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TYCOON, MARCOS BOYHOOD PAL LAUREL GETS AGRI POST

By Nestor Corrales
and Julie M. Aurelio
@Team_Inquirer

After 16 months since he assumed office, President Marcos on Friday chose his own replacement as full-time secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), which is tasked with ensuring the country's food security.

Mr. Marcos appointed his childhood friend and presiden-

tial campaign contributor, fishing tycoon Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., "who understands very well the problems that agriculture is facing."

"And the reason that I held on to the position of Secretary of Agriculture [all this time] was that I truly believe, and I think I was proven right, that there are many things that only a president could do and the problems were so important and were so deep," he said at a press confer-

ence at Malacañang.

But with Laurel whom he knew "since we were boys," the President said someone with "a good understanding of what it is that needs to be done, what are the problems" in the agriculture sector would be leading it.

"I am confident about his appointment because I personally know him," Mr. Marcos said.

"We have come to that point where we have a very

good idea of what needs [to be done] and where the problems lie and what we need to do to solve those problems," he said.

The Laurel family owns the Frabelle Group of Companies, which started with its fishing business in the mid-1960s and expanded into 12 industries as diverse as power generation, real estate, meat and seafood processing, cold-chain network, and shipbuilding and repair.

The 56-year-old tycoon led

the expansion of the business that his father (Francis Sr.) and mother (Bella) established in 1966 with the Frabelle brand.

Prior to his appointment, he has been serving as president of Frabelle Fishing Corp. (FFC), one of the top fishing companies in the Asia-Pacific region, since 1985 and director of Frabelle Corp. since 2010. He was also a member of the President's Private Advisory Council in the agriculture sector. Mr.

Marcos said he had ordered the new agriculture secretary to control the unabated rise in the prices of agricultural products and to find ways to increase production and lower its cost.

"That's the first thing that our new secretary will have to do," he said.

According to the President, the country could learn how to do this from its neighbors, such as Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam.



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Speaking at the same press conference, Laurel said farmers and fishermen "are close to my heart because I have personally seen their struggles and dreams."

In an interview with CEO Magazine in 2016, Laurel said he started learned fishing under his father's guidance in his teens.

For five years, he said, he spent an average of 45 days at sea on one of their fishing boats.

Modernizing agriculture

"I was at the frontline, connecting with our people, our captains, and our crew," he said. "While you are onboard a ship, there is so much machinery and engineering to use and operate, which I gladly helped out with. I learned so much from those experiences."

Laurel said his father regularly sent him to Japan to train in, among others, refrigeration, food manufacturing and ship-building.

"I became competent in so many real-life situations out in the field. I travelled all over Japan and all over Asia to visit factories, see how they were run, and understand what they produced," he said in the magazine interview.

He told Malacañang report-

ers that one of the top items on his agenda would be to modernize the agriculture sector.

"My main goal is to ensure that our harvest is abundant and make sure that it reaches the table of every Filipino," he said. "My goal is to ensure that there is enough and healthy food that our countrymen can buy at the right price."

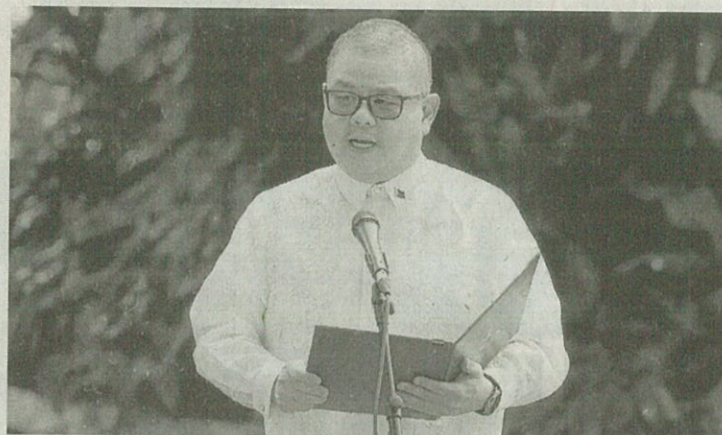
'Political payoff'

In an interview with the Inquirer last July, retired crop science professor Teodoro Mendoza said Mr. Marcos "should make sure, too, that farmers will have a fair and just income."

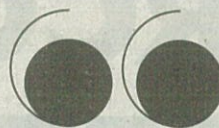
Laurel, a computer science graduate from the University of Santo Tomas, holds other positions such as president of Markham Resources Corporation, Bacoor Seafront Development Corporation and Diamond Export Corporation; and chair of Westpac Meat Processing Corporation, Bukidnon Hydro Energy Corporation and Diamond Export Corporation.

According to Frabelle's website, Laurel also trained in net manufacturing, engine overhauling, electronics, hydraulics and ship repair.

One lawmaker criticized his appointment for being a "political payoff" for his P30 million contribution to Mr. Marcos' 2022 campaign kitty, while other representatives said the Pres-



CHILDHOOD FRIEND Fishing magnate Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. takes his oath of office on Nov. 3 as secretary of the Department of Agriculture, a post concurrently held by President Marcos for 16 months. The childhood friend of Mr. Marcos contributed P30 million to his presidential campaign in 2022. —**MARIANNE BERMUDEZ**



My goal is to ensure that there is enough and healthy food that our countrymen can buy at the right price

Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.
Agriculture Secretary

ident made a prudent choice.

ACT Teachers Rep. France Castro questioned the qualifications of Laurel in heading the agriculture department, aside

from being a "crony" of Mr. Marcos and president of a deep sea fishing company.

Laurel also donated P20 million to Sen. Juan Miguel

Zubiri's campaign and supported Sen. Robin Padilla's nearly P8.75-million worth of airtime on GMA Network.

Castro cited an allegation by the fisherfolk group Pamalakaya that FFC was the "driving force" behind a 420-hectare reclamation project that displaced over 700 fishing families from two coastal villages in Bacoor City, Cavite.

In 2020, Pamalakaya said the reclamation project would violate a 2008 Supreme Court directive ordering 13 government agencies to clean up, rehabilitate and preserve Manila Bay.

Wealth of experience

"So aside from producing canned fish and reclaiming land that is causing floods in Metro Manila and Central Luzon, what are the qualifications of Laurel to head the DA? Mr. Marcos should not be using government posts to pay off his political debt. It is better to look for someone else who is more apt for the position and will truly serve farmers," Castro said.

She also warned that the importation of agricultural products, which became "more pronounced" during Mr. Marcos' leadership of the DA, may "just continue or even become worse" under Laurel.

Other House members led by Speaker Martin Romualdez disagreed with Castro.

Romualdez said Laurel's 30 years of experience in the private sector equipped him "with a wealth of experience that will be invaluable in steering our country's agriculture and fisheries sectors" and that it made him "well-suited" for the job at hand.

"His firsthand experience in managing a large-scale operation gives him insights into the intricacies of supply chains, market demands, and global trends," he added.

Innovative, sustainable

House majority leader Rep. Manuel Jose Dalipe agreed that Laurel's familiarity with cutting-edge technologies for food preservation and storage "will translate to lesser food wastage and longer shelf life" for agricultural products.

Kabayan Rep. Ron Salo said he was "particularly excited" about the possible creation of a new Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, which is now under the agriculture department.

"With his strong background in the fisheries industry, I anticipate innovative approaches and sustainable practices that will not only boost the fisheries sector but also preserve our aquatic resources for future generations," Salo said. —**WITH A REPORT FROM**

INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ



AGRI GROUPS AIR COMMON WISH LISTS FOR LAUREL

NEW DA CHIEF ASKED TO 'REVERSE PRO-IMPORT BIAS' AT AGENCY

Industry stakeholders expressed hope that the newly appointed head of the Department of Agriculture (DA), business tycoon Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., would veer away from the longtime bane of local food producers: mass importation.

Various groups representing farmers, fisherfolk and agribusiness entrepreneurs and traders on Friday gave their respective wish lists for Laurel as he took over a crucial economic post held for a year and four months by President Marcos.

They all shared the view that the sector should finally see the long-promised reforms to bring down the cost of farm inputs, improve facilities and infrastructure, and secure an environment where small-time farmers and fishermen can thrive and compete.

For starters, Laurel "could work on reversing the pro-import bias of some DA officials and the economic managers," according to an official of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF).

Rooted in reality

"He will also have to invest in an honest-to-goodness data and information system," said FFF national manager Raul Montemayor.

The new agriculture secretary should "listen closely and act promptly" on the concerns of "small farmers, municipal fishers and other disadvantaged members" of the sector.

Elias Jose Inciong, president of the United Broiler Raisers Association, noted how the country's economic managers had "cherry-picked provisions (of trade laws and treaty commitments) to suit their dogma of import liberalization."

"We hope that he will have directions based on reality, i.e. the experiences of farmers and fisherfolk, and not on the false narrative of economists that the sector is protected," Inciong said.

Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) said it would wait for the new DA chief's position concerning calls to reject all proposals to reduce tariffs on imported agricultural commodities.

"We hope that he'll live up to the expectations and directive(s) of the President (PBBM) in supporting local production, boosting the local agri industries; and that importation is only last resort and not the principal policy," Sinag executive director Jayson Cainglet said.

Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines Inc. (ProPork) said that given the challenges faced by the sector, Laurel can foster stronger collaboration with local producers and show a "firm commitment" to scrap the implementation of reduced tariff rates.

ProPork president Rolando Tambago said the new DA leadership should have a "strong political will to implement harmonized policies (in the nation-

al and local government levels) that favor local producers."

According to United Sugar Producers Federation (Unifed) president Manuel Lamata, the group is ready to present to Laurel the real state of the sugarcane industry and "how the department can extend its assistance and resources to" sugar farmers.

Show of confidence

Expressing confidence in the new Cabinet official, Philippine Association of Meat Processors Inc. president Felix Tiukinhoy Jr. said an agribusiness leader like Laurel should be "able to manage the agriculture portfolio efficiently and well."

