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Malaysia's price controls exacerbate rice shortages

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## New DA chief starts agency revamp

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Newly appointed Agriculture Secretary **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** has started a reorganization within the Department of Agriculture (DA) with the appointment of his chief of staff.

Laurel signed Special Order 1360 designat-

ing lawyer Alvin John Balagbag as new chief of staff and head executive assistant, replacing Agriculture Assistant Secretary Rex Estoperez.

Laurel directed all officials and employees of the DA, including its bureaus, attached agencies and corporations

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## New DA

From Page 1

and regional field offices to give their full support and cooperation to Balagbag.

At the same time, Laurel also appointed Assistant Secretary Genevieve Velicaria-Guevarra as head of the Kadiwa program previously handled by dismissed assistant secretary Kristine Evangelista.

The Office of the Ombudsman has ordered the dismissal of Evangelista from the service and ordered the filing of criminal charges against her in connection with the controversial deal with a farmers' cooperative during the onion crisis in 2022 where the retail price of the bulbs reached as high as P720 per kilo.

Laurel also issued Special Order 1361 designating Maria Alilia Maghirang as non-resident agriculture attaché to the Republic of Palau, the Federal States of Micronesia and the Republic of Marshall Islands.

Meanwhile, Laurel formally occupied the space previously designated as office of Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban located at the second floor of the main building of the DA.

Sources from the DA said that Laurel has already issued a memorandum directing all employees covered by contract of service to start vacating their offices.



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## Priority agendas in agriculture

**T**HE newly appointed secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. faces two formidable challenges. First is how to increase overall farm productivity and second, how to tame rising food prices. There are undeniably a multitude of challenges hounding the sector but these two are the most critical



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ones if the goal of attaining food security is to be achieved.

► **Finer B3**





## ■ FINER FROM B1

### Priority

If overall farm productivity remains low (the growth rate has averaged 1 percent annually for more than two decades), there is no way local supply can meet the ever-rising demand of a population that is growing by an average of 1.3 to 1.5 percent annually. If supply is unable to keep up, it is inevitable that food prices will keep on rising.

The obvious solution to fill the supply gap is importation, but powerful vested interest groups are against this because cheap imports will lessen their profits. The usual reasons for opposing imports is that these groups are either imbued by a sense of patriotism or that they have cast their lots with poor tillers and hence are "pro-poor."

Reality, however, does not square with the claim of improving the plight of small cultivators. Protectionism has been with us for more than half a century and yet our tillers remain as dirt poor as ever. Laurel will have to perform the delicate balancing act of accommodating the demands of these vested interest groups while also ensuring that supply is adequate through judicious importation.

Undoubtedly, the ultimate solution is to increase overall farm productivity to a point where ample supply will result in lower food prices. But there are formidable challenges in achieving this task, starting with the fact that the average farm size now is a hectare as a result of the protracted implementation of the agrarian reform program. This does not allow for economies of scale in production and the

application of modern farm technologies and machineries.

The solution is to cluster and consolidate farms. But who will do this? The DA has no presence on the ground because of the devolution of agricultural extension workers to the local government units (LGUs) as a result of the Local Government Code of 1991. LGUs will have to lead the farm clustering and consolidation effort.

But what if the LGUs are not interested because it is not a high-profile visible project that can win votes in the next election? What if the LGU agricultural extension workers are not qualified to undertake agricultural productivity-enhancing projects because their appointments owe more to their loyalty to the appointing powers rather than on merits? And what if the DA central office itself is ineffective in its role of regularly upgrading the capability of agricultural extension workers?

The second problem relates to the manner by which the DA budget is allocated. It is so rice-centric, leaving little for the development of other agricultural commodities. The total budget for rice-related units and programs in 2024 will be around P109 billion, which is more than half of the total budget for the entire agricultural sector.

The budget for corn, livestock and poultry, which has the highest contribution to agricultural gross value added, is just above P5 billion. Worse, the high-value crops program, with around 13 crops (i.e., cacao, coffee, mango, durian, etc.) where the country has a comparative advantage, has a measly budget of only P1.5 billion. Coconut, which is cultivated in around 3.5 million hectares, second to rice, has

less than P1.4 billion.

With these allocations, how can we expect to raise the productivity of other commodities and overall farm output? Sadly, despite massive subsidies to the rice sector, its productivity growth has been, to say the least, modest.

