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Agri output down 0.3% in Q3

By DANESSA RIVERA

The country's farm production declined by 0.3 percent in the third quarter, as the crops and fisheries sectors recorded lower outputs, according to latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

This marks the second consecutive quarter that farm production declined.

The PSA said the value of agriculture and fisheries production amounted to P412.41 billion from July to September.

This was lower than the 1.2 percent decline in the second quarter, but a reversal from the 1.6 percent growth registered in the same quarter last year.

The agricultural sector, at current prices, grossed P522.58 billion in the third quarter, up 4.3 percent from P500.9 billion in the same period last year.

From January to September, the farm output inched up by 0.2 percent.

In a statement, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel said the farm sector is showing signs of recovery despite the slight contraction in the third quarter.

"As we look at the data more closely, we could see positive signs in the rice, corn, and onion harvest, as well as in our production of tilapia and *galunggong* – all important food items for the Filipino masses," he said.

"With the growth numbers in the first three quarters, we remain optimistic ag-

riculture could still contribute positively to the broader economy," he said.

Michael Ricafort, chief economist at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., attributed the quarterly decline to the impact of typhoons and more expensive production inputs.

"Some storm damage in the early part of third quarter 2023 partly led to the slight year-on-year decline of -0.3 percent in agriculture. Higher prices/inflation, especially on various agricultural inputs, also partly weighed on production/output, especially relatively higher global crude oil prices in most of the third quarter," he said in a Viber message.

According to the PSA, crop output, which accounted for 54 percent in the total value of production, slipped by 0.4 percent to P222.69 billion.

The subsector saw improved palay and corn output at 0.2 percent and five percent, respectively.

Agriculture Undersecretary for rice development Leocadio Sebastian said palay production improved "despite the reduced area harvested because of delayed rice planting due to late onset of rainy season."

"The increase came from the increase in yield per hectare and total production during the quarter. We are still expecting to reach 20 million metric tons production this year," he said.

Fisheries production, which accounted for 14.2 percent of the total, recorded its second straight quarter of contraction as it declined by 6.1 percent in the third quarter. Its value of production amounted to P58.72 billion for the period.

Milkfish (*bangus*), the top fish product of the country, saw a 12 percent decline during the period.

The PSA also noted double-digit decreases in tiger prawn (*sugpo*), big-eye tuna (*tambakol/bariles*), fimbriated sardines (*tunsoy*), mudcrab (*alimango*), squid (*pusit*), cavalla (*talakitok*), thread-fin bream (*bisugo*), blue crab (*alimasag*), grouper (*lapu-lapu*), skipjack (*gulyasan*), frigate tuna (*tulingan*), and bali sardinella (*tamban*).

Livestock, which contributed 16 percent to the total, rose by 2.5 percent on higher hog and goat production.

Similarly, poultry—which had a 15.7 percent share—grew by 2.9 percent as all commodities, except for duck eggs, registered gains during the quarter.

United Broiler Raisers Association (UBRA) president Elias Jose Inciong said the sector's third quarter growth was an "underperformance."

The normal growth of the poultry sector is four percent to seven percent. As such, there is some under performance. This may have been caused by adjustments made due to lower than expected demand," he said.



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Farm output down in third quarter

The local agricultural sector registered a contraction in the third quarter due to decrease in crop and fisheries production, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

The value of agricultural and fisheries production, measured at constant 2018 prices, declined by 0.3 percent to ₱412.41 billion from July to September, a reversal of the 1.3 percent growth posted in the same

period last year.

However, the decline was less severe than the 1.2 percent contraction seen in the second quarter of 2023.

Last Nov. 3, President Marcos appointed **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** as the new secretary of the Department of Agriculture.

Prior to this appointment, President Marcos served as agriculture secretary in concurrent capacity. (Gabriell Christel Galang)



PH farm output down anew in Q3

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

FARM output contracted further in the third quarter (Q3) as livestock and poultry gains failed to offset a decline in crops and fisheries, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported on Wednesday.

The value of agricultural and fisheries production fell by 0.3 percent in July to September, reversing from the 1.6-percent growth posted in the same period last year but narrowing from the 1.2-percent drop posted three months earlier.

At constant 2018 prices, production for the period amounted to P412.41 billion from the year-earlier P413.6 billion.

Year to date, farm output re-

mained positive with growth at 0.2 percent. This was down slightly, however, from the January-September 2022 uptick of 0.3 percent.

Fisheries production, which accounted for 14.2 percent of total third-quarter output, posted a 6.1-percent drop to P58.72 billion.

Thirteen of 20 monitored species registered declines, with tiger prawn and bigeye tuna production down the most by 49.0 percent and 41.1 percent, respectively.

Year to date, the value of fisheries production fell by 7.0 percent, worsening from the year-earlier -4.3 percent.

Crop production, which accounted for 54 percent of total output for the third quarter, dropped by 0.4 percent to P222.69 billion from P223.5 billion.

Palay and corn, the country's main crops, gained by 0.2 percent and 5.0 percent. The former's growth, however, slipped from 1.1 percent three months earlier while corn rebounded from a 0.8-percent contraction.

Fourteen out of 23 crop categories posted declines, with sugarcane down the most by 26.4 percent. Onion output, on the other hand, grew by 165.1 percent.

Year to date, the value of crop

production increased by 0.9 percent, rebounding from the year-earlier drop of 1.0 percent.

Livestock production, meanwhile, still increased by 2.5 percent during the quarter to P66.11 billion, higher than last year's P64.5 billion. It contributed 16.0 percent to the total value of production in agriculture and fisheries.

Hog and goat output rose by 3.3 percent and 0.1 percent, respectively, but those for dairy contracted by 12.4 percent; cattle, 1.5 percent; and carabao by 0.3 percent.

The value of livestock production for the first nine months expanded by 2.4 percent, improving from the previous year's 1.8 percent.

Poultry output, with a 15.7-percent share of total production, was valued at P64.89 billion. This was

2.9 percent higher than the P63.06 billion posted in the comparable 2022 period.

Three of the four monitored poultry commodities posted growth, led by chicken eggs at 4.7 percent; duck at 3.6 percent; and chicken at 2.3 percent.

Although lower than last year's 8.79-percent growth, year-to-date poultry production still increased by 2.5 percent.

The Department of Agriculture said there were strong indications that the sector would contribute positively to the economy despite the third-quarter contraction.

The release of third-quarter farm output data came a day before the announcement of preliminary third-quarter economic growth results.

Analysts expect economic growth

to have picked up from the second quarter's slower-than-expected 4.3 percent.