"We welcome his appointment. He is very competent and familiar with realities and challenges of production post-harvest and marketing," added Asis Peres, convener of Tugon Kabuhayan.

Meat Importers and Traders Association president emeritus Jesus Cham said the new DA chief "brings with him a wealth of experience and understanding covering livestock and fisheries sector."

Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (Pcafi) president Danilo Fausto said the group had been "expecting his appointment for more than week now."

"We had [a] preliminary meeting with him two weeks ago and we had expressed our full support and cooperation for

the benefit of our agriculture stakeholders," Fausto added.

'Many vested interests'

The country's largest business organization, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI), also welcomed Laurel's appointment.

PCCI president George Barcelon said Mr. Marcos made the right decision in tapping Laurel, "a very successful businessman" with both local and international experience that would be "helpful" in his new job.

"Another important thing is that a secretary has been selected (to succeed the President) because there has been a clamor for (it) since the position is too important to not be given 100-percent focus," he added.

Laurel's vast business network could give him an advantage, Barcelon said. "There are many vested interests in the agriculture sector, be it traders or farmers. But the issue of being equitable—like our issues with importation and the supply of sugar—is something a businessman with enough acumen will be able to address."

Given Laurel's background mainly in the fisheries and food processing business, Barcelon said, the PCCI expects local fisheries to be given the focus it deserves under the new secretary.

PCCI plans to meet with the new DA chief in early December for an initial discussion on the reforms or policy recom-

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mendations being pushed by the chamber.

Barcelon cited the proposed amendments to the agrarian reform law, particularly to extend the land retention limit in order to make commercial production more viable, as well as the inclusion of a private sector representative on the board of the Sugar Regulatory Administration.

'GG' price as gauge

The fisherfolk group Pamalakaya hoped that President Marcos' successor in the DA would renounce trade liberalization policies that allow imported fish of "cheap and inferior quality" to flood local markets to the disadvantage of local fishermen.

"The fishers are giving a standing order to the new DA secretary to strengthen local food production by renouncing liberalization policies of importation of agricultural and fisheries products," Pamalakaya national president Fernando Hicap said in a statement.

According to Hicap, the Philippines imported more than 200,000 metric tons of various pelagic fishes from 2018 to 2022, based on Pamalakaya's monitoring. Most of the imports were from China and Taiwan.

This was an "insult" to the country's fishing sector, he said, and it continued when the DA approved in August another importation of 35,000 metric tons of fish for the fourth quar-

ter of 2023.

"The DA secretary should know that opening floodgates for imported fishery products (has a) drastic impact on the livelihood of local fisherfolk," Hicap said.

The farm-gate value of round scad, or "galunggong," for example, drops from P70 to P80 per kilo to just P50 to P60 per kilo "every time the Philippine government allows the importation of tens of thousands of metric tons" of this variety.

'Doable measures'

Aside from shunning importation, Laurel may boost the productivity of small fishermen by providing "sufficient" production subsidies and calamity assistance for fishermen, ensuring their safety and freedom of movement in traditional fishing grounds within Philippine waters, and opposing reclamation projects that damage marine resources and undermine the livelihood of coastal communities.

"These are all doable measures to ensure that the country will not fall short on fisheries production and that our country can be food self-sufficient," Hicap said. "All it takes is political will from the new agriculture chief to stand alongside fisherfolk and farmers for significant and genuine reforms in the agriculture and fisheries." —REPORTS

FROM JORDEENE B. LAGARE, ALDEN M. MONZON AND DEMPSEY REYES INQ



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BBM turns over DA post to fishing tycoon

After more than a year of running the Department of Agriculture (DA), President Marcos has handed over the post to his long-time friend, fishing tycoon Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., with the first marching orders to boost production and bring down food prices.

Marcos announced Laurel's ap-

pointment during a press conference on Friday morning at Malacañang after administering the latter's oath of office.

"It is time that we have found somebody who understands very well the problems that agriculture is facing," Marcos said of Laurel, who was standing next to him.

Laurel served as president of Frabelle Fishing Corp., the world's third largest tuna fishing company, from 1985 to Oct. 31 this year. He was also a member of the Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector Group.

Marcos said he is banking on
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Businessman Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. takes his oath as new secretary of the Department of Agriculture after being appointed by President Marcos, who occupied the position concurrently for over a year.

BBM From Page 1

Laurel's years of experience in the fishing industry. "We are confident, Secretary Kiko and I are confident, that we have a fair understanding, a good understanding of what it is that needs to be done, what are the problems," he said.

Marcos also vouched for Laurel's integrity and competence to lead the DA, which the Chief Executive said is one of the most important government agencies.

"I have known Secretary Laurel for a long time. I've known him since we were boys. So, I am confident in appointing him because I know his

qualities. First of all, I know he's hard working. Second, he understands well the agricultural system here in the Philippines," Marcos said. "So, we all expect that he will do a very good job."

Laurel was one of Marcos' top donors in the 2022 presidential elections, according to a *Bilyonaryo.com* report last month.

The President said he decided to name a full-time agriculture chief after finally coming up with "very good idea" to address the challenges faced by the sector.

Asked about his first marching orders to Laurel, Marcos said gaining control over rising prices of agricultural goods is an issue that

needs to be immediately resolved.

"The obvious one is try and gain control of the prices of all the agricultural commodities that are going up," Marcos said.

Full support

Agri stakeholders and various farmers' groups backed the appointment of Laurel, expressing their full support and readiness to work closely with the new DA secretary.

"We are expecting his appointment for more than a week now. We had a preliminary meeting with him two weeks ago and we had expressed our full support and cooperation for the benefit of our agriculture stakeholders. We welcome him

and we wish him all the luck and the blessings of our Lord," Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. president Danilo Fausto said.

"The Federation of Free Farmers welcomes the appointment of a full-time Secretary of Agriculture. We wish Secretary Francis Tiu Laurel Jr. success in his new position, and we are prepared to work closely with him," former agriculture secretary and Federation of Free Farmers chairman Leonardo Montemayor said.

United Broiler Raisers Association president Elias Jose Inciong and Philippine Egg Board chairman Gregorio San Diego said they would

keep an open mind on the appointment of Laurel.

Meat Importers and Traders Association president Jesus Cham said Laurel "brings with him a wealth of experience and understanding covering the livestock and fisheries sector."

Former Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources director Asis Perez said the new DA secretary "is very competent and familiar with realities and challenges of production, post-harvest and marketing."

Meanwhile, Philippine Association of Meat Processors Inc. president Felix Tiukinhoy Jr. expressed confidence that Laurel will be able



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to manage the agriculture portfolio efficiently and well, given that he is a proven and tested agri-business entrepreneur.

Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines Inc. president Rolando Tambago said the group hopes the new agriculture chief will promote and strengthen local production, which would boost agri industries.

Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura executive director Jayson Cainglet said the new agriculture secretary should commit "that he will reject, much more to support, all proposals to reduce tariffs on all agricultural commodities."

The Philippine Fisheries Development Authority said it is ready to work with the new agri chief in providing world-class fishery post-harvest facilities and quality service.

Sugar Regulatory Administration chief Pablo Azcona and presidents of various sugar planters' federations in the country also welcomed the appointment of Laurel.

"We commit to you our full cooperation as you begin the challenging but rewarding job of managing the country's agricultural assets in general, and the sugar industry in particular. To this end, we look forward to meeting you," the Sugar Council said in a statement.

For its part, fisherfolk group Pamalakaya urged Laurel to eliminate liberalization policies that enable the importation of agri-fisheries products to the detriment of local food producers.

Amihan National Federation of Peasant Women secretary general Cathy Estavillo said Laurel's appointment was not a surprise as President Marcos was only settling a political debt. Laurel was reportedly one of Marcos' top donors in the 2022 elections.

'Give him time'

Senators are giving Laurel time to prove himself after being appointed by President Marcos to the agriculture portfolio.

Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri welcomed the appointment of Laurel as the new secretary of the DA, saying that "Kiko Laurel has the management experience and the common touch to lead what is perhaps the most important agency in the country today."

"It's a good decision to appoint a full-time secretary for the Department of Agriculture as increasing our food production must be our top priority. Now, if the question is if Mr. Tiu Laurel is a good choice for DA sec, let us give him time to prove himself," Senate Minority Leader

Aquilino Pimentel III said.

Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian said Laurel's appointment to the DA is a signal that the agriculture sector needs practical and sensible solutions to boost productivity.

"Let's give him the chance to work. He comes with a fisheries background. But the agricultural industry is more than just fisheries and its underlying issues are firmly rooted. Only the passage of time will reveal whether the President's decision to appoint him was a wise one," Sen. Francis Tolentino added.

"I am wishing newly appointed Sec. Francisco Laurel all the best to be able to fix a very complicated problem that is the Department of Agriculture," Sen. Joseph Victor Ejercito stated.

"I know him to be a sincere, no-nonsense, honest and hardworking patriot. I congratulate Sec. Tiu-Laurel on his appointment, wish him well and look forward to working with him," Sen. Francis Escudero said.

Sen. Grace Poe said Laurel must have the focus, fortitude to get things done and genuine feeling for the sector.

"As the first order of the day, we hope the new DA chief would take to heart the President's warning in his SONA against smugglers, hoarders and price fixers," Poe said.

"Laurel is the right man for the job. He brings with him decades of hands-on experience in the agricultural sector. There is no doubt on his competence and capability in steering the department towards the revitalization of agriculture and attaining food security in the country," Sen. Bong Revilla said.

Sen. Cynthia Villar said the President has the prerogative on who to appoint. "Let us respect his decision," she said.

Even opposition Sen. Risa Hontiveros welcomed the appointment of Laurel, but vowed to verify murmurs of conflict of interest during his confirmation at the Commission on Appointments (CA).

