demand.

In terms of imports, shipment of fluid milk will likely rise by 5 percent to 110,000 MT. So will cheese imports, increasing 2 percent to 53,000 MT next year.

"Despite production improvements, the Philippines supplies only 1 percent of its total annual dairy requirement, with the rest imported," the USDA said.

Average milk production in the country is 10 liters (L) per day for dairy cows; 4.5 L/day for buffalo; and 1.5 L/day for goats. This is

lower compared to the United States' average daily milk yield of around 30 L/day.

"Production [in the Philippines] remains low mainly due to poor feeding and management practices resulting from high production costs and lack of adequate infrastructure," the USDA said.

Water buffalo and goats' milk supplies were also seen to increase but "it will not offset the decrease in cow's milk production."

Cow's milk production accounted for 60 percent of expected output.

Data from Philippine Statistics Authority showed the country's

beginning inventory of dairy cattle (female dairy animals only) in 2023 was at 9,730 heads, while there are 7,240 buffaloes, and 14,908 goats.

Luzon has the top milk-producing provinces including Laguna, Bulacan and Batangas. Some provinces in Southern Mindanao are also major producers like Davao and Bukidnon.

The agency also cited the low private investments in dairy animals as one of the constraints in the dairy sector, noting that processors prefer to import low-cost powder milk over domestic producers "who cannot supply the needed volume."

Currently, a four-year dairy improvement program is being implemented by the Department of Agriculture through the National Dairy Authority and the Philippine Carabao Center to address the lack of investment in the sector.

The program has an allocation of P1.56 billion coming from residual funds from the United States Public Law 480 program.

By 2024, the project aims to produce 27.7 million liters of fresh milk and increase livestock population by almost 17,000 head, excluding the production of female calves and dairy buffaloes.





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## Rice retail prices rise by P2 per kilo

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Retail prices of rice have increased by P2 per kilo amid the rising farmgate price of palay, according to retailers' group Grains Retailers Confederation of the Philippines (GRECON).

In an interview with **The STAR**, GRECON national president James Magbanua said that in the Visayas alone, the buying price of fresh palay increased to P19 from P17 per kilo, and between P24 and P25 for dry palay.

"The farmgate price of palay has increased since last week and it follows that once the farmgate price goes up, the retail price of rice will also

go up. The P45 per kilo and P40 plus per kilo of rice is still available," Magbanua said.

He said the buying price of palay is higher in Luzon.

Farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) chairman Rosendo So earlier said the farmgate price of palay has reached P27 per kilo.

"The P27 per kilo buying price of palay is in Luzon. Here in the Visayas, it has yet to reach that level," Magbanua said.

He said he does not agree with So's proposal for President Marcos to impose another price ceiling of P45 per kilo on rice next month amid the increase in the farmgate

price of the staple.

"To me, the price cap is not advisable. It is not healthy for the economy," Magbanua said.

He said that farmers benefit from the upward trend in the farmgate price of palay.

"For the first time, I did not hear farmers complain about the low buying price of palay," he said.

Magbanua said the government should subsidize the retail price of rice instead of imposing a price ceiling.

"The government can subsidize, but not the price cap. If it will release funding, it is better to subsidize (the retail price of the grains)," he said, noting that farmers are encouraged to plant more because of the high

buying price of palay.

"We need to implement a long-term solution to increase the yield (of the farmers) and lower the production cost. These should include transfer of technology, modernization of the sector and lower the production cost of the farmers. The government should address the high cost of farm inputs," Magbanua said.

He gave assurance that the supply of rice amid the peak harvest season would be adequate.

Meanwhile, Raul Montemayor, national chairman of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), said that traders anticipate high farmgate prices after the peak harvest season

and the possible impact of the El Niño phenomenon in the increase in the buying price of palay.

"There is an uptick in palay prices, which is good for farmers. But with the large harvest coming in, I don't think prices will spike up very much. If ever in the short-term only, but the increase in palay prices – when these should be going down during the peak harvest season – indicates that traders anticipate higher prices after the harvest months, probably because of the continued high international prices and possible effects of El Niño," Montemayor said in a separate message to **The STAR**.

Montemayor said he is validating reports that retail prices of rice have increased.