"As we look at the data more closely, we could see positive signs in the rice, corn and onion harvest as well as in our production of tilapia and galunggong (round scad) — all important food items for the Filipino masses," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said on Wednesday.

Michael Ricafort, chief economist at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., attributed the decline in output to bad weather and higher prices of various agricultural inputs.

"For the coming months, [an] El Niño drought expected from the fourth quarter of 2023 to [the] first quarter of 2024 could weigh on agriculture," he added.



Editorial

A promising choice to lead the DA

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s appointment of agribusiness leader **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** to serve as secretary of Agriculture came as a surprise to most of the country, but it is a most welcome one. After holding the job himself for more than a year, Marcos' choice displayed some refreshing "out-of-the-box" thinking and offers the prospect of real progress in improving the country's agricultural sector.

Prior to Laurel's appointment, with the exception of the President's own temporary double duty as Agriculture secretary, the head of the Department of Agriculture (DA) has always been either a politician or an academician in the agricultural field. What the DA has never had, however, is a true manager, and this is what makes the President's choice so praiseworthy.

Agriculture, more so than other sectors in the economic and social fabric of the country, is essentially one large, nation-sized business enterprise. Yes, there are a great many social and political factors involved, but at the most basic level, the agriculture sector's sole objective is to produce food as efficiently as possible to meet the demands of the market. Running a business requires a manager. Former DA secretaries have not lacked in passion or commitment, but they have approached the task from their own perspective as political or scientific technocrats, and the results — reflected in the underachieving state of Philippine agriculture — sadly speak for themselves.

Secretary Laurel, of course, is at heart a businessman, and more to the point, a businessman whose interests depend on an efficient, productive agriculture sector. Naturally, he will step away from his position as president of Frabelle Fishing Corp. to focus on his job at the DA, but he takes the knowledge and experience he gained in that role with him, and that has already been reflected in some of his early suggestions.

During comments following the new secretary's oath-taking on Monday, President Marcos reiterated his "marching orders" to Laurel, which include controlling prices of agricultural com-

modities, recovering from the stubborn bird flu and African swine fever that have plagued the agricultural sector for several years, and putting a stop to smuggling and the activities of cartels that have plagued producers and consumers alike through price manipulation for as long as anyone can remember.

Secretary Laurel's first response was to set realistic expectations, suggesting that "P20 per kilo rice" may not be a practical goal, at least for now, since it is important to balance affordable prices for consumers with sustainable prices for producers. Laurel's second suggestion also hinted at his intention to improve the efficiency of the DA's work, as he announced that he intends to relaunch the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics. "Our data right now is not that accurate," he explained, although he was quick to point out, "I am not blaming anyone for this." Without correct data on production, supply and demand, he continued, the DA cannot properly respond to issues such as prices for agricultural commodities.

As to the chronic problems of smuggling and market manipulation by cartels, Laurel said that he would "soon" form an intelligence group within the DA to combat corruption within the department and contend with the smugglers and errant traders. Acknowledging that there is indeed corruption among the ranks of the DA and that this facilitates the nefarious activities of smugglers and cartels is a welcome bit of candor.

However, if we were to offer one mild criticism of Secretary Laurel's plans — and we mean this as constructively as possible — "soon" is not an encouraging time frame. Not being a career politician or government functionary, which is, to Secretary Laurel's credit, perhaps does not occur to him that promises "to run after corruption" or "run after smugglers" have been repeated so often by newly appointed executives — not just in the DA — that they are practically boilerplate. The damage caused by these bad actors is so great that exposing them and putting a stop to their activities should be a top priority; in other words, "now" would be a much more reassuring word than "soon."

That being said, we nevertheless are confident that the President made the best possible choice, and look forward to Secretary Laurel's tenure. It is high time we see some great improvement in Philippine agriculture which, of course, will benefit everyone in the country.



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Agri output dipped slightly in Q3

BY JED MACAPAGAL

AGRICULTURE production value dropped 0.3 percent in the third quarter of the year pulled down by the crops and fisheries sub-sectors, according to a report from the Philippine Statistics Authority.

At constant 2018 prices, the agriculture production value stood at P412.41 billion.

In the first nine months of the year, the value of production in agriculture and fisheries at constant 2018 prices registered a 0.2 percent increase.

The fisheries sub-sector recorded the biggest drop in the third quarter, 6.1 percent, contributing P58.72 billion or 14.2 percent of the total agricultural output.

Production increases were observed for seaweeds, alumahan, matangbaka, yellowfin tuna, galunggong, tilapia and sapsap.

Declines were recorded for tiger prawn, bigeye tuna, fimbriated sardines, mudcrab, squid, talakitok, bisugo, blue crab, grouper, skipjack, milkfish, frigate tuna and tamban.

At current prices, the sub-sector grossed P76.98 billion, down 0.4

percent from last year.

For the first nine months of 2023, the fisheries sub-sector's value registered a 7 percent contraction.

The 0.4-percent decline in crops sub-sector's value of production at constant 2018 prices followed at P222.69 billion and accounting for 54 percent of the total value of production of agriculture and fisheries.

Increases in production were registered for palay at 0.2 percent to 3.79 million metric tons (MT) from 3.78 million MT and corn, 5 percent, to 2.47 million MT from

2.35 million MT.

Other crops that experienced growth for the period are onion, tobacco, mango, coffee, cacao, pineapple, tomato and banana.

However, declines in production were recorded for sugarcane, potato, mongo, cabbage, eggplant, rubber, calamansi, abaca, ampalaya, sweet potato, cassava and coconut.

At current prices, the sub-sector grossed P265.39 billion, 10.1 percent higher than last year.

For the first nine months of

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Malaya Business Insight

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AGRI

2023, the crops sub-sector's value was up 0.9 percent.

The poultry sub-sector recorded the biggest increase in production for the period at P64.89 billion, higher by 2.9 percent at constant 2018 prices and accounted for 15.7 percent of total agricultural output.

The performance of the sub-sector was pushed by the growth in the production of chicken, chicken eggs and duck despite decline in the output duck eggs for the period.

The value of poultry production also went up by 0.4 percent to P88.46 billion at current prices.

For the first nine months of the year, the poultry sub-sector's

value also increased by 2.5 percent.

The livestock sub-sector, which contributed 16 percent or P66.11 billion of the total value of agricultural production at constant 2018 prices, experienced an increase in value at 2.5 percent.

Only hog and goat recorded increases in the sector while dairy, cattle and carabao experienced contractions.

At current prices, the value of livestock production amounted to P91.74 billion, down 2.9 percent from the same period last year.