"We will await Secretary Tiu-Laurel when he goes before the Commission on Appointments, so these issues affecting his capacity to lead the DA can be scrutinized and the concerns of our peasant farmers and fisherfolk discussed," the senator said.

The House of Representatives, led by Speaker Martin Romualdez, also welcomed yesterday the appointment Laurel to the DA.

According to Romualdez, Laurel's "extensive background in the

private sector provides him with a wealth of experience that will be invaluable in his new job."

For House Majority Leader and Zamboana City Rep. Mannix Dalipe, Pres. Marcos made a "perfect choice" in appointing the "fishing magnate" as his replacement in DA.

House committee on agriculture and food and Quezon Rep. Mark Enverga underscored the new secretary's "leadership and experience bring positive changes to the agriculture sector in the country."

Panel vice chair and Quezon Rep. David Suarez also pointed out that aside from Laurel's vast experience, they believe he will bring "innovation and vigor to the department that sits at the forefront of Pres. Marcos' agenda and vision for a Bagong Pilipinas."

Agri Partylist Rep. Wilbert Lee has expressed hope that Laurel will be able to continue the programs and projects implemented by the President to develop the country's agricultural sector.

But for House Deputy Minority Leader and ACT Teachers party-list Rep. France Castro, Laurel's appointment "seems to be a political payback," as she pointed out that Laurel contributed at least P30 million to the President's campaign in 2022 through the Partido Federal ng Pilipinas.

Castro maintained the President should not use government positions to pay back those who helped him as she questioned Laurel's qualifications. — Helen Flores, Mark Ernest Villeza, Bella Carias, Cecille Suerte Felipe, Sheila Crisostomo, Danessa Rivera, Gilbert Bayoran

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EDITORIAL

Finally, a DA chief

After 16 months of serving concurrently as the secretary of the Department of Agriculture, President Marcos has finally relinquished the post. Yesterday he swore in his campaign donor Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. as DA chief. The shipping tycoon has his work cut out for him.

Since the start of the Marcos administration, among the biggest problems have been food security and other agriculture-related issues. There were supply shortages and consequent price spikes in basic commodities, from sugar to large broilers to onions and, recently, rice. The problems were linked to hoarding, profiteering and low production as well as the continuing Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Food inflation has been fueling the high inflation rate. Last year, confectionery and other sweetened food items drove food inflation. The government has yet to provide a satisfactory explanation for the anomalous importation of 440,000 metric tons of refined white sugar at the start of 2023 – a deal awarded to just three lucky entities handpicked by the DA. The importation combined with the start of the sugarcane harvest failed to soften sugar prices.

In the latest inflation figures, the key driver was the spike in rice prices, which an ill-conceived price cap failed to tame. Rice supply has always been a politically sensitive issue in this country, but even more so for President Marcos, who had campaigned for the nation's top

post on a promise of providing rice at P20 a kilo.

Meanwhile, only 11 provinces as of this week can boast of being completely free of African swine fever, which has devastated the country's hog industry. Domestic producers, however, insist that there is enough pork supply and there is no need for increased importation. What is needed, they say, is to tighten procedures in clearing the entry of imported pork and pork products, which they blame for the spread of ASF.

Laurel, owner of Frabelle Fishing Corp., will be assuming the top DA post amid concerns raised by fishers' organizations about policies he might pursue that could be detrimental to small-scale fishermen. The marginal fisherfolk are opposing a proposal to allow large commercial fishing boats to enter the municipal waters – 15 kilometers from the shoreline – reserved for small-scale fishing.

And speaking of resources, the country, which has one of the world's most extensive coastlines, needs to wean itself from a disgraceful dependence on imports for its salt needs. Laurel will have to oversee this effort, in coordination with other concerned agencies.

One thing in which there is general agreement is that having a full-time, hands-on secretary of agriculture, who will not be distracted by the enormous demands of the presidency, is a positive development. The nation can only hope that Laurel will not disappoint.

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Romualdez hails outgoing DA chief Marcos for 'dedicated service'

By ELLSON QUISMORIO

President Marcos deserves praise for his "dedicated service" and "tireless efforts" as Department of Agriculture (DA) secretary, according to House Speaker Martin Romualdez.

"I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for his dedicated service as the outgoing secretary of Agriculture," Romualdez said in a statement Friday, Nov. 3. "His tireless efforts have laid a solid foundation for the department, addressing crucial issues and setting clear goals to uplift the lives of our farmers and fisherfolk."

On Friday, the chief executive finally vacated his DA post following his appointment of Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. as full-time secretary of

the agency.

"It is my hope that Secretary Tiu-Laurel will build on this groundwork to further enhance the lives of ordinary Filipinos, ensuring that the collective interests of farmers and fisherfolk are prioritized," added Romualdez, who represents Leyte's 1st district in Congress.

Marcos announced that he would temporarily serve as DA chief on July 21, 2022, or nine days ahead of his first day as Philippine president.

During his time as agriculture chief, issues on the onion price surge, rice price surge, and agricultural smuggling in general grabbed headlines.

Marcos addressed these issues via policy pronouncements as well as the active participation of Romualdez and the House through its oversight function.

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Meet new Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel

From handling his family's business, fishing tycoon Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. will now lead the country's Agriculture department currently hounded by rising prices and issues on production and supply.

Laurel, Kiko to his friends and colleagues, joined his family's business—Frabelle Fishing Corporation—in 1985, where he moved from division to division, learning as much as he can about the company's operations and processes first hand.

He trained in refrigeration, net manufacturing, engine overhauling, electronics, hydraulics, food manufacturing, shipbuilding, and ship repair.

Frabelle Fishing Corporation is the ► 9

NEW DA CHIEF — Business tycoon Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. speaks after his induction as new Agriculture Secretary by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. during a press conference in Malacañang in Manila on Friday, Nov. 3, 2023. (Noel Pabalate)

Meet new Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel 1◀

world's third largest tuna fishing company with a major presence in the Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and many other major regions across the globe.

Prior to his appointment to the DA post, Laurel also held the following positions: president of Agusan Power Corporation which operates a 24.9-megawatt Hydro Electric Power plant in Agusan del Norte and chairman of the World Tuna Purse Seine Organization that advocates sustainable resource management of fishing operations

globally and a member of the Private Sector Advisory Council for Agriculture.

Currently, he is a captain and commander in the Naval Affiliated Reserve Force NCR (WESPHIL) of the Philippine Navy.

Laurel, 56, is President Marcos' long-time friend.

During the announcement of his appointment at Malacañan Palace, with reporters and Laurel's family in attendance, Marcos said he has known him since they were boys.

According to Marcos, his long-

time friendship with Laurel, whom he also calls Kiko, has given him the confidence to appoint him to the post he held on for more than a year.

"I've known him since we were boys. So, malakas ang loob ko na ma-i-appoint siya kasi kilala ko pagkatao niya. Alam kong napaka-sipag nito, unang-una. Pangalawa, nauunawaan niya nang mabuti ang sistema ng agrikultura dito sa Pilipinas (So, I am confident to appoint him because I know his whole personality. I know that he is hard-working and he understands very well the system of agriculture here in the Philippines)," Marcos said as he vouched for his long-time friend.

"So, I am expecting that he will do a good job," he said. (Bethena Unite)



Marcos names fishing tycoon as new DA chief

By BETHEENA UNITE

President Marcos has appointed fishing tycoon Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. as Department of Agriculture secretary, relinquishing the Cabinet portfolio he had held in concurrent capacity since he took office last year.

Marcos announced Laurel's appointment in a press briefing at Malacañan Palace on Friday, Nov. 3.

"It is time that we have found somebody who understands very well

the problems that agriculture is facing," he told Malacañang reporters shortly after administering the oath of office of Laurel.

The President said he has finally appointed a full-time DA secretary because he is now confident that he found someone who understands the agriculture sector given Laurel's long-time experience in the fishery sector.

"I'd like also to put a little background to it, the reason for the timing is that now we are ► **9**



Marcos names fishing tycoon as new DA chief 1◀

confident—Secretary Kiko and I are confident that we have a fair understanding, a good understanding of what it is that needs to be done, what are the problems,” he stressed.

It took Marcos more than a year to appoint a full-time DA secretary as he believes that “there are many things that only a president could do.”

“And the problems were so important and were so deep that I felt that the authority and, I supposed, the moral suasion of a president was necessary for us to be able to figure out, and it really was, agriculture is a much, much more a complicated thing than most people understand,” he said.

Control rising prices

Laurel’s first matching order is to control the rising prices of agricultural commodities.

“Well, the obvious one is to try and gain control of the prices of all the agricultural commodities that are going up at tinatamaan tayo (affecting us),” the President said in a press briefing at the Malacañan Palace.

The rising prices of agricultural goods such as onion and rice is among the factors that compelled Marcos to handle the Agriculture department since he assumed the presidency last year.

“In the immediate term, hindi lang short-term, kung hindi in the immediate term kailangan natin ma-control at tingnan natin kung paano natin gagawin (not only short-term, but also in the immediate term, we need to control it and see how we will do it),” Marcos said.

The President also expects Laurel to provide solutions to the problems faced by farmers and fisherfolk due to climate change.

“[W]ala naman tayong kontrol diyan kaya’t kailangan talaga makapag-isip tayo ng mga bagong sistema, mga bagong estratehiya upang ito naman ay mabigyan natin ng solusyon at hindi pahirapan ang taong-bayan (We have no control over that so we really need to come up with a new system, new strategy so that we can provide solution to this to ease the burden of the people),” Marcos said.

He also expects the new DA chief to address animal diseases that hound the agriculture sector such as swine flu and avian flu.

The chief executive wants Laurel to come up with longer term solutions on production and cost production mechanization.

Laurel was also asked to look into the methods used by Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam and learn from them.

The new DA secretary said one of the first things he will do is to ask the cooperation of everyone in the department as he needs the team “to be intact.”

“I need the team to be intact and buo ang loob para magawa ang—at para ma-meet ang target and goals natin (and be strong hearted to meet our targets and goals),” Laurel said.