The third problem, meanwhile, relates to institutional issues confronted by the DA itself. It is so focused on its regulatory functions rather than development tasks. It measures success in terms of the subsidies it distributes rather than the effectiveness of those subsidies as reflected in the incomes and welfare of farmers.

This is related to overall staff quality. Mid-level managers, particularly at the regional office level, are mostly appointed as a result of endorsements from the powers-that-be in Malacañang, Congress or at the LGU level. They are not the most technically competent but excel in the art of political compromises. The problem is compounded by the reality that there is no honest-to-goodness evaluation of their performance based on key empirical indicators.

In the immediate term, meanwhile, the new Agriculture secretary will be faced with the formidable task of arresting rising rice prices. Despite earlier assurances from senior DA officials that rice prices would settle at P36 to P38 per kilo by the end of last month as October was peak harvest month, average prices hovered at over P50. Since palay (unmilled

rice) farmgate prices have stayed at P23/ kilo or more, it is expected that rice prices will remain at more than P50.

Inevitably, rice prices will soar in the coming months as we are at the tail-end of the harvest season, demand will peak in December due to the Christmas holidays, and January and February next year are planting months with the El Niño phenomenon hitting us during that period.

The Foundation for Economic Freedom, where this writer is a fellow, has recommended the temporary reduction of the rice tariff to 10 percent (from the current 35 percent) to allow traders to import more to build our rice ending stock this year.

Unfortunately, the administration spurned the proposal as it listened to the clamor of populist lobby groups and claimed that global rice prices were on a decline

Unfortunately, global prices remain high as those in Vietnam, from which we import 90 percent of our rice imports, are still elevated. Even assuming that we get hold of 300,000 metric tons (MT) of rice from India, this will certainly not be enough as we import more than 2 million MT from Vietnam. How Laurel responds to this will be a key determinant of how he will fare as the new DA chief.

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## New DA chief's proposal to reactivate BAS hits snag

**T**HE Department of Agriculture (DA) may find it difficult to reactivate the Bureau of Agriculture Statistics (BAS) as its return would require the amendment of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) charter.

This was according to Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan who said it might be more advantageous for the DA to create a statistics unit within the agency to generate data.

On his first day in office, newly appointed Department of Agriculture Secretary (DA) Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said he is planning to reactivate the BAS to manage data on production and demand amid over-importation issues on agricultural products. (<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/11/07/tiu-laurel-bares-plan-to-reactivate-das-bas/>).

"Kung yung agency na nag-iimplement ng sariling program, yan na din ang gagamitin mong data for your income accounts, how sure are you that [the data is above board]? Kailangan independent, there is science to follow," Balisacan said.

"Yung pag-collect ng data ng agency, depende sa requirements kung ano ang gusto nila makita. Yung pag-collect ng data ng statistics agency, iba yun. Gusto mo representative nationally, kung may regional breakdown, gusto mo representative at the regional level, not necessarily na nagtutugma yun sa interes ng agency at statistical system," he explained.

The BAS is one of the four agencies that were merged to create the PSA. The three other agencies include the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics (BLES), which was under the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

The two other agencies, former attached agencies of the Neda, were the National Statistics Office (NSO) and the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB).

Part of the reasons for the creation of the PSA through the merger of the four agencies aimed to give rise to an independent statistical agency not directly involved in the management and implementation of certain agency-related projects.

Nonetheless, Balisacan said strengthening the data capacity of agencies like the DA through the creation of a unit within the agency would be beneficial and would help improve the country's data ecosystem.

"I don't see any conflict because in the first place any organization, any department should have strong data for their administrative and management purposes. The data that we collect in PSA are very different data. They are the data that we need to compile the National Income Accounts, not sensitive to the requirements of DA," Balisacan said.

On Monday, Tiu Laurel was asked how he would address the issue of over-importation of meats and poultry products. The Agriculture chief said he would have to look at the data of production versus demand.

**Cai U. Ordinario**



## Marcos names special envoy to boost trade with S. Korea

PHILIPPINE President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. has appointed his special envoy to boost trade ties with South Korea, months after the two countries entered into a free trade deal.

Bryan C. Lim, vice president for business development at Suyen Corp., was named special presidential envoy to Korea for trade and investments, the Presidential Communications Office said in a Facebook post.