For the first three quarters of the year, the livestock sub-

sector's production value was up by 2.4 percent.

Overall, the value of the country's entire agricultural production at current prices also went up by 4.3 percent to P522.58 billion.

Despite the slight contraction

in the value of farm production in the third quarter, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said there are still strong indications the sector could contribute positively to the economy.

"As we look at the data more

closely, we could see positive signs in the rice, corn and onion harvest as well as in our production of tilapia and galunggong—all important food items for the Filipino masses,"

said DA Secretary Francisco Tiu

Laurel Jr., in a statement.

Laurel added with these "positive signs," the DA is working towards higher productivity of other key agricultural commodities through various interventions.

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Onion retail prices up by P30/kilo

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The retail price of onions has increased by P30 per kilo, setting the price to as high as P220 per kilo in Metro Manila markets compared to the prevailing prices a week ago, according to the **Department of Agriculture (DA)**.

Based on the DA's latest monitoring, the retail prices of local red onions ranged between P80 and P220 per kilo; imported red onions, between P125 and P140 per kilo; local white onions, between P100 and P160 per kilo; and imported white onions between P80 and P200 per kilo.

As for DA's price watch five days ago or on Nov. 2, the highest retail price of local red onions was only P190 per kilo, which is P30 lower compared to the present P220 per kilo while imported white onions was only P160 per

kilo or P40 cheaper compared to the current price of the imported white bulbs.

The retail price of local onions was highest in Pateros as it ranged between P200 and P220 per kilo.

Meanwhile, the retail price of the bulbs reached as high as P200 per kilo in La Huerta Market in Parañaque City.

The retail price of red onions reached as high as P720 in December 2022 amid the manipulation and hoarding of the bulbs as demand went up because of the holiday season.

Farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura chairman Rosendo So said that the retail price of onions should not exceed P200 per kilo as the buying price in the cold storage in Nueva Ecija was only at P80 per kilo.



Region 2 pushing durian production expansion

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

THROUGH the High-Value Crops Development Program (HVCDP), the Department of Agriculture (DA)-Regional 2 (Cagayan Valley) office has resolved to expand the durian industry in the region after attending the first-ever Philippine Asia Durian Summit in Davao City.

HVCDP focal person Carol Albay said the Cagayan Valley region as of 2022 has approximately 4 hectares of durian that yield 45.4 metric tons (MT) of the fruit annually.

"This year, a total of 8,000 pieces of durian planting materials will be distributed, covering 80 hect-

ares in the region," she said.

Albay added that in the next five years, the DA has plans to expand durian plantation in the country to 50,000 hectares with the Cagayan Valley region as one of the target expansion areas.

The Cagayan Valley region com-

prises the provinces of Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino and the island province of Batanes.

The DA-Region 2 delegation, through HVCDP, attended the first-ever Philippine Asia Durian Summit with the theme "Cultivation, Innovation, Collaboration," held at the SMX Convention Center, SM Lanang Premier in Davao City from October 25 to 28, 2023.

She explained that the Durian Summit held in Davao City was "an inaugural event envisioned to be a space for the sharing of voices, insights, local and international durian experts and enthusiasts outlook, collaboration and fostering partnership in the sector."

"It also aims to increase awareness of the increasing demand for durian in the international market," Albay added.

Citing the still-increasing market demand for durian in China, Albay said the Davao Region is currently exporting 3,481 MT of fresh durian to the Asian country.

"China also exports fresh and frozen durian to Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Thailand and the United States," she said.

The delegation from Cagayan Valley was also given a tour showcasing the different varieties of durian, packing houses, the best farm practices and techniques, and postharvest management systems.



■ The delegation from the Department of Agriculture-Region 2 (Cagayan Valley) office to the Philippine Asia Durian Summit in Davao City tours packing houses for the fruit, which is now being exported to China. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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Cashew fruit seen as profitable commodity

PRODUCING products from the cashew apple can be a profitable venture, based on discussions during the conference themed "Advancing Cashew Industry through Green Technology" held on November 3 at Dusit Thani Manila.

The conference was convened by the Department of Science and Technology (DoST)-Industrial Technology Development Institute that is the culminating activity of the DoST-Ministry of Science and Technology China project titled "Green Oil and Phytochemicals from Cashew."

This project seeks the utilization of green technologies to extract oil from cashew for applications in food, pharmaceutical and cosmetic products.

During the conference, DoST Secretary Renato Solidum Jr. said that the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR) and the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in

Agriculture (Searca) see an "underutilization of the components of the cashew fruit."

The DA-BAR-funded Searca research showed that cashew farming in the Philippines has traditionally focused on nuts, based on its study in Palawan. The province is the country's leading cashew-producing province, where commodity is the "One Town, One Product" or OTOP.

The Searca study titled "Technology and Investment Profile of Cashew Products" highlighted products such as cashew wine, cashew prunes, cashew jelly, cashew jam and salted cashew nuts, which maximizes the utility of the cashew apple using various technologies.

But the study showed that Palawan's cashew farmers have struggled with low returns on their investments.

The study said this issue is partially linked to the underutilization of the cashew apple's flesh, which constitutes a substantial 90 percent of the fruit.

"The study further suggests that this may be addressed by exploration of the fruit's potential in processing or manufacturing," Solidum said.

Glenn Gregorio, Searca director, said that in a move to address this challenge and boost cashew farmers' income, the Western Philippines University in Palawan has initiated development of products from the cashew apple.

He said the DA-BAR and the DA-Palawan Research and Experiment Station (DA-PRES) supported further improvements in products utilizing the cashew nut and apple.

A research project by the DA-PRES titled "Cashew Products Processing, Packaging and Labeling" focused on processing cashew apples and introduced modern packaging materials.

Gregorio said the DA-PRES has also developed various products from cashew apples, including those featured in the study. "Cashew apple, once undervalued, has

gained economic value surpassing four times that of cashew nuts."

"The study also outlined strategies to enhance the marketability and commercialization of these products," Gregorio said, adding that the DA-PRES has also contributed by organizing promotional campaigns and farmer training sessions, stimulating interest in value-adding activities.

To conduct a thorough assessment of the financial viability of each product, the study used financial evaluation tools, including net present value, benefit-cost ratio and financial internal rate of return.

"The results of this analysis indicated that all cashew products exceeded the predefined criteria for financial viability. These findings strongly suggest that cashew wine, cashew prunes, cashew jelly, cashew jam and salted cashew nuts all exhibit considerable promise as lucrative investment opportunities," Gregorio said.