Agriculture modernization

Laurel is eyeing the modernization of the Philippines’ agriculture sector to ensure ample food supply in the country.

He said modernization of the country’s agriculture sector is key to improving the welfare of fishers and farmers.

“Pangunahing adhikain ko ang pagtiyak na sagana ang ating ani at siguraduhing ito ay nakakarat-ing sa hapag ng bawat Pilipino. Layunin ko na tiyakin na may sapat at masustansyang pagkain na mabibili ang ating mga kababayan sa tamang halaga (My main goal is to ensure abundant harvest and make sure it reaches the table of every Filipino. My goal is to ensure there is enough and nutritious food that our countrymen can buy at the right price),” he said. “Susi rito ang modernisasyon ng sector ng agrikultura kasabay ng pagpapabuti ka sa kapakanan ng ating mga kapatid na mga magsasaka at mangin-gisda. Ating siguraduhin na sila ay makikinabang sa mga bunga ng kanilang pagod at pagsisikap (The key to this is the modernization of the agricultural sector while improving the welfare of our fellow farmers and fishermen. We will make sure that they benefit from the fruits of their hard work and efforts).”

According to Laurel, he will lay

out his plans as agriculture secretary in the following days.

The new DA chief said his office will always be open to farmers and fishers.

“Handa akong makinig at maka-trabaho kayo. Higit sa lahat, ako ay handa na magtrabaho para sa inyo (I am ready to listen and work with you. Above all, I am ready to work for you),” he said.

He said farmers and fishers are very close to his heart because he has personally witnessed their struggles and dreams.

Laurel has been president of Frabelle Fishing Corporation since 1985 and the director of Frabelle Corporation since 2010. He trained in refrigeration, net manufacturing, engine overhauling, electronics, hydraulics, food manufacturing, shipbuilding, and ship repair.

His appointment came as a confirmation of earlier rumors that he will be the next DA secretary. The Palace did not confirm those rumors.

‘He will do a very good job’

Marcos is confident Laurel will do “a very good job” as head of the Agriculture department, which he considers as “one of the most important departments in our government.”

“Matagal ko nang kilala si Secretary Laurel. I’ve known him since we were boys so, malakas ang loob ko na mai-appoint siya kasi kilala ko ang pagkatao niya. Alam ko na napakasipag nito unang una; pangalawa, nauunawaan niya ng mabuti ang sistema ng agrikultura dito sa Pilipinas. Kaya’t inaasahan natin lahat na he will do a very good job (I have known Secretary Laurel for a long time. I’ve known him since we were boys so I am confident to appoint him because I know his whole personality. I know that he is hard-working and he understands very well the system of agriculture here in the Philippines. So, I am expecting that he will do a good job),” the chief executive vouched.

Marcos also said that designating Laurel as Agriculture head is like tapping the private sector to join the government in its pursuit to solve the problems hounding the sector.

The President said Laurel understands these problems, the solutions needed to be done, and has a good network of experts who can help the government provide solutions to the agricultural problems. (With a report from Jel Santos)



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Farmers, business hail Malacanang decision to appoint new DA chief

By BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT

The agriculture sector, particularly the farmers and meat processors, said they are willing to work with the new agriculture chief as they hailed the decision of Malacanang to finally appoint a new agriculture secretary, a position held in concurrent capacity by President Marcos since he assumed office on June 30, 2022.

In separate statements, the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) and the Philippine Association of Meat Processors Inc. (PAMPI) said they welcomed the appointment of Francis Tiu Laurel Jr. as full-time Secretary of Agriculture.

"We wish Secretary Francis Tiu Laurel Jr. success in his new position, and we are prepared to work closely with him," said FFF Chairman Leonardo Montemayor.

At the same time, FFF expressed the hope that the new secretary will "listen closely to and act promptly on the concerns particularly of small farmers, municipal fishers and other disadvantaged members of the agricultural sector."

From the meat processors, PAMPI congratulated Laurel Jr. and wished him success in his new role as head of the DA.

"As a proven and tested agribusi-

ness entrepreneur, we are confident that he will be able to manage the agriculture portfolio efficiently and well," said PAMPI President Felix Tiukinhoy Jr.

"We hope that all sectors of agriculture provide him needed advice and support to ensure that agriculture becomes a strong pillar of the national economy."

PAMPI also extends their full support and cooperation to the department of agriculture under Laurel's watch.

The Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI), the voice of business in the country, expressed great relief that finally the President

has found someone he can rely on to handle the agriculture portfolio.

PCCI President George T. Barcelon said that the mandate for the new agriculture secretary would be largely to help implement measures to control the stubborn inflation.

Barcelon said the most important concerns the secretary should focus his attention on is management of supply and demand and logistical issues to reduce prices, especially for the basic goods. He said these requires management skills of the new secretary.



FRANCIS TIU LAUREL JR.



Tiu Jr.'s appointment as DA chief: Tested competence or 'payback'?

By Samuel P. Medenilla

NEWLY appointed Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco "Kiko" Tiu Laurel Jr. will be facing an uphill battle in trying to level off high food prices and reach the expectations of his predecessor President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. himself.

Last Friday, Marcos finally announced the appointment of Laurel, a food business tycoon and one of his top campaign donors in the 2022 polls, at a news conference in Malacañang.

Agriculture expert

THE chief executive said he decided to turnover the leadership of DA, which he held for over a year, since he is confident in the capability of Laurel to address the "complicated" issues in the agriculture sector.

"We have found somebody who understands very well the problems that agriculture is facing and the reason for the timing," Marcos said.

He said Laurel, whom he has known since his childhood, has established a strong presence in the agriculture sector as President of Frabelle Group of Companies (FGC) and a member of the Private Sector Advisory Council (PSAC) agriculture sector.

The FGC is engaged in fishing, aquaculture, canning, food manufacturing, and processing, food importation, cold storage, real estate and power generation.

"He knows and is close to those called experts professionals [in the sector], which he can easily approach, who can help give solutions to our problems in agriculture," Marcos said.

Laurel graduated from the University of Santo Tomas with a degree in computer science.

Pricey food

FOREMOST of the said issues, he said, which wants Laurel to prioritize are the high prices of agricultural commodities.

Since the President served as the concurrent secretary of the DA last year the prices of onion, sugar and rice, and recently potatoes suffered a price spike.

"We need to control [food prices] and see what we can do," Marcos said.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported the food inflation shoot up last September after rice prices accelerated 17.9 percent from 8.7 percent in the previous month.

This despite the price cap Marcos imposed for regular milled rice and well-milled rice during the said period.

The Chief Executive attributed the surge in the prices of rice, onions, and sugar to price manipulation by food smugglers and hoarders.

To resolve the matter, DA under the leadership of Laurel is eyeing to reduce the

country's reliance on imports by boosting local farm production through mechanization and emulating the best agriculture practices of other countries, such as Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

"The key [to addressing this problem] is the modernization of the agriculture sector and [improving] the welfare of our farmers and fisherfolk," Laurel said.

Other challenges

LAUREL was also tasked by the President to stop the spread of animal diseases such as the Avian Flu and African swine fever, which have caused millions of financial losses in the poultry and livestock industry, respectively.

DA is currently eyeing to secure the necessary vaccines to stop the spread of both diseases.

Marcos said he also wants the new DA chief to deal with the impact of climate change to agriculture.

Last March, the Climate Change Commission announced the government would be using \$39.3 million to provide farmers with data and low emission technologies.

Laurel said he would disclose his plans to achieve the demands set by Marcos in the coming days.

Credibility issues

IN a message, Ateneo School of Government Dean Randy P. Tñaño told the *BUSINESSMIRROR* that the appointment of an industry player as the new head of DA was an expected development.

He also noted no less than agriculture stakeholders have been calling for an appointment of a "full-time" secretary in DA, who knows the industry.

"Traditionally, the President has appointed someone from the business sector as the Agriculture department secretary, so President Marcos has not broken this trend," Tñaño said.

Tñaño, however, pointed out Laurel will face challenges in to his credibility as the new

head of DA early, which include allegation that his appointment was "payback" for his P30-million campaign contribution to Marcos' presidential bid.

"That's an issue that the President and Mr. Tiu Laurel would need to address early on," Tñaño said.

He also said the business tycoon must divest from his business interests to preserve the credibility of his leadership in DA.

"Mr. Tiu Laurel would need to divest from his business interests and also from his other professional associations before he begins as secretary. He would need to resign from the Private Sector Advisory Council as well," Tñaño suggested.

Presidential Communications Office Secretary Cheloy V. Garafil said Laurel already divested his interests from his companies.



PBBM names fishing tycoon Tiu Laurel Jr. as new DA chief

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA,
BUTCH FERNANDEZ &
JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Friday announced the appointment of fish tycoon Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. as the new secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The Chief Executive made the announcement at a news conference in Malacañang.

Marcos said he decided to turnover the leadership of DA, which he held for over a year, since he is confident in the capability of Tiu Laurel, whom he has known since childhood, to address the issues, which he identified in the agriculture sector.

"We have come to that point where we have a very good idea where the problems lie and where, what we need to do to solve those problems," the President said.

'Focus, fortitude'

SENATOR Grace Poe, citing the gargantuan tasks ahead facing newly named DA chief, said Tiu Laurel, must "have the focus, fortitude to get things done and genuine feeling for the sector."

Reminding Tiu Laurel that agriculture is a vital component of the economy, providing food on the table and sustaining the livelihood of millions, Poe however noted the sector "has been on a steady decline as a contributor to growth and employment generation."

She suggested, "As the first order of the day, we hope the new DA chief would take to heart the President's warning in his State of the Nation Address against smugglers, hoarders and price fixers."

Tiu Laurel thanked the President for his appointment and committed to prioritize the modernization of the agriculture sector to help boost its production and ensure the welfare of farmers and fisherfolk.