Suyen, the Philippine company behind the clothing brand Bench, has interests in fashion, food, furniture and real estate.

Mr. Lim donated P20 million in cash to the 2022 presidential campaign of Mr. Marcos, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) said in a report last year.

To expand its real estate business, the company signed a deal with Global Gateway Development Corp., a unit of Dennis Uy's Udenna Group, for the sublease of the latter's 177-hectare leasehold in the

Clark Freeport Zone in Pampanga, according to Property Asia.

Mr. Marcos, 66, earlier this month appointed another campaign donor to the Department of Agriculture, which he headed for almost a year.

The PCIJ earlier this month reported that at least six of Mr. Marcos' campaign donors have been given government posts, including Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr., Special Assistant to the President Antonio Ernesto "Anton" Floirendo Lagdameo, Jr., National Housing Authority General Manager Joeben Ang Tai and Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO) chief Melquiades A. Robles.

### FULL STORY



Read the full story by scanning the QR code or by typing the link  
< [bit.ly/BWTheNation](https://bit.ly/BWTheNation) >

South Korea was the Philippines' fourth-largest trade partner last year, with total trade hitting \$15.45 billion. They signed a free trade deal on the sidelines of the 43rd Association of Southeast Asian Nations Summit in Jakarta in September. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**



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## Fruit exporters bag \$603-M orders in China expo

The Philippines has already secured purchasing agreements worth \$603 million, particularly for fresh fruits such as bananas and durian, at the China International Import Expo (CIIE).

In a virtual media briefing, Ana Abejuela, the Agriculture Counselor at the Embassy of the Philippines in Beijing, said most of the purchase agreements generated for the CIIE, which will run until Nov 10, are for the country's major fruit exports to China.

"So as of yesterday [Nov. 6] at CIIE, we were able to produce a little over \$600 million [worth of purchasing agreements] and most of these are fresh fruits. And of course, the largest is still bananas, and then followed by durian. Then we have also pineapples and also banana chips," she said, noting that coconut products were also covered.

Data from the International Trade Center (ITC) showed that the Philippines is the largest source of China's banana imports, accounting for 41 percent of imports last year, worth \$476 million.

Abejuela also noted the interest of the Chinese market for durian.

"We see that the market for durian is huge in China and we have these opportunities," she said, adding that the country has gained market access for the fruit earlier this year.

However, she emphasized that volume remains a challenge for the Philippines in terms of durian exports to China.

"Volume has always been a challenge for all our fresh and processed food products to China," she said, explaining that China makes bulk container orders.

To address this, she explained that the Department of Agriculture (DA) plans to implement a durian production program, which is aimed at expanding the produc-

tion area of the fruit in the country.

"So next year, the plan for expansion is a little more than 4,000 hectares. The DA will give planting materials," she said.

Davao City's Durian Industry Association president Emmanuel Belviz said the challenge with the durian industry is that the majority of it is composed of backyard farmers.

"Because of this export market, we're trying to fix the mindset of the farmers to be more entrepreneurial," he said.

He stressed the need to focus on production and improving the quality of the product to be able to capitalize on the opportunities for export.

The Philippines earlier witnessed the strong demand for its durian products in the Chinese market when it participated in the China-ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO) in September.

Data from the DTI-Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions (CITEM) showed that the Philippines generated \$5.4 million in sales from fresh durian during the expo, accounting for more than half of \$10.36 million total sales raised.

In April, the Philippines successfully delivered its first shipment of fresh durian to China, signaling the activation of the agreement for direct market access between the countries during the state visit of President Marcos in January this year.

"The top sales performance at CAEXPO 2023 of durian exhibitors from both retail and wholesale buyers reinforces the growing demand for the local durian variety in the global market. The Puyat variety from Davao boasts of a richer flavor profile than regional counterparts with its creaminess on top of its expected sweetness," the CITEM said.

- Catherine Talavera



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## PhilRice wants 'half-cup rice' in dining places

By ALEXIS ROMERO

To reduce rice wastage, the agriculture department's Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) is pushing for a bill that will require food establishments to offer half cup of rice, a measure that President Marcos filed when he

was still a senator.

PhilRice development communication division head Hazel Antonio noted that there are 46 local ordinances requiring food businesses to include half cup of rice in their menu, but a law is needed to make the policy

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## PhilRice From Page 1

effective nationwide.