Growing rice with less water

IT is common knowledge that among the staple crops cultivated globally, it is rice that consumes the largest volume of water. Also, rice cultivation releases a big amount of methane that contributes to global warming.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said that flooded rice paddy fields account for 12 percent of global anthropogenic methane emissions, which is equivalent to 1.5 percent of the total warming effect of all greenhouse gases.

"Under common rice production practices, farmers keep rice fields flooded to suppress weed emergence. Underwater, methane is produced as organic matters decay with little access to oxygen," the ADB said in a briefer for a recent webinar on how to incentivize the reduction of methane emissions in rice farming in Asia.

The ADB recommended the alternate wetting and drying (AWD) method in cultivating the staple, which allows rice farms to grow under dry conditions periodically. The institution added that AWD can reduce methane emissions by 30 to 50 percent, and water utilization by 10 to 20 percent. AWD also does not reduce the yield of rice.

Direct-seeded rice system

From the private sector, Bayer Global is introducing what it calls the direct-seeded rice (DSR) method for cultivating the staple, which the company claims has the potential to reduce by up to 40 percent both greenhouse gas emissions and water use.

During the 6th International Rice Congress held in Manila on October 16, Bayer Global said that under its DirectAcres program, it plans to scale up the DSR system to 1 million hectares and to support 2 million early adopter-smallholder farmers and their families in India by 2030.



MOVING FORWARD

WILLIAM D. DAR

For the Philippines, Bayer Global is seeking to upscale the DSR system starting next year.

In India, which has less water resources compared to the Philippines, the DSR system through the DirectAcres program is already applied in 11 percent of its rice lands. Bayer Global said that it expects 75 percent of rice farms in India to switch to the DSR system by 2040.

"Already underway, DirectAcres has seen considerable success with 99 percent of Indian farmers achieving successful plant establishment and 75 percent a higher return on investment compared to rice grown using the conventional transplanted method. Bayer plans therefore to introduce DirectAcres in other rice-growing countries in Asia-Pacific, starting with the Philippines in 2024," Bayer Global said in a statement.

Frank Terhorst, head of Strategy and Sustainability at Bayer's Crop Science Division, added that the company is building systems based on the principles of regenerative agriculture to also help address global food security.

Bayer Global said another benefit of the DSR system compared to the traditional method of transplanting rice seedlings is less labor, or up to a 50-percent reduction.

Drip irrigation for rice farming

Another private firm, Netafim in Israel, has developed a drip irrigation system for rice farming that it claims can reduce water usage by up to 70 percent while increasing yields by 50 percent.

"Producing a ton of rice in a paddy system will consume 5,000 cubic meters of water. Alternatively, that same ton grown with drip irrigation will need only 1,500 cubic meters. Drip eliminates evaporation, run-off and percolation," Netafim said in its website.

The Israeli firm also said that reducing water usage in rice farming through drip irrigation can do wonders for the environment.

"Paddy rice cultivation generates 20 percent of methane gas emissions worldwide. If only 10 percent of paddy rice farmers switch to drip, the drop in emissions will be equivalent to taking 40 million cars off the road," the company said.

Netafim also said the submerged rice roots make the plants absorb heavy metals, resulting in the grains having arsenic. By utilizing drip irrigation, arsenic absorption of rice is reduced by as much as 90 percent.

PhilRice advocates AWD

In the Philippines among local institutions, it is the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) that is advocating AWD to reduce water usage in rice farms.

PhilRice released in September 2022 a policy paper titled "Policy Imperatives to Increase Uptake of the Alternative Wetting and Drying Technology" explaining the benefits of AWD. The paper said that AWD has already been adopted in many rice-producing countries but in the Philippines, the adoption is low as there is no incentive for farmers to save on water.

The institution added that AWD has been practiced for decades but farmers still find it hard to break the old practice of submerging rice fields in water.

To upscale AWD, PhilRice is recommending the following, and let me quote them: use participatory approaches in agricultural extension; review of some provisions of the Free Irrigation Service Act; and improve irrigation water governance to modernize tools to practice AWD.

I strongly believe that saving water in cultivating crops should be piloted and upscaled nationwide while our country still has enough water resources. This should also be made alongside efforts to reduce chemical input use in farming, and making farms part of an overall ecosystem that includes water sources, forests, which are all part of the paradigm shift to regenerative agriculture.

And since rice is among the top five most cultivated crops in the world, scaling up measures to reduce water and chemical input use, and preserving soil resources in cultivating the staple can be one big step in mainstreaming regenerative agriculture.



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Govt urged to explore full potential of cashew

THE government should explore the potential of cashew fruits to improve farmers' incomes, the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) said.

SEARCA in a study funded by the Department of Agriculture's (DA) Bureau of Agricultural Research, said cashew apple's flesh is currently underutilized even if it constitutes 90 percent of the fruit.

SEARCA said this is because focus has only been given to cashew

nuts, particularly in Palawan which is the country's leading producer of the crop.

The study titled Technology and Investment Profile of Cashew Products said by-products like wine, prunes, jelly, jam and salted cashew nuts can maximize use of the cashew fruit through various technologies.

It also found that Palawan's cashew farmers have struggled with low returns on their investments, mainly because of the underutilization of the cashew apple's flesh due to the lack of

awareness about its processing potential.

Dr. Glenn Gregorio, SEARCA director, said to address such challenge, the Western Philippines University as well as DA attached agencies such as the Bureau of Agricultural Research and the Palawan Research and Experiment Station (PRES), initiated product development of more products using both cashew nuts and cashew apples.

"Cashew apple, once undervalued, has gained economic value surpassing four times

that of cashew nuts," Gregorio said.

According to data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, the country produced a total of 123,760.66 metric tons (MT) of cashew in 2022, down by 51.6 percent from 2021's 255,931.01 MT.

Palawan supplied 117,836.32 or 95.2 percent of the total cashew produced in 2022. The province also provided 250,126.46 MT of cashews in 2021 or 97.7 percent of all cashews produced by the Philippines for the period. -Jed Macapagal

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AMID TYPHOONS, INFLATION

AGRI OUTPUT SHRINKS FOR SECOND QUARTER IN A ROW

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

The country's agriculture sector contracted for the second consecutive quarter this year as some commodities registered lower production due to typhoons and higher input costs.

Agriculture production dipped by 0.3 percent in the third quarter compared to the 1.6-percent growth recorded in the same period last year, based

on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The figure was slightly better than the 1.2-percent drop in the April to June period this year.

This brings the overall value of agriculture output to P412.41 billion from P413.62 billion previously.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. chief economist Michael Ricafort partially attributed the year-on-year decline to typhoons.