"It is my main objective to ensure a bountiful harvest to ensure it will reach the tables of Filipinos," Tiu Laurel said.

Marcos instructed Tiu Laurel to gain control of the prices of food commodities and address the impact of

climate change to agriculture.

Laurel is the President of Frabelle Fishing Corporation and director of the Frabella Corporation.

He also served as honorary consul of the Federated States of Micronesia in the Philippines.

Finding the balance

HOUSE Speaker Martin G. Romualdez, for his part, expressed optimism that the appointment of Tiu Laurel as the new secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA) will lead to policies that balance profit with public welfare, ensuring fair compensation for farmers and fishermen, improved access to modern technologies, and opportunities for growth.

"I warmly welcome the appointment of Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. to the helm of the Department of Agriculture. Secretary Tiu-Laurel's extensive background in the private sector provides him with a wealth of experience that will be invaluable in steering our country's agriculture and fisheries sectors," said Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez.

"The private sector, with its innovation, efficiency, and competitive spirit, has much to offer when integrated with public sector objectives. By merging private sector strategies with the public sector's broader goals, we can harness the best of both worlds," he added.

According to Romualdez, Tiu Laurel's leadership of Frabelle Fishing Corporation showcases the potential of private enterprises in bolstering the nation's food security, economic growth, and technological advancements in agriculture.

"His firsthand experience in managing a large-scale operation gives him insights into the intricacies of supply chains, market demands, and global trends. This expertise will be instrumental in fostering partnerships between the government and private entities, bridging gaps, and creating synergies that benefit the agricultural sector as a whole," said the Speaker.

Moreover, Romualdez said the collaboration between the private sector and agriculture is not just about business.

"It's about ensuring that the fruits of economic growth are equitably distributed, reaching the grassroots level

and benefiting ordinary Filipinos. With a leader who understands both worlds, we can anticipate policies that balance profit with public welfare, ensuring that our farmers and fisherfolk receive fair compensation, access to modern technologies, and opportunities for growth," he said.

Expectations

AS stakeholders welcome Tiu Laurel as the new Secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), farmers' groups on Friday said expectations are high for Laurel to bring about positive change in the agriculture industry.

One of the key expectations from the new DA Secretary, Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) Executive Director Jayson Cainglet said, is the alignment of his actions and policies with the directives of President Marcos.

He said the focus is on supporting local production and boosting the local agriculture industry.

"We hope that he'll live up to the expectations and directive[s] of the President in supporting local production and boosting the local agri-industry, and that importation is only a last resort and not the principal policy," he said.

Cainglet said he hopes to hear a firm commitment from Laurel to reject and, even more importantly, to support proposals to reduce tariffs on agricultural commodities.

'Big challenges'

PAMBANSANG Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas national chairperson Fernando Hicap said the new DA chief will be facing "big challenges" in regards to reforming the policies in the agri-fisheries sector.

In a statement, the fisherfolk group also urged Laurel to "do away" with liberalization policies that allow the importation of agri-fisheries products at the expense of local food producers.

"The fishers are giving a standing order to the new DA Secretary to strengthen local food production by renouncing liberalization policies for the importation of agricultural and fisheries products. From 2018 to 2022, we have monitored more than 200,000 metric tons of various pelagic fish

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imported from other countries like China and Taiwan. This is an insult not only to us being an archipelagic country but also to the millions of Filipinos involved in the fishing sector," Hicap said.

"The DA Secretary should know that opening floodgates for imported fishery products poses drastic impacts on the livelihood of local fishermen. Cheap and inferior-quality imported fish causes further price drops for local fishery products. For instance, every time the Philippine government allows importation of tens of thousands of metric tons of round scad [*galunggong*], the farm gate value of the aforementioned fish product further drops from P70-P80 per kilogram to P50-P60 per kilogram, an all-time low," he added.

In addition to ending import-liberalization policies, the group said the government should implement several measures to boost the productivity of small fishers and make the country food self-sufficient.

Welcome

MEAT Importers and Traders Association (MITA) President Emeritus Jesus C. Cham and the Tugon Kabuhayan group, meanwhile, welcomed the appointment of Laurel.

"Secretary Laurel brings with him a wealth of experience and understanding covering the livestock and fisheries sectors. We look forward to working with the new secretary," Cham said.

For its part, Tugon Kabuhayan said, "We welcome his appointment; he is very competent and familiar with the realities and challenges of production post-harvest and marketing."

Former Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol said he is expecting Laurel would prioritize the policy of the complete value chain.

"Secretary Laurel belongs to a family that operates one of the oldest fishing companies in the country. His appointment is a major breakthrough for the fisheries sector, which has long been neglected," he said.

"Moulded in the corporate world, Sec. Laurel is expected to institute reforms in Philippine agriculture that will focus on the policy of complete value chain," he added.



Fishing tycoon is new Agri chief

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has appointed fishing tycoon Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. as secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), relinquishing the Cabinet post he held concurrently since assuming office in June last year.

In a press conference in Malacañang on Friday, Marcos said Laurel's appointment highlights the importance of partnerships between the private and public sectors. "... We have found somebody who understands very well the problems that

agriculture is facing," Marcos said of his appointee.

He said he and Laurel "are confident that we have a fair understanding, a good understanding of what it is that needs to be done, what are the problems."

Marcos said it took over a year for him to name a new Agriculture chief because he believed that "there are many things that only a president could do."

"And the problems were so important and were so deep that I felt that the authority and the, I suppose, moral suasion of a president was necessary for us to be able

to figure out, and it really was; agriculture is a much, much more complicated thing than most people understand," he said.

The President said he has ordered Laurel to address the pressing challenges in agriculture, including the high prices of food commodities and the threats of climate change, African swine fever, and avian influenza.

Laurel has a good network of experts who can help the government address agricultural problems, he said.

Marcos said he has known Laurel "since

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we were boys, so I am confident to appoint him because I know his whole personality."

Laurel, the agricultural representative in the President's Private Sector Advisory Council (PSAC), was one of Marcos' big donors in the 2022 election campaign, the business news website said.

He heads Frabelle Fishing Corp., a leading supplier of fresh, frozen and processed seafood to markets in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, South Africa and the United States.

He also held positions in various companies, including president of Frabelle Shipyard Corp., chairman of Westpac Meat Processing Corp., director of Frabelle Properties Corp., and president of Markham Resources Corp.

Laurel was also the former chairman of the Diamond Export Corp., president of the Bacoor Seafront Development Corp., chairman/president of Bukidnon Hydro Energy Corp., and president of the Agusan Power Co.

Laurel is the chairman of the World Tuna Purse Seine Organization.

In his speech accepting the Agriculture portfolio, Laurel thanked Marcos for his trust and confidence.

Laurel said he will present to the public his programs for the DA in coordination with the President.

He said his focus will be to ensure that the country's harvest is abundant and that it reaches the table of every Filipino.

Laurel also said he will modernize the agricultural sector, and improve the welfare of farmers and fishermen.

His appointment will be up for confirmation by the Commission on Appointments after Congress resumes session on November 6.

Lawmakers welcomed Laurel's appointment.

Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" Zubiri said Laurel has the management experience and the common touch to lead what is perhaps the most important agency in the country today.

"I am glad that the President personally headed the Department of Agriculture for a time, and instituted a whole-of-government approach in implementing important reforms in the agricultural sector that strengthened our food security. But it is also right that the DA now be helmed by a new Secretary who can be devoted to the agriculture sector, and not have to juggle it with other national concerns," Zubiri said.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel 3rd said the President made the right decision in appointing a full-time Agriculture secretary, since increasing food production must be a top government priority.

"Now, if the question is if Mr. Tiu Laurel is a good choice for DA secretary, let us give him time to prove himself," Pimentel said.

Sen. Cynthia Villar, chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, said the President has the prerogative "whom to appoint. Let us respect his decision."

Sen. Francis "Chiz" Escudero said Laurel "has extensive exposure and knowledge in fishing and agriculture. I know him to be a sincere, no-nonsense, honest, and hardworking patriot."

Sen. Mary Grace Poe said that with the gargantuan tasks ahead, the new DA secretary must have the focus, fortitude to get things done, and a genuine feeling for the sector.

Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez said Laurel's leadership of Frabelle Fishing Corp. showcased the potential of private enterprises in fostering food security, economic growth, and technological advancements in agriculture.

House Majority Leader and Zamboanga City Rep. Manuel Jose Dalipe said Laurel's cognizance of the importance of having cutting-edge technologies for food preservation and storage will translate to lesser food wastage and longer shelf life for the country's produce.

"Every year, billions worth of agricultural products go to waste because we have not been investing in storage and preservation facilities.

"This appointment of Secretary Laurel in the DA would hopefully change that," Dalipe said.

House Minority Leader and 4P's Party-list Rep. Marcelino Libanan said Marcos' relinquishment of the Agriculture portfolio meant that he can now concentrate wholly on his job as President.

AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee said, "There are still so many challenges that the agriculture sector is still facing, and we hope that under the leadership of Secretary Laurel, the government can still focus on the sector to resolve the problems of our countrymen whose livelihood depends on this sector."

Quezon 3rd District Rep. Reynan Arrogancia said Laurel is the "prudent choice" for Marcos, since he will broaden the ways the DA can be more responsive to the demands of the agri-

Deputy Minority Leader and ACT Teachers Rep. Francisca Castro questioned the appointment of Laurel and called it a "political payback" for Laurel's generous contribution to Marcos' campaign coffers.

"Government positions should not be used by Marcos as a way to pay back political debt. He should choose someone that is perfect for the position and would serve farmers and fisherfolk," Castro said.

Magsasaka party-list nominee Robert Nazal said Laurel's appointment is a "breath of fresh air," citing the new official's 30 years in the agriculture industry.

Other government officials also lauded Laurel's appointment.

Agriculture Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio Sebastian said he is ready "to work with him in pursuing lasting solutions to advance Philippine agriculture."