"We had a proposed Senate bill before by President BBM (Bongbong Marcos) when he was still a senator on half cup of rice. It was not passed... But we'll try to revive that and to have another Senate bill," Antonio said at a press briefing yesterday in Malacañang.

Antonio said PhilRice has asked the office of Sen. Loren Legarda to sponsor the measure on half cup of rice, which was previously known as the proposed "Anti-Rice Wastage Act of 2013."

Under the bill filed by Marcos, business establishments that refused to serve less than one cup of rice will be slapped with a fine of P20,000 for the first offense, P50,000 for the second offense and P100,000 for the third and succeeding offenses.

PhilRice deputy executive director for development Karen Eloisa Barroga said two tablespoons of rice are wasted by every person in the Philippines daily or equivalent to P7.2 billion, enough to feed 2.5 million Filipinos.

"Many people get more than what they can eat. Get only what you need and what we have done in the past was to encourage a half cup serving as default. And some of the provinces, actually and cities, restaurants in the cities and provinces partnered with us to make sure that we could have a default serving of half cup of rice to avoid wastage," she said.

While businesses have the right to offer un-

limited rice to their customers, there is a need to create awareness among businesses that there is much rice wastage happening, Barroga said.

Antonio said the ordinances on half cup of rice do not include sanctions for buffet customers who failed to consume all the food they took. PhilRice is encouraging consumers to avoid rice wastage and to buy locally produced rice as the country observes National Rice Awareness Month.

The observance, which carries the theme "Be RICEponsible," is pursuant to Presidential Proclamation 524 signed on Jan. 5, 2004. The proclamation sought to increase public awareness on measures to achieve rice self-sufficiency and address malnutrition and poverty.

Aside from addressing rice wastage, the campaign seeks to help local farmers and provide consumers with healthy food choices.

"I think our farmers appreciate the hard work. But this time, we're encouraging every consumer to buy their products because that is one of the goals of DA (Department of Agriculture), specifically the PhilRice under the rice program, to help our farmers to market their products as milled rice, instead of selling them as fresh palay at the farmgate," Antonio said, noting that income of farmers is low because they only get about 49 percent of consumer prices.

"If we buy rice at P50 (per kilo), they only get less than P25 minus the inputs so they are left with almost nothing. So we encourage them to sell milled rice," she said. "So now, we're partnering with institutional buyers to buy from them directly."





## ASF RECOVERY TAKING 'TOO LONG' – DA EXEC

THE livestock sector's recovery from an African swine fever (ASF) outbreak is "taking too long and [is] too slow," a senior Agriculture department official said.

Progress is still being made, Agriculture Undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano said, adding that the government was hopeful that vaccines being trialed would help speed up the process.

"We are now battling ASF like an

insurgency war, farm to farm, sitio by sitio, barangay by barangay, municipality by municipality, and province by province," he said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Again, the fastest solution is a vaccine," Savellano added.

"We are on our way to recovery, but it is taking too long and too slow."

Potential vaccines are now being tested at the Bureau of Animal Industry's (BAI) Veterinary Labora-

tory Division, he said, adding that "we want to do it fast, but we want to do it [safely] also."

The House of Representatives appropriations committee last month realigned P1.5 billion of controversial confidential funds meant for other departments for vaccines against ASF.

Industry leaders have said that it will take billions for the country to free the hog industry of the highly

contagious and deadly virus that is affecting both domestic and feral swine.

Based on BAI data, ASF is currently present in 13 regions and 31 provinces, the latter comprising Benguet, Ifugao, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Cagayan, Isabela, Nueve Vizcaya, Quirino, Aurora, Bataan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac,

► 'Too long' B2

### ■ 'TOO LONG' FROM B1

## ASF RECOVERY

Zambales, Laguna, Quezon, Mindoro Oriental, Romblon, Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Masbate, Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental, Misamis Occidental, Davao del Sur, Sultan Kudarat, Agusan del Norte, Dinagat Islands, and Agusan del Sur.

Meanwhile, Batanes, Occidental Mindoro, Palawan, Bohol, Siquijor, Biliran, Bukidnon, Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi remain free from the swine disease.

In 2019, before ASF hit the Philippines, the swine population in the country was estimated at around 13 million heads. This went down to around 10 million at one point, with the subsequent pork shortfall being made up by imports.