"Higher prices or inflation,

especially on various agricultural inputs, also partly weighed on production or output," Ricafort added, noting higher global crude oil prices affected the sector's overall performance as well.

Among the subsectors, fisheries incurred the biggest decrease in output of 6.1 percent.

Tugon Kabuhayan convener Asis Perez said the fisheries' underwhelming performance was due to the limited availability of fish fry and fingerlings in

the past quarters.

"We're keeping our fingers crossed that there will be no further decline in production this coming last quarter," he said.

Crop output tumbled by 0.4 percent with palay and corn, two staple Filipino foods, gaining slightly.

Agriculture Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian said palay was just a tad higher because of delayed planting amid the late onset of the rainy season. **INQ**



Agricultural output falls 0.3% in Q3

By Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson
Reporter

THE PHILIPPINES' agricultural output shrank for a second straight quarter in the July-to-September period mainly due to declines in crops and fisheries production, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

Data from the PSA on Wednesday showed the value of production in agriculture and fisheries at constant 2018 prices dipped by 0.3% to P412.412 billion in the July-to-September period, "due to reductions in crops and fisheries production."

This was a reversal from the 1.6% growth in the same period a year ago, but an improvement from the 1.2% contraction in the second quarter this year.

At current prices, the value of production in agriculture and fisheries rose by 4.3% to P522.58 billion in the third quarter.

For the nine months to September, the value of production in agriculture and fisheries at constant 2018 prices inched up by 0.2% from the 0.3% increase in the same period in 2022.

"Despite (the) slight contraction in the value of farm production in the third quarter, there are still strong indications the sector could contribute positively to the economy," the Department of Agriculture (DA) said in a statement.

The DA set a target of 2.3%-2.5% for agricultural output growth this year.

Crops, which account for more than half or 54% of the sector's overall production, slipped by 0.4% to P222.69 billion in the third quarter. This was a reversal of the 1.8% expansion in the same period a year ago and the 1.2% growth in the second quarter of 2023.

Roehlano M. Briones, a senior research fellow with the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, said that the drop in crops output was mainly due to weather disruptions.

For the first nine months, the value of crop production grew by 0.9%, an improvement from the 1% decline a year earlier.

In the third quarter, the decline in crop output was mainly attributed to the lower production in sugarcane (-26.4%), potato (-26%), mongo (-21.1%), cabbage (-17.5%), eggplant (-13.9%), and rubber (-12.7%). Lower output was also seen in abaca (-7.7%), ampalaya (-7.5%), and coconut (-1.9%).

Meanwhile, tobacco production surged by 122.1% and onion by 165.1%. Corn inched up by 5%, while banana (0.03%) and mango (15.2%) also showed increased production.

Fisheries recorded the steepest drop in the third quarter as production fell by 6.1% to P58.72 billion, worsening from the 5.2% decline a year ago but improving from the 13.8% contraction in the previous quarter.

Fisheries contributed 14.2% to the total share of agricultural output.

For the January-to-September period, the value of fisheries output at constant 2018 prices fell by 7% from the 4.3% decline a year ago.

Former Agriculture Undersecretary Fermin D. Adriano said fisheries production was affected by typhoons during the third quarter.

Agricultural, S1/11



Agricultural, from SI/1

Latest data from the Agriculture department showed that the southwest monsoon along with typhoons Egay (international name: Doksuri) and Falcon (international name: Khanun) caused around P12 billion in agricultural damage, with rice production losses at P3 billion. The volume of lost production was estimated at 279,289 metric tons (MT) with 250,174 hectares of affected farmland.

Pangingisda Natin Gawing Tama Network representative Dennis F. Calvin said the contraction in fisheries production was due to "a lot of pressure to the already depleted resource."

"We might be feeling the brunt of the impacts of El Niño, though technical assessments should be conducted first," he said in a Viber message.

For the third quarter, double-digit declines were seen in tiger prawn or sugpo (-49%), big-eye tuna or *tambakol* (-41.1%), fimbriated sardines or *tunsoy* (-37.8%), mudcrab or *alimango* (-28.1%), squid or *pusit* (-26.3%), cavalla or *talakitok* (-26.3%), threadfin bream or *bisugo* (-19.4%), blue crab or *alimasag* (-18.1%), grouper or *lapu-lapu* (-15.5%), skipjack or *gulyasan* (-12.6%), and milkfish or *bangus* (-12%).

Meanwhile, higher production was recorded for indian mackerel or *alumahan* (60.6%), big-eyed scad or *matangbaka* (32.8%), yellowfin tuna or *tambakol* (28.5%), round scad or *galunggong* (17.2%), tilapia (6.9%), and seaweed (14%).

Newly appointed Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. said that the latest agricultural output data still show positive indicators for key commodities under crops and fisheries.

"As we look at the data more closely, we could see positive signs in the rice, corn and onion harvest as well as in our production of tilapia and *galunggong* — all important food items for the Filipino masses," he said.

BRIGHT SPOTS

On the other hand, the livestock and poultry sectors recorded gains in the third quarter.

Mr. Adriano said this was due to the recovery of the livestock sector from African Swine Fever and the poultry sector from avian flu.

The value of livestock production, which accounted for 16% of total farm output, rose by 2.5% to P66.1 billion in the third quarter. This was lower than the 4% growth in the third quarter a year ago, but better than the 0.7% increase in the second quarter.

In the third quarter, hog and goat production grew by 3.3% and 0.1%, respectively. However, lower production was seen for dairy (-12.4%), cattle (-1.5%), and carabao (-0.3%).

In the nine months to September, the value of livestock production rose by 2.4%, higher than 1.8% in the same period a year ago.

Meanwhile, poultry output expanded by 2.9% to P64.89 billion in the third quarter, slower than the 6.4% growth in the same quarter of 2022 but higher than the 1.5% increase in the second quarter.

Poultry accounted for 15.7% of the total agricultural output.

The value of chicken eggs, duck, and chicken production expanded by 4.7%, 3.6%, and 2.3%, respectively. Duck eggs declined by 2.2% during the quarter.

From January to September, the value of poultry production at constant 2018 prices rose by 2.5%, much slower than the 8.8% expansion a year ago.

Elias Jose M. Inciong, president of the United Broiler Raisers Association, said despite the growth registered for the poultry sector, this was still below expected output.

"The normal growth of the poultry sector is 4% to 7%. As such, there is some under performance. This may have been caused by adjustments made due to lower-than-expected demand," he said in a Viber message.

OUTLOOK

For the last quarter of the year, Mr. Briones said he is not optimistic for a turnaround in agricultural output growth due to the El Niño weather event.