Presidential Adviser for Poverty Alleviation (PAPA) Lorenzo "Larry" Gadon

said he is looking forward to partnering with Laurel in implementing programs that would help alleviate poverty, especially in the provinces and remote areas of the country.

Laurel "has an extensive experience in food production and market distribution; hence, he knows how to play with the forces of demand and supply," Gadon said.

Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) Administrator Pablo Azcona said: "Rest assured that SRA will be supportive of the DAs programs as it has in the past, and we are looking forward to strengthen this partnership with the DA."

Agricultural stakeholders also welcomed Laurel's appointment.

The Philippine Association of Meat Processors Inc. (Pampi) described him as "a proven and tested agribusiness entrepreneur," who "will be able to manage the agriculture portfolio efficiently and well."

Pampi President Felix Tiukinhoy Jr. expressed hope that "all sectors of agriculture provide him needed advice and support to ensure that agriculture becomes a strong pillar of the national economy."

The Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas said Laurel will be facing big challenges in reforming the agri-fishery sector.

"The fishers are giving a standing order to the new DA Secretary to strengthen local food production by renouncing liberalization policies of importation of agricultural and fisheries products," said Pamalakaya National Chairman Fernando Hicap.



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The Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura Executive Director Jayson Cainglet said the group is "hoping to hear a firm commitment from the new DA secretary that he will reject, much more to support, all proposals to reduce tariffs on all agricultural commodities."

The Federation of Free Farmers National Manager Raul Montemayor said he hopes Laurel "will listen closely to and act promptly on the concerns, particularly of small farmers, municipal fishers and other disadvantaged members of the agricultural sector."

The Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc., United Sugar Producers Federation (Unifed), Meat Importers and Traders Association, and Philippine Association of Meat Processors Inc. also expressed support for the new Agriculture chief.

Manuel Lamata, president of Unifed, said the group is "looking forward to working with him and presenting to him the state of the sugar industry and how the department can extend its assistance and resources to our industry, particularly now that we are in the thick of our milling season."

**WITH JAVIER JOSE ISMAEL,
RED MENDOZA,
ARLIE O. CALALO,
ARIC JOHN SY CUA,
JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL
AND EUGENE Y. ADIONG**



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Bilyonaryong Agri chief tatalupan sa kongreso

Siguradong gigisahing mabuti sa Commission on Appointments ang bagong miyembro ng gabinete ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. sa katauhan ng negosyanteng si Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. na hini-rang bilang kalihim ng Department of Agriculture, ayon kay Senador Risa Hontiveros.

"Considering the Secretary's background, we have also heard murmurs of conflict of interest. Our commercial fishing fleets have recently resisted efforts of the DA to monitor and regulate their operations," pahayag ni Hontiveros.

Binigyang-diin ng senador na hindi dapat malagay sa kompromiso ang mga adhikain ng gobyerno na makamit ang food security at environmental protection nang dahil lamang sa interes ng mga malalaking kompanya.

"We will await Secretary Tiu-Laurel when he goes before the Commission on Appointments, so these issues affecting his capacity to lead the DA can be scrutinized and the concerns of our peasant farmers and fisher-folk discussed," sabi ng senador.

Sa kabila nito, sinabi ni Hontiveros na umaasa siyang matutugunan ni Laurel ang mga problema sa sektor ng agrikultura.

Sabi naman ni Senadora Cynthia Villar, may karapatan ang Pangulo na piliin kung sino ang nais maging kalihim ng DA.

"The President has his prerogative who to appoint. Let us respect his decision," sabi ni Villar, chairperson ng Senate committee on agriculture.

Samantala, wala umanong magiging 'conflict of interest' sa pagpasok ni Laurel sa gabinete sa harap ng isyu na maraming malalaking kompanya ang hinahawakan ng bagong DA chief.

Ayon kay Presidential Communications Office (PCO) Secretary Cheloy Garafil, binitiwang lahat ni Laurel ang mga hawak na kompanya bago nito tinanggap ang puwesto sa DA.

"As per Sec. Laurel, he already divested his interests from his companies," ani Garafil.

Sa ilalim ng batas, ipinagbabawal sa isang opisyal ng gobyerno na humawak o magkaroon ng posisyon sa isang pribadong kompanya o korporasyon dahil sa posibilidad na maapektuhan ang tungkulin nito o paghahatid ng serbisyo sa publiko.

Nakasaad din sa Administrative Order No. 1 series of 1992 ng Malacañang na kailangang magbitiw

sa kanilang trabaho sa mga pribadong tanggapan ang mga miyembro ng gabinete, undersecretary at assistant secretary upang maiwasan ang 'conflict of interest'.

Si Laurel ay presidente ng Frabelle Fishing Corporation, chairman at presidente rin ng Agusan Power Corporation, at humahawak ng iba't ibang posisyon sa maraming pribadong kompanya na ang mga negosyo ay nasa shipyard, meat processing, export, hydro energy at iba pa.

Samantala, tinawag ni ACT Teachers Party-list Rep. France Castro na 'political payback' ang pagtalaga kay Laurel sa DA dahil sa P30 milyong kontribusyon umano nito sa kampanya ni Pangulong Marcos noong 2022 elections.

Ayon pa kay Castro, wala siyang nakitang sapat na kuwalipikasyon kay Laurel para pamunuan ang DA sa halip ang alam umano niya ito ang nasa likod bilang FFC president sa 420 ektaryang reclamation project na dahilan upang mawalan ng tirahan ang mahigit 700 pamilyang mangingisda na naninirahan sa dalawang coastal village sa Bacoar City, Cavite. (**Dindo Matining/Aileen Taliping/Billy Begas/Eralyn Prado**)



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Rendahan taas-presyo ng mga pagkain

PBBM HINAMON BAGONG AGRI CHIEF

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DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.



PBBM HINAMON BAGONG AGRI CHIEF

HINIRANG ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ang fishing tycoon na si Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. bilang kalihim ng Department of Agriculture (DA).

Inanunsiyo ng Pangulo sa isang press conference nitong Biyernes nang umaga (Nobyembre 3) ang appointment ni Laurel matapos ang opisyal na panunumpa nito sa kanya na ginanap sa Malacañang.

Sinabi ng Pangulo na pinili niya si Laurel bilang DA chief dahil naiintindihan nito ang mga hamon at problemang kinakaharap sa larangan ng agrikultura.

Tiwala si Pangulong Marcos na naiintindihan ni Laurel ang sitwasyon at kung ano ang mga dapat gawin para mabigyan ng kalutasan ang mga problema sa agrikultura.

"And this is because it is time that we have found somebody who understand very well the problems that agriculture is facing. The reason for the timing is that now we are confident that we have a fair understanding, a good understanding of what it is that needs to be done, what are the problems," pahayag ng Pangulo.

Hindi lamang aniya sa industriya ng pangingsda mahusay ang bagong kalihim dahil malawak din ang kaalaman nito sa iba pang panig ng agrikultura kaya nauunawaan niya hindi lamang ang problema kundi pati ang solusyon.

"Malaki ang trabahong ibinigay natin sa bagong kalihim at handa kami ngayon, hindi lamang sa pamahalaan kung hindi pati na sa private sector na siya'y tulungan. Malakas ang loob ko na na mai-appoint siya kasi kilala ko

ang pagkatao niya. Alam ko na napakasipag nito unang-una, pangalawa nauunawaan niyang mabuti ang sistema ng agrikultura dito sa Pilipinas kaya't inasahan natin na he will do a very good job," dagdag ng Pangulo.

Samantala, inilatag naman ni Laurel ang kanyang mga plano para matiyak na tumaas ang ani ng mga magsasaka at magkaroon ng sapat ng pagkain sa hapag ng bawat Pilipino.

"Pangunahing adhikain ko ang pagtiyak na sagana ang ating ani at siguruhing ito ay makakarating sa hapag ng bawat Pilipino. Layunin ko na tiyakin na may sapat at masustansiyang pagkain na mabibili ng ating mga kababayan sa tamang halaga," ani Laurel.

Hiniling ng bagong kalihim ang tulong ng bawat isa upang magtagumpay ang adhikain para sa mas maunlad at masaganang

agrikultura.

Si Laurel ay pangulo ng Frabelle Fishing Corporation; chairman at president ng Agusan Power Corporation; kasalukuyang honorary consul ng Consulate of the Federated States of Micronesia in the Philippines; chairman ng World Tuna Purse Seine Organization; at humahawak ng iba't ibang posisyon sa maraming kompanya sa bansa tulad ng Westpac Meat Processing Corporation, Diamond Export Corporation, Bacoor Seafrost Development Corporation, at Bukidnon Hydro Energy Corporation.

Pinatutukan naman ni Pangulong Marcos kay Laurel na kontrolin ang presyo ng mga produktong agrikultura upang hindi mahirapan ang mamamayan partikular ang mataas na presyo ng bigas, asukal, sibuyas at iba pa. (Aileen Taliping/Prince Golez/Natalia Antonio)

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Fishing tycoon Laurel, bagong

NI MALOU ESCUDERO

Itinalaga ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. ang negosyanteng si Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. bilang kalihim ng Department of Agriculture (DA).

Inanunsyo mismo ni Marcos ang pagkakatalaga kay Laurel sa isang press conference sa Malakanyang. Nanumpa na rin kaagad kay Marcos si Laurel.

"I am very happy to have been able to announced the new appointment of one of the most important departments in our government at ito parang, isinama na natin na ang pagtingin natin sa private sector ay partner sa lahat ng mga ating gagawin," pahayag ni Marcos.

"I have just administered the oath of office for the new secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Francisco Laurel," anang Pangulo.

Kumpiyansa si Marcos na magagampanan ni Laurel ang tungkulin lalo't matagal na ito sa industriya sa pangangisda at agrikultura.

Nakatitiyak din si Marcos na alam ni Laurel ang mga solusyon sa problema sa sektor ng agrikultura at kilala rin nito ang mga tao lalo na ang mga expert at professional.