Like Magbanua, he also opposed a suggestion to re-implement the price ceiling on rice.

"This (increase in the retail price of rice) should not be a reason to impose price caps and end up depressing palay prices and penalizing farmers again for something that is not their fault. The best and most reliable way to offset the increase in international prices and effects of El Niño is to encourage, not discourage, farmers to plant more by giving them a good price for their produce," he said.

– With Ramon Efren Lazaro





## Agri stakeholders push for use of tech

BY JED MACAPAGAL

LOCAL stakeholders are pushing for further modernization and digitization of the country's agricultural sector, citing its effects in maximizing the industry's potential for growth.

Buddy Tancontian, AgriDOM Solutions Corp. external relations manager, emphasized the need for farmers to adopt the technology of precision agriculture and collaboration among various stakeholders to promote sustainable farming practices and ensure food security.

"With us working together, government agencies, researchers and agriculture organizations, we must continue to support and promote agricultural innovations and initiatives that encourage these resource efficient and farming practices," said Tancontian in a recent roundtable discussion focused on technologies and innovations meant to boost the sector.

AgriDOM, a technology-based solution provider, aims to digitize, optimize and modernize the agricultural industry in the Philippines with services including the use of unmanned aerial



AgriDOM's services include the use of unmanned aerial vehicle for fertilizer and pesticide spreading and spraying. (agridomcorp.com)

vehicle and unmanned ground vehicle fertilizer and pesticide spreading and spraying; mapping, surveying and monitoring; and cold chain management, among others.

Meanwhile, Nehemiah Cabal-

long, Philippine Rice Research Institute information technology officer, said the government is now considering digitalization as a core element of the local agriculture sector and not just a means to provide support to farmers.

The roundtable discussion is part of the events that lead up to the Digital Pilipinas Festival slated next month at the SM Aura Convention Center and in various co-located venues and innovation hubs across the country.





## editorial

# Farmers, fishers lost trillions to disasters

**F**ARMERS and fishers—two of the poorest basic sectors in the Philippines—have incurred more than a trillion pesos in losses due to typhoons and other disasters. That is according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, which recently published a report that estimated the impact of disasters on agriculture. (See, “Disasters cost farm sector \$23-billion damage in 30 years—FAO,” in the BUSINESS-MIRROR, October 17, 2023).

The report, titled “The Impact of Disasters on Agriculture and Food Security 2023,” said damages caused by typhoons and other disasters in the past three decades reached at least \$23 billion or P1.26 trillion using the current exchange rate.

FAO looked at the impact of 565 disasters that struck the Philippines since 1990. Despite this, there were “none or very few figures” reported for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. This means that the final tally on the impact of disasters on agriculture production could have been much higher if data on those sectors were available.

The lack of comprehensive data on the impact of typhoons and disasters on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors is lamentable as coastal communities, including fishers, are most vulnerable to coastal flooding and coastal erosion. Measuring the extent of the damage inflicted by these disasters would allow policymakers to craft suitable interventions that would allow affected fishers to strongly bounce back from the horrors caused by strong typhoons.

The report also noted that 85 percent of the sources of the country’s production are susceptible to disasters, and 50 percent of the country’s territory is considered economically at risk.

Most of the damages included in the report focused on those related to crops and losses incurred by farmers. And this comes as no surprise for the Philippines as its rice sector usually bore the brunt of strong typhoons and erratic weather patterns.

Unfortunately for a country like the Philippines, which has remained as a net food importer, FAO warned that disaster events have increased from 100 per year in the 1970s to around 400 events per year worldwide in the past 20 years. Aside from this, disaster events are becoming more intense and complex and their impact is expected to worsen. These disaster events threaten some of the progress made by the Philippines in the past to increase farm productivity and raise food output despite the meager resources it allocates for the sector.

It would do well for our policymakers to heed FAO’s prescription to immediately transform the agrifood systems to minimize the threats posed by typhoons, droughts, and even transboundary animal diseases like the African swine fever.

FAO said governments must implement a program that will make it a norm for farmers and other stakeholders to incorporate disaster risk management into agricultural practices and policies. It said this must be done if only to prevent natural disasters and other disruptions to agricultural production from robbing farmers and fishers of trillions of pesos in potential income.