Latest data from the state weather bureau showed that a moderate El Niño will continue to persist and is predicted to intensify in the coming months.

On the other hand, Mr. Adriano said that there is a possibility for crops to post higher growth in the fourth quarter as it is "peak palay harvest" in October.

"We have not been visited by destructive typhoons in October and hopefully November, which is also good for other crops," he said.

"Livestock and poultry will continue to increase given peak demand for such products this Christmas holiday," he added.

For fisheries, Mr. Calvin said that there may be further decline due to inclement weather and the closed season for fishing grounds, which could disrupt production, especially for capture fisheries.

"Fish importation, where we are expecting 35,000 metric tons (MT) of assorted fish to enter the market, and reliance on aquaculture production are usually the interventions we do during the last quarter until first quarter of next year," he added.



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Rules for deploying avian influenza vaccine issued

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it identified the types of farms that are eligible for priority status in the rollout of vaccines for avian influenza (AI), also known as bird flu.

Under the guidelines, priority has been given to com-

mercial farms for layer chicken, layer chicken breeders, broiler chicken breeders, free-range breeders, grandparent broiler breeders, as well as small-hold layer/native chicken, duck, game fowl, turkey, and goose farms.

Commercial broiler chicken, small-hold broiler, quail, pigeon, and exotic bird farms were ineligible.

The guidelines recognize two types of vaccine deployment — protective emergency vaccination and preventive vaccination.

The DA said it will prioritize areas with a significant number of AI cases for protective emergency vaccinations. Areas at risk of an outbreak may be subject to preventive vaccination. — **Adrian H. Halili**

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Govt avian flu vaccine approval to help boost PHL food security—poultry industry players

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

[@jearcalas](#)

THE national government's decision to allow commercial vaccination against bird flu would help ensure the country's food security, particularly for proteins, and deter the use of illegal vaccines, an industry expert said.

Jun Romo, president of the Philippine College of Poultry Practitioners, said the approval of the guidelines on targeted use of vaccination against avian influenza (AI) is two-fold.

First, it would contribute to protecting the local poultry industry, thereby, safeguarding the country's protein supply. Second, it would serve as a deterrent to unauthorized vaccines circulating in the market today.

"The most pressing impetus why we pushed for the use of vaccination [was] because we really want to protect our food security, especially poultry, which is the source of cheapest protein both in eggs and meat," Romo told the BUSINESSMIRROR.

The PCCP is the partner private organization of the Department of Agriculture (DA) in crafting and drafting the guidelines on bird flu vaccination use.

Romo explained that the PCCP pushed for the inclusion of vaccination as part of the government's tools against bird flu when the transboundary animal disease resurged in late 2021.

He pointed out that bird flu has become "endemic" to wild birds in recent years compared to the first time that the Philippines suffered outbreaks of the disease in 2017.

"We want to protect the areas critical to our food security, especially those near to the marshlands where wild birds go. And we know that those are the same areas where the bulk of our layer population can be found," Romo said.

Furthermore, Romo emphasized that the risk of using illegal vaccines is that it might push the bird flu virus to mutate.

Once that happens, the arrival of legitimate vaccines may not be effective enough to control the virus, he explained.

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Industry players have sounded the alarm that various vaccines, claiming to be against bird flu, are readily available and accessible in e-commerce platforms like Shopee.

Romo is confident that the Philippines, in drafting the AI vaccination guidelines, benefitted from the wisdom and experiences of nearby countries that have been using vaccines to control the disease.

Gregorio San Diego, Philippine Egg Board Association (PEBA) chairman, said local poultry raisers have been forced to use smuggled vaccines, such as those sold in online platforms like Shopee, just to have a certain level of protection to their flocks.

"If you get hit by bird flu, it can wipe out all your birds and that is a huge devastation. So, poultry raisers are risking using illegal vaccines just to have a sense of protection compared to having none," San Diego told reporters in an interview on Wednesday.

In October 2022, the PEBA joined the call for the government to allow and fast track the entry of inactivated bird flu vaccines in the country to curb the impact of the disease on the domestic layer industry. (**Related story:** <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2022/10/24/phl-layer-industry-cites-riskfrom-ai-surge-pushes-vax/>)

San Diego and Romo urged the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to fast track the issuance of the special import permit for the

AI vaccines to kick start the roll-out of legitimate vaccines.

Romo disclosed that the technical working group (TWG) on AI has formally endorsed three vaccine candidates to the FDA to be issued with special import permits.

He emphasized that the vaccines underwent rigorous local trials and have been used by other countries as well in their fight against bird flu.

The Philippines recently allowed the commercial use of AI vaccines in domestic poultry to help in curbing the spread of bird flu nationwide and minimize economic losses incurred by raisers. (**Related story:** <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/11/08/phl-allows-commercial-use-of-ai-vaccine-for-domestic-poultry-industry/>)

The landmark policy decision was made after the DA published the guidelines on the targeted use of bird flu vaccines to complement the efforts against the transboundary animal disease.

The urgency of allowing the use of vaccines came about when the country faced resurgence of bird flu outbreaks in recent years at a faster rate and wider scope compared to the initial incidences in 2017.

The Philippines joined the growing number of countries worldwide that have adopted a vaccination policy to control the spread of bird flu that has killed at least 300 million of poultry globally, disrupting global supply and trade.



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PHL farm output contracts in July-Sept—PSA

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

[@jearcalas](#)

THE country's agricultural production in the third quarter dipped by 0.3 percent, a reversal of the 1.6-percent growth posted a year ago, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said there are still "strong indications" that the sector could contribute positively to the economy despite the contraction in the value of farm production during the period.

PSA data indicated that the contraction in the output of crops and fisheries dragged the overall performance of the country's farm sector.

The contractions in the two

sectors were more than enough to pull down the overall gains registered by the livestock and poultry sectors.

"As we look closely at the data more closely, we could see positive signs in the rice, corn and onion harvest, as well as in our production of tilapia and galunggong—all important food items for the Filipino masses," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel said in a statement.



A FARMER uses a hand tractor with a three-disc plow attachment developed by the Philippine Rice Research Institute. BUSINESSMIRROR FILE PHOTO

Data from the PSA showed that the value of production in agriculture and fisheries, at constant 2018 prices, during the July to September period fell to P412.412 billion from P413.622 billion a year ago.

Across all the sectors, fisheries posted the steepest decline at 6.1 percent followed by crops at



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0.4 percent, according to the PSA.

The value of the fisheries production in the third quarter was estimated at P58.72 billion, about P3.826 billion lower than the P62.546 billion recorded last year.