Taos puso namang tinanggap ni Laurel ang hamon ni Pangulong Marcos na paglingkuran ang mga nasa sektor ng agrikultura.

"Bilang kinatawan ng Pangulo, layunin ko na ipagpatuloy ang kanyang mga adhikain at programa sa sektor ng agrikultura," pahayag ni Laurel.

"Pangunahing adhikain ko ang pagtiyak na sagana ang ating ani at siguruhing ito ay makararating sa hapag ng bawat Filipino. Layunin ko na tiyakin na may sapat at masustansyang pagkain na mabibili ng ating mga kababayan sa tamang halaga," wika pa ni Laurel.

Binanggit din ni Laurel ang kahalagahan ng mo-

demisasyon ng agrikultura upang matulungan ang mga lokal na magsasaka at mangingisda.

Nagtapos sa University of Sto. Tomas si Laurel na may degree sa computer science.

Si Laurel ang presidente ng Frabelle Fishing Corporation ayon sa website nito.

Matatandaan na mula nang maupo bilang Pangulo ng bansa noong Hunyo 2022, si Marcos ang tumayong kalihim ng DA.

DA chief

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**PBBM sa bagong DA chief:
Kontrolin presyo ng agri commodities**

Ibinigay ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. nitong Biyernes ang kanyang unang marching order

sa bagong Kálihím ng Department of Agriculture na si Secretary Francisco Laurel Jr. kung saan pinatitayak na "regulated" ang presyo ng lahat ng mga bilihan sa agrikultura.

"Well, the obvious one is try and gain control of the prices of all the agricultural commodities that are going up," ani Marcos.

Sinabi ng Pangulo na ang pagkakaroon ng kontrol sa pagtaas ng presyo ng mga produktong pang-agrikultura ay isang isyu na kailangang agad na malutas.

"In the immediate

term, kailangan natin ma-control at tingnan natin kung paano natin gagawin," ani Marcos.

Binanggit din ng Pangulo ang kanyang utos tungkol sa paggawa ng mga hakbang upang mabawasan ang epekto ng climate change bukod pa sa pagtaas ng produktibidad sa sektor ng agrikultura at fishery sectors.

Patuloy anyang nakikipagtulungan ang Pilipinas sa mga karatig bansa nito, partikular sa mga nasa ASEAN, para mapabuti ang practices sa technology sector. (Malou Escudero)



NEW MAN AT THE HELM

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. yesterday gave his first marching order to new Secretary of the Department of Agriculture to ensure prices of all the agricultural commodities are regulated.

President Marcos told reporters that he already discussed the administration's goals for the sector with the newly sworn in DA Secretary Francisco Laurel Jr.

"Well, the obvious one is try and gain control of the prices of all the agricultural commodities that are

going up," Marcos said in a press conference in Malacanang.

The chief executive said that gaining control over rising prices of agricultural goods is an issue that needs to be im-

mediately resolved.

"In the immediate term, kailangan natin ma-control atting nan natin kung paano natin gagawin," Marcos said.

The President also mentioned about his order on taking measures to mitigate the effects of climate change on top of increasing productivity in the agriculture and fishery sectors.

President Marcos said the Philippines continues to partner with its neighboring countries, particularly those in the ASEAN, to improve the practices and technology in the said sector.

"Tinitingnan natin ang mga ginagawang ating mga karatig

bansa such as Thailand, such as Indonesia, such as Vietnam at baka mayroon tayong matutunan sa kanila na puwede nating na bagay dito sa Pilipinas and that's the first that our new Secretary will have to do," he said.

Secretary Laurel, for his part, said he will be initially meeting the DA executives and employees today, hoping for their unified support under his leadership.

"Ang hingiin ko lang sa kanila talaga ngayon is their full cooperation dahil importanteng buo ang departamento sa isang goal...which is basically modernization at increase of production," Laurel said. **PCO**



LAUREL JR.



LAUREL WELCOMED AS AGRI HEAD

By Jester Manalastas

SPEAKER Ferdinand Martin Romualdez has welcomed the appointment of Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. as Secretary of Department of Agriculture (DA).

Romualdez said Tiu-Laurel's extensive background in the private sector provides him with a wealth of experience that will be invaluable in steering our country's agriculture and fisheries sectors.

"The private sector, with its innovation, efficiency, and competitive spirit, has much to offer when integrated with public sector objectives. By merging private sector strategies with the public sector's broader goals, we can harness the best of both worlds," he said.

"Secretary Tiu-Laurel's leadership of Frabelle Fishing Corporation showcases the potential of private enterprises in bolstering our nation's food security, economic growth, and technological advancements in agriculture. His firsthand experience in managing a large-scale operation gives him insights into the intricacies of supply chains, market demands, and global trends. This expertise will be instrumental in fostering partnerships between the government and private entities, bridging gaps, and creating synergies that benefit the agricultural sector as a whole," the House leader added.

Moreover, Romualdez said, the collaboration between the private sector and agriculture is not just about business.

Romualdez said it is about ensuring that the fruits of economic growth are equitably distributed, reaching the grassroots level and benefiting ordinary Filipinos. With a leader who understands both worlds, we can anticipate policies that balance profit with public welfare, ensuring that our farmers and fisherfolk receive fair compensation, access to modern technologies, and opportunities for growth.

On the other hand, Romualdez would like to express his deepest gratitude to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for his dedicated service as the outgoing Secretary of Agriculture.

"His tireless efforts have laid a solid foundation for the Department, addressing crucial issues and setting clear goals to uplift the lives of our farmers and fisherfolk. It is my hope that Secretary Tiu-Laurel will build on this groundwork to further enhance the lives of ordinary Filipinos, ensuring that the collective interests of farmers and fisherfolk are prioritized," Romualdez said.

"In these challenging times, it is essential to have a leader who understands the intricacies of the market while keeping the welfare of ordinary Filipinos at heart. I believe Secretary Tiu-Laurel is that leader, and I look forward to the positive changes he will bring to our country's agricultural landscape," the Speaker added.

Meanwhile, House Majority Leader Zamboanga Rep. Manuel Jose Dalipe said President Marcos made a perfect choice in appointing fishing magnate Laurel as the new Agriculture chief.

According to Dalipe, Tiu's vast experience in the fishing sector and food production would greatly help the Marcos administration in crafting the best strategy to ensure food security.

"Every year, billions worth of agricultural products go to waste because we have not been investing in storage and preservation facilities. This appointment of Secretary Laurel in the DA would hopefully change that," Dalipe said.

"We welcome President Marcos' decision to appoint Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. as the new head of the Department of Agriculture. With Mr. Laurel's extensive experience in the fishing and agricultural sectors, I believe he is well-suited to address the challenges our agricultural industry faces.

"This appointment reflects President Marcos's commitment to appoint an agricultural expert to head the Department of Agriculture and is a significant step in addressing the agricultural challenges facing the nation," Dalipe added.



TO BOOST SELF-SUFFICIENCY

RICE SEED PROCESSING FACILITY, WAREHOUSES TO SOON RISE IN NUEVA ECIIJA

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

A new rice seed processing facility and warehouse with cold storage facilities will soon rise in Nueva Ecija, which should bolster the country's efforts to become more rice self-sufficient.

The Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) said the facility would be set up at its central experiment station in Science City of Muñoz and would be complemented by new storage facilities to be

built in PhilRice's Ilocos Norte and Isabela stations.

The Global Agricultural Policy Institute will undertake the project in collaboration with the National Food Authority (NFA). The construction will run until 2026.

South Korea provided \$4.5 million in official development assistance to complete the project aimed at enhancing the efficiency and sustainability of the rice supply chain.

"The Official Development Assistance (ODA) project was

initiated by the Philippines in October 2019 and gained momentum in May 2023 with the signing of a Record of Discussions outlining mutual objectives," it added.

The project "is expected to help increase the utilization rate of high-quality certified rice seeds, improve self-sufficiency in rice production, and enhance food security in the Philippines," the agency said.

The Philippines is hard-pressed to produce enough rice to feed its people, with rice self-suf-

ficiency declining since the 1990s to just 77 percent in 2022, from 81.5 percent the previous year, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. The supply gap is filled by imports, mainly from neighboring Thailand and Vietnam.

15-year highs

With global rice prices soaring to 15-year highs, local prices have likewise increased and thus blamed for the acceleration in the cost of basic goods and services.

PhilRice contributes to rice self-sufficiency by produc-

ing foundation and registered seeds, which are then distributed to research and production centers of the Department of Agriculture, state universities and colleges and seed growers.

"These facilities help ensure the high quality and viability of seeds and reduce grain losses. Seed distribution is also fast-tracked with these facilities," Fidela Bongat, head of PhilRice's Business Development Division, said.

The project will also come with hardware and software for

PhilRice's Rice Seed Information System (RSIS) and the NFA as well as training programs for local producers.

According to PhilRice, RSIS is a digital platform for collecting, consolidating, and disaggregating near real-time rice seed production and distribution data at the municipal, provincial and national levels.

Data gathered from the system will aid policymakers and key government agencies in making sound decisions regarding rice production, it added. **INQ**



Combating the rice crisis

COMMENTARY

GARY B. TEVES

Another rice crisis recently emerged as the cost of rice soared due to various reasons. This problem is underscored by a troubling statistic—in September, the cost of rice increased by 17.9 percent, reaching its highest point in 14 years, contributing 2.8 percent to the whole inflation rate for that month. This increase put significant financial pressure on Filipino families' budgets, 13.1 percent of which accounts for rice, and more difficult for poor households who spend up to 30 percent of their income on rice.

The nature and causes of the current rice crisis are multifaceted, with several key factors at play. Extreme weather conditions, including typhoons and droughts, have affected local rice production, leading to lower yields and reduced supply. Concurrently, distribution gaps disrupted the market availability of rice. This issue was further worsened by high transport costs, primarily driven by the soaring fuel prices resulting from the Ukraine war and the decision of large oil producers to reduce oil output. Additionally, fluctuating international rice prices have had a ripple effect, influencing local prices.