# Exec: Logistics woes crimp banana shipments to Japan

By ANDREA E. SAN JUAN [@andreasanjuan](#)

**M**ANILA should improve its logistics infrastructure to “optimize” the Philippines’s shipments of bananas and pineapples to Japan, according to Sembikiya Fruit Co. Ltd.

The company, considered one of Japan’s oldest fruit shops that imports from the Philippines, said it is experiencing logistics issues and is having difficulties importing local fruits.

Company President Hiroshi Oshima made this pronouncement during the economic dialogue between the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) and the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) held in Makati City last Tuesday.

“Recently, the Filipino banana is not being stably transported or imported into Japan. So Ecuadorian bananas are gaining more share in the Japanese banana market,” Oshima said in Japanese.

He said the fruit company processes imported fruit, adds value to it then turns it into a “Sembikiya-branded product.”

Oshima said it is important that the original fruit is of “high quality” and that the supply is stable throughout the year.

Currently, he said 95 percent of the pineapples being processed by Sembikiya are from the Philippines. “Pineapples and bananas in the Philippines are of top quality.”

As for pineapples being imported from the Philippines, the president of the Japanese fruit importer said these are “well received by consumers thanks to its high ripeness, sweetness, and rich aroma and we are using it in a wide range of menu due to its stable quality and availability.”

As for the local bananas it imports, the company described Philippine bananas as having “more sweetness, richness and flavor compared to those produced in other countries.” The company sells bananas as fresh fruit.

However, Oshima said he met with Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual to discuss not only the supply of Philippine fruits but also his concerns about quality in light of climate change.

“We met with Minister Pascual of [Department of Trade and Industry] DTI and I actually made two requests

to the minister that due to climate change, the quality is quite unstable. Due to the climate, we want more improvement in the variety which is less susceptible to the impact of climate change,” he said.

Due to the impact of climate change, Oshima said flowering is not happening according to plans. As such, appropriate timing for harvesting by natural flowering is disrupted. This, he said, has resulted in “reduction of production situation remains to be quite difficult...unable to satisfy our desired trading volume.”

Meanwhile, at the same economic dialogue, the PCCI and JCCI inked a memorandum of understanding (MOU) as both chambers aim to increase trade and expand investments between the two nations in the areas of information and communications technology and innovation, agriculture, manufacturing, franchising, tourism, services, and small and medium enterprise development, among others.

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Under the agreement, the MOU noted that “Each of the Parties shall assist the other Party in the organization of or participation in exhibitions, trade fairs, symposiums, seminars, conferences, study tours, business—matching, and other means of trade and investment promotion and similar events taking place in their territories that aim to expand business and economic cooperation.”

PCCI President George T. Barcelon said

this agreement “is an opening for us..to look into some of the many sectors that would benefit us, like in the agricultural sectors we have a potential of increasing our export of fruits.”

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed that Philippine exports to Japan in August reached \$917.98 million, a 3.5-percent decline from the \$950.81 million recorded last year while imports from Japan amounted to \$786.65 million in August 2023, down 22.4 percent from the previous year’s \$1.01 billion.





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## Soybeans, wheat drop

SINGAPORE- Chicago soybean futures lost more ground on Tuesday to hit their lowest in a week, while corn slid for a third straight session as rapidly advancing US harvests weighed on prices.

Wheat prices eased after closing marginally higher on Monday.

"The soybean market is coming under seasonal harvest pressure in the United States," said one Singapore-based trader. "Chinese demand is a bit subdued which is also putting pressure on prices."

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was down 0.2 percent at \$12.84-1/2 a bushel, after dropping earlier in the session to \$12.82-1/4 a bushel, the lowest

since Oct. 16.

Corn fell 0.3 percent to \$4.88-3/4 a bushel and wheat gave up 0.6 percent to \$5.83-1/2 a bushel.

US farmers had harvested three-quarters of their soybean crop and 59 percent of their corn by Sunday, according to weekly data from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) released on Monday.

The figures, roughly in line with trade expectations, were ahead of the five-year average pace for each crop.

In Brazil, if expected rains come this week, it will improve prospects for soy farmers who have been sowing their new crop at a slower pace in unusually hot and dry weather, experts said. -Reuters