The fisheries sector's output value was the lowest since 2003, when it reached P58.146 billion. It contributed 14 percent to the

overall agricultural and fisheries production in July to September.

Meanwhile, the value of the country's crop production fell by P810 million to P222.692 billion from last year's P223.502 billion, according to the PSA. The crops sector accounted for 54 percent of total farm and fisheries output of the country.

"The value of livestock production at P66.11 billion was 2.5 percent higher than last year's same quarter level. It contributed 16.0 percent to the total value of production in agriculture and fisheries," the PSA said on Wednesday.

The poultry sector, which had a 15.7 percent share to total agricultural production, registered a P64.89 billion worth of output, about 3 percent higher than the P63.06 billion it recorded last year.

"At current prices, the value of production in agriculture and fisheries amounted to P522.58 billion, which was 4.3 percent higher than its level in the same quarter last year," the PSA said.

Data from the agency also showed that the country's agricultural and fisheries output from January to September grew slightly to P1.269 trillion compared from last year's P1.266 trillion.

The sector posted slight increases in terms of the value of output for the second consecutive year. In 2022, it grew by 0.3 percent on an annual basis.

During the nine-month period, only the value of fisheries output contracted while the production of crops, livestock and poultry posted increments, based on PSA data.

The value of fisheries production from January to September reached P172.212 billion, about 7 percent lower than the P185.247 billion recorded last year.

Figures from the agency indicated that the value of the production of crops amounted to P711.29 billion (up 0.88 percent); livestock, P191.272 billion (up 2.39 percent); and poultry, P194.376 billion (up 2.5 percent).

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3 World Bank-funded projects to boost agri output unveiled

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has launched three new projects funded by the World Bank (WB) as part of government efforts to achieve food security.

Newly installed DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. led the unveiling of the Philippine Rural Development Project (PRDP) Scale-Up, Philippine Fisheries and Coastal Resiliency (FishCoRe) Project, and Mindanao Inclusive Agricultural Development Project (MIADP) in a ceremony held at Novotel hotel in Quezon City on Monday afternoon.

Laurel underscored the significance of the three projects, noting that these are in line with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s thrust to strengthen the capabilities of farmers and fisherfolk through climate-resilient policies and innovations.

"Together with our longtime partner, the World Bank, we are excited to see the immense contribution to increasing agricultural productivity, market access, income and resiliency and significantly improve organized farmer and fisherfolk groups' access to markets and services," he said.

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Negros farmers selling rice at P25/kilo anew

By **GILBERT BAYORAN**

BACOLOD CITY – Rice farmers, aided by the provincial government in reducing their labor inputs, have been selling rice anew for P25 per kilo at the "Bigasan ng Bayan" outlet located in the Food Terminal Market of Negros Occidental (FTMON) since Nov. 7.

Pedro Limpangog, president of the Federation of Irrigators Association of Central Negros-Bago River Irrigation System (FIACN-BRIS), said they are targeting 470 priority consumers to avail themselves of the low priced rice.

Priority consumers – including senior citizens, indigents and persons with disabilities – can buy up to five kilos only.

Limpangog said the sacks of rice were produced by 44 FIACN-BRIS southern sector farmers from Bago City, Valladolid, Pulupandan, San Enrique and La Carlota.

Last month, the Bigas ng Bayan outlet also sold rice to at least 455 individuals at the FTMON.

Limpangog said the proceeds would be used to buy more rice from other rice farmers, which will be also sold at FTMON at P25 per kilo.

The Manila Times®

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CACAO CONGRESS SET IN DAVAO TO BOOST LOCAL OUTPUT

THE conduct of the National Cacao Congress 2023 in Davao City from November 16 to 17 offers an opportunity to showcase local cacao and gain insights on how to improve its production, an official said Tuesday.

Dante Muyco, chairman of the Davao Regional Cacao Industry Council, also encouraged the ca-

cao farmers to achieve a yield of 2 kilograms (kg) of quality dry beans per tree, a benchmark that will allow the Philippines to compete in the global export market.

"The demand for chocolate is rising, and we target at least 2 kg per tree of dry beans. But based on our observation, the number of kilos per tree will only get at least

800 grams," Muyco said in a press briefing here.

To address the problem, he said cacao experts were invited to discuss the productivity and sustainability of the cacao industry in the upcoming event.

"[The] Philippines is consuming around 50,000 MT (metric tons) of cacao annually and the inter-

national demand is growing at 10 percent per year. The world needs 5 million MT per year, and we are too far yet," Muyco said.

Davao Region's favorable climate, he said, places it in a viable position to expand production to meet the increasing demand for cacao.

Muyco said the region was de-

clared Cacao Capital of the Philippines in 2021 through Republic Act 11547, highlighting its pivotal role in cacao production.

With 81 percent of the Philippines' cacao output coming from Mindanao, local farmers must respond to the challenge by improving quality and productivity, he said.

Summit activities include plenary sessions, panel discussions and workshops covering various aspects of cacao production, quality enhancement and sustainability.

A highlight of the event is an exhibition showcasing 85 booths for cacao industry stakeholders to present their products and services.

PNA



Report: Hidden costs of global agrifood systems worth at least \$10T

CURRENT agrifood systems impose huge hidden costs on people's health, the environment and society, equivalent to at least \$10 trillion a year, according to a ground-breaking analysis by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), covering 154 countries.

FAO said the amount represents almost 10 percent of global GDP.

According to the 2023 edition of The State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA), the biggest hidden costs (more than 70 percent) are driven by unhealthy diets, high in ultra-processed foods, fats and sugars, leading to obesity and non-communicable diseases, and causing labor productivity losses. Such losses are particularly high in high- and upper-middle-income countries.

One fifth of the total costs are environment-related, from greenhouse gas and nitrogen emissions, land-use change and water use. This is a problem that affects all countries, and the scale is probably underestimated due to data limitations.

Low-income countries are proportionately the hardest hit by hidden costs of agrifood systems, which represent more than a quarter of their GDP, as opposed to less than 12 percent in middle-income countries and less than 8 percent in high-income countries. In low-income countries, hidden costs associated with poverty and undernourishment are the most significant.

The report makes the case for more regular and detailed analysis by governments and the private sector of the hidden or 'true' costs of agrifood systems via true cost accounting, followed by actions to mitigate these harms.

There have been other attempts at measuring the hidden costs of agrifood systems, producing similar estimates as FAO. The new FAO report,

however, is the first to disaggregate these costs down to the national level and ensure they are comparable across cost categories and between countries.