To help stabilize rice prices, we propose the following short- and long-term recommendations for the executive and legislative branches:

Executive. 1. Encourage greater private sector participation in the rice supply chain, particularly conglomerates who can help enhance the efficiency of the rice distribution system essential to fight disruptions that drive up rice prices. These corporations can invest in improving storage facilities, strengthening transportation infrastructure, and establishing direct marketing channels in collaboration with farmers.

2. Closer collaboration between government agencies. For instance, the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the National Food Authority can work together to develop a rice

procurement and distribution plan, specifically made for this current crisis, that ensures that farmers get a fair price for their produce and that consumers can buy affordable rice. The DA and the Department of Trade and Industry can also develop a rice market development plan that connects farmers with buyers.

3. Develop more agriculturists, particularly focusing on their role in helping farmers enhance productivity at the farm level which can then help cut rice prices and ensure affordability. Traditional farmers' hesitance to adopt new agricultural technologies, including fertilizers and hybrid rice varieties, has contributed to the rice crisis.

4. At the local government level, promote a cofinancing mechanism that incentivizes local government units (LGUs) to provide more funding to rice programs. Under cofinancing, each peso an LGU invests in irrigation, post-harvest facilities, or other programs to support rice farmers will receive two to three times more matching fund from the national government.

5. Continue implementing the rice tariffication law (RTL), which was created to combat the rice crisis a few years ago. RTL facilitates the importation of rice, helping offset domestic shortages, and stabilize prices. Moreover, encouraging active participation of the private sector in rice trading promotes market competition and discourages price manipulation.

6. The President should convene and preside over the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council, at least monthly, to closely monitor the progress of important bills and effectively address the top concerns of Filipinos such as this rice crisis.

Legislative. 1. Reconsider the proposal to lower the tariff rate on rice from 35 percent to 10 percent. We advocate for a dynamic approach that adjusts tariffs based on international rice market conditions. When global rice prices decline, lowering tariffs can stimulate economic growth and ease consumer burdens. However, it is crucial to recognize the inherent volatility of international rice prices. If prices trend upward again, we must be prepared to reinstate higher tariffs to protect domestic farmers.

2. Amend the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law. This can promote efficient land use, increased productivity through modernized farming practices, crop diversification, economies of scale through consolidated farms, improved rural infrastructure, better access to credit, market regulation, and comprehensive support for smallholder farmers.

3. Amend the warehouse receipts law. While this applies to all crops, enhancing the efficiency and transparency of warehouses can reduce post-harvest losses and ensure that crops such as rice stocks are stored under optimal conditions.

4. Involve pertinent oversight committees in both the House and Senate. Their oversight and scrutiny will provide an additional layer of accountability, helping to maintain transparency in implementing these measures.

Taking these decisive actions to mitigate the rice crisis is of paramount importance to ensure a sufficient rice supply, proper and efficient rice distribution, stabilize rice prices, manage inflation, and alleviate poverty in the Philippines. When executed in a timely manner, these recommendations will address the current challenges effectively and help avert another rice nightmare in the future.

Gary B. Teves served as finance secretary under the Arroyo administration.



Well-milled rice to reach P52; harvest 85% complete

By BELLA CARIASO

The main harvest season for rice is 85 percent complete, farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) chairman Rosendo So said yesterday, noting that well-milled rice could reach P52 per kilo in December amid the high farmgate price of palay.

In a radio interview, So added that the harvest season is expected to be completed next month and the stocks could last until February 2024.

"We already harvested at least 85 percent and the remaining is about 15 percent. The farmgate palay is now at P28 per kilo and that equivalent to rice is about P52, P54 per kilo," So said.

So has pushed for the return of the price ceiling amid the upward trend in the retail price of rice due to the high buying price of palay.

"We will return to that (higher retail price of rice). That is why last time, we warned that the retail price of rice will increase if the price ceiling is not reimposed," So said, noting that in Isabela, the farmgate price of palay is at P28 per kilo.

So said the local government of Cebu is providing at least P30 per kilo over its decision to sell P20 per kilo of rice to consumers.

"(The P20 per kilo) is highly subsidized by the local government. We don't know the volume the LGU will release as it needs to subsidize at least P30 per kilo as the buying price of palay in Cebu is also high at P26 per kilo and the LGU will only sell at P20 per kilo," So explained.

So said the next palay harvest is expected in March 2024 as farmers have started to plant again.

"Many farmers planted again so the turnaround is faster. We expect to harvest again in March next year. Our stocks now will reach the end of February so we don't see any problem (in the supply)," he noted.

Based on the monitoring of the DA, the retail price of local regular milled rice ranged between P41 and P45 per kilo; local well-milled rice, between P45 and P53 per kilo; local premium rice, between P50 and P60 per kilo and local special rice, between P50 and P65 per kilo.

Imported well-milled rice ranged between P45 and P48 per kilo; imported premium rice, between P47 and P58 per kilo and imported special rice, between P54 and P60 per kilo.

Vegetables

Meanwhile, So confirmed that the farmgate price of chayote in Benguet had plummeted to P9 per kilo, but retail cost remains high at P90 per kilo.

In a radio interview, So said the

retail price of chayote should only increase by P10 per kilo or to P19 per kilo. Yet based on the monitoring of the DA, the retail price of chayote in Metro Manila ranged between P25 and P90 per kilo.

So said that except for potatoes, the retail prices of other highland vegetables and lowland crops have started to go down.

The retail price of potatoes ranged between P160 and P230 per kilo, and cabbage at between P120 and P160 per kilo, while onions should not exceed P200 per kilo as the buying price in Nueva Ecija was only at P80 per kilo.

According to So, the retail price of lowland vegetables like bitter melon also decreased because of bountiful harvest, while prices of pork and chicken remain stable.

Meanwhile, the retail price of medium eggs ranged between P7.20 and P8.60 per piece.

The retail price of pork shoulder or *kasim* ranged between P260 and P330 per kilo and pork belly or *liempo*, between P290 and P400 per kilo. Whole chicken ranged between P140 and P200 per kilo.

For his part, United Broiler Raisers Association (UBRA) and Philippine Egg Board chairman Gregorio San Diego said that he does not expect the farmgate price of eggs to increase further.

San Diego has attributed the upward trend in the retail prices of eggs to a drop in the production after the devastation of recent Super Typhoon Egay and Typhoon Goring, adding that the farmgate price of eggs increased between P0.15 and P0.20 per piece.

Fight hoarders

In Congress, House committee on agriculture and food vice chairman and Quezon province Rep. David Suarez welcomed the P10 reduction in the price of onion as he said the chamber will continue to combat hoarders and price manipulators.

"Buoyed by this (price reduction) development and upon the instruction of Speaker Martin Romualdez, the House committee on agriculture and food will intensify its investigation on hoarders and price manipulators, not only of onions but of other staple food items like rice," he noted.

He added that the Speaker has made it clear that the House will extend all-out support to Pres. Marcos' call for an all-out war against smuggling, hoarding and price manipulation.

"Our mission order is clear: there is no room for smugglers, hoarders and price manipulators under this administration," he said.

— With Sheila Crisostomo



October inflation could be lower but not much – BSP chief

By LEE C. CHIPONGIAN

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Eli M. Remolona Jr. said the October inflation rate may be lower compared to September's 6.1 percent but he emphasized it could be slightly lower only because there are persistent price pressures.

"We're actually expecting inflation to go down but not as much as we used to expect," he said last week after the Monetary Board acted on an off-cycle rate increase on Oct. 26.

"The whole path is elevated while the trajectory is similar (but the base is high). It looks the same except that it's a higher path," he added.

The BSP on Nov. 1 announced its October inflation forecast range of 5.3 percent to 5.9 percent, lower than the actual consumer price index (CPI) reported in September.

In a statement, the BSP said the reason for the below six percent October CPI projection was the decrease in oil prices and selected food items such as rice, meat and vegetables.

It also noted that the upside factors that could pull CPI higher for the month

of October are the higher prices of electricity, LPG, fruits, and fish. The recent adjustment in jeepney fares and higher electricity are also upside risks.

The government will announce the October CPI on Nov. 7. As of end-September, the average inflation is at 6.6 percent, way above the two percent to four percent BSP target. The headline CPI rose in September to 6.1 percent versus 5.3 percent in August, but still within the BSP's forecast range at the time of 5.3 percent to 6.1 percent for the month.

In September though, core inflation, which excludes selected volatile food and energy items to measure underlying price pressures, eased further to 5.9 percent from 6.1 percent last August.

The BSP said it will "closely monitor developments affecting the outlook for inflation and growth in line with its data dependent approach to monetary policy formulation."

The Monetary Board, BSP's policy-making arm, will meet on Nov. 16 to discuss whether or not to do another rate hike as a follow up on the Oct. 26 off-cycle policy action, or to hold the key rate steady at 6.5 percent.

Meanwhile, analysts have mixed

predictions on the BSP rate. Some expect the BSP to tighten the target reverse repurchase (RRP) rate further from 6.5 percent to an 18-year high of seven percent to combat a persistently high inflation. Others expect the BSP to keep the rate at 6.5 percent.

Remolona said last Oct. 27 that it is still a toss-up whether or not they will continue to hike the policy rate on Nov.

16. If they do raise interest rates again, this will be in reaction to a high October inflation and a slower-than expected GDP growth in the third quarter. The economic growth report will be released on Nov. 9.

The BSP chief said they no longer expect headline CPI to return to within the two percent to four percent target range this year, and he sees above four percent

inflation from March to July next year.

The Monetary Board, in raising the key rate by 25 bps last week, has noted that second-round effects "broadened" because of transportation fare increases and minimum wage adjustments.

Remolona said inflation expectations have also risen sharply, highlighting the risk of further second-round effects.