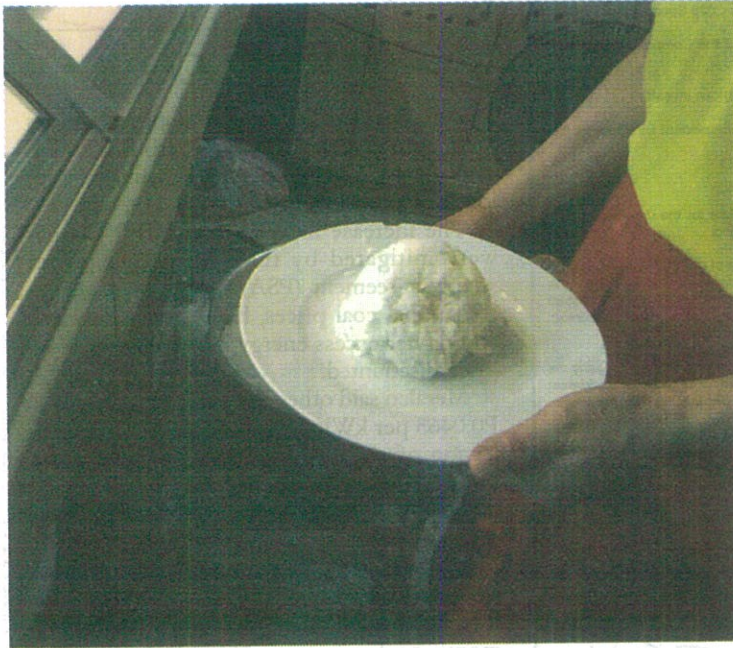
JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL





WASTAGE REACHES P7M/YEAR

## Unli no more, half-a-cup rice serving pushed



**Be RICEponsible.** PhilRice is pushing for the passage of bill proposing the serving of half-cup rice in eateries and restaurants.

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

AT LEAST P7 million worth of rice — enough to feed at least 2.5 million Filipinos for a year — is wasted annually, a Department of Agriculture-Philippine Rice Research Institute (DA-PhilRice) official said yesterday, in time for the kickoff celebration of the National Rice Awareness Month.

Karen Eloisa Barroga, DA-PhilRice deputy executive director, said at least two tablespoons of rice is wasted per person per day.

Barroga said Filipinos tend to place too much rice on their plates but are unable to finish the serving, or what is commonly called “takaw mata.” Children also tend to contribute to food wastage unless their parents eat the leftovers.

Hazel Antonio, DA-PhilRice Development Communication Division head, said the two tablespoons of rice are equivalent to more than 384,000 metric tons per year.

Antonio, however, said the numbers are based on 2018 data of the Food and Nutrition Research Institute and include rice that are fed to pets.

Antonio said there is a need to update the data to consider that rice fed to pets is “not waste.”

Barroga said PhilRice launched the “Be RICEponsible” campaign which encourages everyone to “get only what you need,” and advocates for the consumption of healthy rice and the avoidance of rice wastage.

Barroga said “Be RICEponsible”

See UNLI ► Page A2

## UNLI

is embedded in the message “ABAKADA” which stands for: A, adlay, mais, saba at iba pa ay ating kainin; BA, brown rice ay atin ding subukan at kainin; KA, kanin ‘ay huwag sayangin; and DA, dapat bigas ng Pilipinas ang bilhin.

She said the “Be RICEponsible” and ABAKADA campaign has been expanded to include not just farmers but also consumers.

“Consumers have a role to play by avoiding wastage of our food, and doing that is also very helpful for our health,” Barroga said.

PhilRice is also pushing for the revival and passage of Senate Bill 1863, or the “Anti-Rice Wastage Act of 2013,” that was filed by then-senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in 2013. The bill seeks to promote the serving of half-cup rice and impose fines on establishments that refuse to serve half-cup rice orders.

She said mandating the default serving of half-a-cup of rice in restaurants would standardize the practice.

She said PhilRice is in talks with Senator Loren Legarda to sponsor the bill.

Antonio said there are 46 local ordinances that mandate the serving of half-a-cup rice in restaurants, which are mostly in urban cities like Manila, Quezon City, Puerto Princesa, Davao, Cebu and Iloilo.

As this developed, Barroga and Antonio said PhilRice is working on the launch of a specialized rice that would best represent and promote the Philippines which would be called “Lakambini.”