For the first time ever, FAO will dedicate two consecutive editions of The State of Food and Agriculture to the same theme. This year's report presents initial estimates, while next year's will focus on in-depth targeted assessments to identify the best ways to mitigate them. Governments can pull different levers to adjust agrifood systems and drive better outcomes overall. Taxes, subsidies, legislation and regulation are among them.

"In the face of escalating global challenges: food availability, food accessibility and food affordability; climate crisis; biodiversity loss; economic slowdowns and downturns; worsening poverty; and other overlapping crises, the future of our agrifood systems hinges on our willingness to appreciate all food producers, big or small, to acknowledge these true costs, and understand how we all contribute to them, and what actions we need to take.

I hope that this report will serve as a call to action for all partners—from policymakers and private-sector actors to researchers and consumers—and inspire a collective commitment to transform our agrifood systems for the betterment of all," said FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu.

The report urged governments to use true cost accounting to transform agrifood systems to address the climate crisis, poverty, inequality and food security. It noted that innovations in research and data, as well as investments in data collection and capacity building, will be needed to scale the application of true cost accounting, so it can inform decision-making in "a transparent and consistent way."

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Cacao congress to promote local cacao, raise productivity

DAVAO City—The conduct of the National Cacao Congress 2023 in this city on November 16-17 is seen as a great opportunity to showcase local cacao and gain insights on how to improve its production, an official said Tuesday.

Dante Muyco, chairperson of the Davao Regional Cacao Industry Council, also encouraged cacao farmers to achieve a yield of 2 kg of quality dry beans per tree,

a benchmark that will allow the Philippines to compete effectively in the global export market.

"The demand for chocolate is rising, and we target at least 2 kg per tree of dry beans. But based on our observation, the number of kilos per tree will only get at least 800 grams," Muyco said in a press briefing here.

To address the problem, he said, cacao experts were invited to discuss the productivity and sustainability of the cacao industry in the

upcoming event.

"[The] Philippines is consuming around 50,000 MT [metric tons] of cacao annually and the international demand is growing at 10 percent per year. The world needs 5 million MT per year, and we are too far yet," Muyco said.

Davao region's favorable climate, he said, places it in a viable position to expand production to meet the increasing demand for cacao.

Muyco said the region was declared Cacao Capital of the Philippines in 2021 through Republic Act 11547, highlighting its pivotal role in cacao production.

With 81 percent of the Philippines's cacao output coming from Mindanao, local farmers must respond to the challenge by improving quality and productivity, he said.

Summit activities include plenary sessions, panel discussions, and workshops covering various aspects of cacao production, quality enhancement, and sustainability.

A highlight of the event is an exhibition showcasing 85 booths for cacao industry stakeholders to present their products and services. *Philippine News Agency*



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Soybeans strengthen

SINGAPORE- Chicago soybean prices firmed nearly 1 percent on Wednesday, trading close to their highest levels in two months, as adverse weather conditions in top exporter Brazil and strong Chinese demand underpinned the market.

Wheat edged higher, recouping some of previous session's losses, although prices remained under pressure from improved US crop conditions.

"Brazilian soybean planting program is running bit behind schedule due to erratic weather," said one Singapore-based trader.

"At this stage, we are not too worried as there is still time."

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 0.8 percent at \$13.73-1/4 a bushel, not far from previous session's highest since Sept. 6 at \$13.80 a bushel.

Wheat gained 0.6 percent at \$5.73-1/2 a bushel and corn edged 0.2 percent higher to \$4.69-1/4 a bushel.

Brazil, the world's top soybean supplier, saw torrential downpours in southern areas while arid conditions persisted to the north. - *Reuters*

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Australia just had the driest October in more than two decades

AUSTRALIA, a top exporter of wheat, barley and canola, experienced the driest October in more than 20 years and the fifth driest in records going back to 1900 as an El Niño weather pattern continues to bring dry, hot conditions to the country, according to the Bureau of Meteorology.

That follows the driest September on record. Early that month, the government forecaster estimated wheat output at 25.4 million tons, or 36 percent less than a year earlier, when the crop was boosted by abundant rains. Dry weather since then may have cut expectations even further. Harvesting of wheat and barley mostly starts in November and lasts through January.

■ Rainfall in October was below average for most of Australia, and the driest on record for the key growing region of Western Australia. The month's rainfall was 65 percent below the 1961-1990 average

■ Soil moisture was below average

(in the lowest 30 percent of all years since 1911) for much of country, particularly in the south and east

■ For November 2023 to January 2024, below median rainfall is likely or very likely (60 percent to greater than 80 percent chance) for northern, western, central and southern Australia

Sheep industry in crisis

MEANWHILE, Australia's sheep industry is in crisis, with prices near the lowest level in 16 years forcing some farmers in the country's west to give their animals away for free to pet-food manufacturers.

Mutton prices have plunged 75 percent over the past year, according to Tim Jackson, global supply analyst at Meat & Livestock Australia. Sheep prices have also slumped, with older animals fetching an average of just A\$34 (\$22) in October and some reports of animals selling for less than a dollar a head, he said.

El Niño is expected to bring drier and

hotter conditions, increasing the number of animals sent for slaughter because of lack of pasture. Many abattoirs are now operating at capacity. Government plans to phase out live exports have deepened concerns about oversupply—particularly in Western Australia, which shipped almost all of the country's live sheep last year.

"Some farmers are getting almost nothing," said Andrew Spencer, chair of Sheep Producers Australia. Where the sheep are low quality, some farmers are being forced to give animals away for free to pet food producers, he said. "It's been a very volatile time over the last couple of years."

In the north of the Western Australia wheat belt, there have been reports of some farmers being forced to euthanize sheep, said Steve McGuire, vice president of WAFarmers. "In the '90s, we had to euthanize large numbers. That was soul-destroying, we don't want to go back to that," he said.

This represents a dramatic decline in

fortunes for sheep producers, who less than three years ago were enjoying record lamb and mutton prices. And the market is not expected to recover until next year, said Matt Dalglish, co-founder of agricultural consulting firm, Episode 3.

Now, all eyes are focused on whether El Niño breaks over the summer, he said, adding a move back to normal rainfall would be a "huge boost to the market."

The crisis in the industry has sparked a wave of dissent among producers, with the top farming body launching a campaign calling for the federal government to abandon plans to ban live sheep exports to the Middle East and for the establishment of a dedicated visa pathway for agricultural workers.

On Monday, one of the country's two major supermarket chains, Woolworths Group, announced it would slash the price of 26 Australian lamb meat products by 20 percent following criticism that retail prices hadn't dropped fast enough.

Bloomberg News