Antonio said Philippine Rice refers to different varieties that are planted, harvested and produced in the country, regardless if they used local or imported seeds.

The two officials also encouraged the public to buy local rice such as home-grown brown rice and support the consumption of grains that are alternative to milled rice, including adlai.



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## DA warns on sale of 'hazardous' frozen meat in wet markets, adverse effect on industry

**T**HE Department of Agriculture (DA) has warned against the sale of frozen meat in the wet market as this can put human health at risk due to the absence of refrigeration facilities and a lack of know-how of vendors in handling the frozen commodity.

DA Undersecretary Deogracias Victor B. Savellano said DA is collaborating with Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to weed off public wet markets of health hazardous frozen products.

DA also advised consumers to look for the seal of the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) to ensure food safety.

"This [type of meat] is dangerous to health. Look for the NMIS food safety seal and of LGU's [local government units]

slaughterhouse documents. Imported frozen meat is not the problem, but their handling as fresh food in wet markets," the DA said.

DA Administrative Order 6-2012 prohibits frozen meat from being sold in the wet market. Frozen meat should only be confined to hotels, restaurants, and supermarkets, which have the refrigeration facilities and handling expertise.

Savellano said DA is also examining the price difference of poultry being sold in the market compared to farm-gate prices. While poultry's price sold in the wet market has been increasing, farm-gate price has actually been decreasing.

"Poultry farmers have been complaining against the low price

at which traders buy their produce," he said.

DA believes the excessive dumping of frozen meat in the wet market may be the cause why farm-gate price of poultry has been decreasing to the detriment of farmers.

Also, Savellano expressed fears that poultry farmers might have been cutting maturity days for harvesting poultry—down to 27 or 28 days instead of 30 days. This, as they try to meet poultry demand in time for the Christmas holidays.

However, instead of increasing their income from increased production, they may be suffering from low farm-gate price due to excessive frozen meat in the wet market.

Savellano said DA's objective is

three-pronged, not just raise supply but also to raise production, bring down price for consumers, and raise farmers' income.

DA's strategy to meet these objectives is to increase feed production to lower price, reported Heaven Torres of DA Livestock.

"DA is now expanding planting of corn so as to bring down feed costs of poultry farmers. This should lead to lower price of chicken for Filipino consumers. Filipinos should be able to feel the low price of chicken," she said.

DA has also asked Malacañang to grant it the authority to manage and administer African swine fever and avian flu vaccine.

DA said as soon as it is granted this jurisdiction (with which it has conflict with Food and Drug Administration), it can help hasten the processing of access of vaccines to the industries, which is critical in preventing the fast spread of the diseases.



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## Half-cup rice policy pushed

THE PHILIPPINE Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) at the Department of Agriculture (DA) is pushing for policies that would require food establishments to offer half-cup of rice in their menus, noting rice wastages that could feed more than two million Filipinos.

The institute will push for the revival of an old bill that sought to penalize restaurants for refusing to serve half a cup of rice, DA-PhilRice Deputy Executive Director Karen Eloisa Barroga told a Palace briefing Thursday.

The bill was filed by President Ferdinand "Bongbong" R. Marcos, Jr. in 2013 when he was still a senator. "We will try to revive that and maybe have another senate bill for that half-cup rice," Ms. Barroga said in Filipino.

More than 40 local government units have ordinances requiring food establishments to offer half-cup of rice, Hazel Antonio, DA-PhilRice's development communications head, said at the same briefing. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**





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## Agriculture dep't says to look into declining poultry farmgate prices

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it is looking into the farmgate prices of poultry, which are diverging from the rising prices for the commodity at the retail level.

In a statement, Agriculture Undersecretary Deogracias Victor B. Savellano said: "While poultry prices in the wet markets have

been increasing, farmgate prices have actually been decreasing."

Whole chicken in Metro Manila markets sold for between P130 and P200 per kilogram as of Nov. 9, according to the DA.

He said that poultry farmers have been complaining about the low price at which traders buy their produce.

The DA said, the decline in the farmgate price of poultry may have been caused by the "excessive dumping of frozen meat in wet markets."

He said producers have reportedly been selling younger poultry of 27 or 28 days instead of the typical 30 days to meet demand during the year-end holidays.

The DA has warned against the sale of imported frozen meat being mislabeled as fresh meat in wet markets.

"The risk is in the absence of refrigeration facilities in wet markets and vendors' lack of knowledge on handling frozen meat," it said.

Mr. Savellano said the Department of Trade and Industry is

helping it crack down on mislabeled meats in wet markets.

"There is no problem with selling imported meat, you just can't label and selling it as fresh meat," he added.

To ensure food safety, the DA urged consumers to look for the National Meat Inspection Service seal and the local

government's slaughterhouse documents.

DA Administrative Order No. 6 of 2012 prohibits the sale of frozen meat in wet markets.

"Frozen meat should only be confined to hotels, restaurants, and supermarkets that have refrigeration facilities and handling expertise," it said. — **Adrian H. Halili**





## 'Be RICEponsible': ₱7 M worth of rice goes to waste yearly

By RAYMUND ANTONIO and BETHEENA UNITE

Filipinos waste ₱7 million worth of rice, enough to feed at least 2.5 million people each year, the **Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice)** said on Thursday, Nov. 9, as it lamented the problem of rice wastage in the country.

"It's actually two tablespoons of rice (are) wasted by every person daily. That would be costing ₱7 million for a year, which could feed 2.5 million Filipinos sana kaysa na-waste (instead of going to waste)," Dr. Karen Eloisa Barroga, PhilRice deputy executive director, said during a Palace press briefing.

Dr. Hazel Antonio, PhilRice Development Communication Division head, explained that each Filipino wastes 10 grams of rice or almost 384,000 metric tons per year.

Barroga lamented that rice wastage is borne out of Filipinos' "takaw-ma-ta" mentality, especially during feasts and celebrations. ▶6

"Takaw mata" is a colloquial term used to describe persons who get too much food on their plates just because the food looks appetizing.

"Ano ba napapansin natin pag may fiesta? Marami, kasi iyong sabi nga natin takaw mata (What do we notice when there's a fiesta? A lot, doing of what we call 'takaw mata'). So, actually the campaign says, 'get only what you need,'" she said.

The official was referring to PhilRice's "Be RICEponsible" campaign, which advocates for the consumption of healthy rice and the avoidance of rice wastage. It is the theme of this year's National Rice Awareness Month.

She stressed the need for PhilRice to "create awareness" by providing data that can guide businesses on how they can prevent rice wastage.

### 'Half-a-cup rice'

Noting that there are 46 local ordinances for a half-a-cup serving in restaurants, Antonio revealed plans to revive Senate Bill 1863, the proposed "Anti-Rice Wastage Act," a measure filed by then-senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in 2013 seeking to impose fines on establishments that refuse to serve half-cup rice orders.

The official said a law mandating the default serving of half-a-cup of rice in restaurants would standardize the practice, though both officials understand that the policy cannot be applied to all Filipinos, especially those working in labor-intensive sectors.

In which case, Barroga added it should be up to the consumers how much rice to order and finish.

Antonio said they are currently in talks with Senator Loren Legarda if she could sponsor the half-a-cup of rice bill.

Noting that there are currently 46 local ordinances on serving half-a-cup of rice, the expert stressed this will be done "in consultation with the businesses."

"We'll try to revive that and to have another Senate bill for half cup of rice. Because what they always say

is it's better if it's a national law so at least, wherever you go, you know that they should serve half," she explained.

Naga City, Iloilo City, and Davao City are examples of cities with a half-a-cup of rice ordinances.

"What's stated there is that half cup should be available and hopefully, it becomes default in plated meals, then it's price will also be half," Antonio added.

The push to revive the President's proposed bill came as PhilRice took note of the current rice wastage that could already feed 2.5 million Filipinos.

### Stricter unli-rice policy sought

Officials of PhilRice, an agency attached to the Department of Agriculture, called on businesses offering unlimited rice to be stricter in imposing sanctions over rice wastage.

Stricter implementation of sanctions to customers, who fail to finish the rice serving they asked for in an unlimited rice meal, must be practiced at all times in a bid to lessen rice wastage in the country.

"Of course, these are businesses, that's their right. But we also have to create that awareness that there is much wastage happening," Barroga said.

She said the data on rice wastage are given to businesses to guide them in their decisions in implementing their unli-rice policy.

Barroga stressed that there is actually a common interest between the government and the private sector to avoid wastage.

PhilRice also reiterated that offering unlimited rice to customers is the businesses' rights, however, they are urged to remind their customers not to waste food and be stricter in imposing sanctions.

"We hope those offering unli rice would really impose sanctions. Because that is what they have been saying: if you cannot finish what you've taken, there is a fine," Antonio said. "So, we hope they are being strict so people would become

conscious about the policy."

PhilRice launched the National Rice Awareness Month and is

celebrated every November pursuant to Presidential Proclamation No. 524 signed on Jan. 5, 2004. It aims to

heighten public awareness on efforts to attain rice self-sufficiency and address malnutrition and poverty.





## Economy grows 5.9% in Q3

By XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS

**T**he country's economy surged in the third quarter on the back of higher consumer spending, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Thursday, Nov. 9.

The economy, as measured by the gross domestic product (GDP), grew by 5.9 percent in July to September this year, stronger compared to the 4.3 percent growth recorded the previous quarter.

This puts the Marcos administration into the "position of strength," Albay 2nd District Rep. Joey Salceda said.

However, the third-quarter pace is slower compared to the 7.7 percent growth recorded in the same period last year.

### Contributors to growth

In a briefing on Thursday, PSA Undersecretary Claire Dennis M. Mapa said major contributors to the growth were wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, financial and insurance activities, and construction.

All major economic sectors also grew from July to September: agriculture grew by 0.9 percent, industry by 5.5 percent, ▶5

and services by 6.8 percent.

On the demand side, government spending also accelerated by 6.7 percent, but gross capital formation shrunk by 1.6 percent.

Further, exports grew by 2.6 percent, while imports contracted by 1.3 percent, while household consumption slowed down to five percent, compared to 6.4 percent and 5.5 percent recorded in the first quarter and second quarter, respectively.

National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said the economic growth should reach 7.3 percent by the last quarter to attain the lowest target growth level this year.

The average economic growth rate for the first nine months of the year stood at 5.5 percent, which fell below the lower end of the targeted range of six percent to seven percent.

"It (growth target) is still doable, still within reach but of course the challenges are there particularly the continued external factors, the threats that come from these new political tensions, and of course the domestic inflation we're facing," Balisacan said.

The NEDA chief added that the easing of inflation in October must be sustained to achieve the target.

Inflation rate in October slowed down to 4.9 percent, down from the 6.1 percent recorded last September.

However, Gareth Leather, Capital Economics senior Asia economist, said the economic growth in the third quarter would not be sustained due to high interest rates and weaker global growth.

Interest rates were raised by a cumulative 450 basis points this cycle which will likely to remain elevated, he added.

He also said private consumption is expected to struggle in the near term which jumped by 4.8 percent from the 3.7 percent decline in the second-quarter.

"Elsewhere, the sharp increase in services exports also supported growth in Q3. However, we expect this strength to fade as well if, as we expect, global growth slows in the near term on the back of weakness in advanced economies," the economist further said.

The forecast for the economic growth in 2023 has been revised to five percent from four percent due to stronger expected outturn for the quarter ending September, Leather said.

"However, our forecast for 2024 for five percent GDP growth remains unchanged. With the drag from higher interest rates yet to filter through the economy in its entirety and global demand likely to weaken, we expect below trend and below consensus growth in the coming quarters," he further said

### Growth back on track

The GDP growth was reported at the heels of positive developments on inflation, which slowed down to 4.9 percent during the same quarter.

"With inflation back under control and growth back on track, President Marcos has the space and the opportunity to work on policies and priorities that are forward-looking. PBBM [President Bongbong Marcos] is back in a position of strength—and that is leverage for more long-term reforms," Salceda said. "Moving forward, Filipinos can expect that while global conditions will remain volatile and uncertain, the President has more tools to work with, thanks to good growth numbers for the past quarter."

Government spending was the key driver of growth recovery in the third quarter according to Salceda. This resulted in high construction sector growth at 12.4 percent on the expenditure side, and 14 percent on the industry side.

"We have to sustain the government's spending catchup plan, especially at the local government unit level. Budgeted programs and plans there were put on hold because of the Barangay and SK (Sangguniang Kabataan) Election spending ban should be pursued vigorously to completion this year," he noted.

"Mining is also back in the green at 4.5 percent growth, its best performance since Q3 of 2022, PBBM's first quarter in office," said the Bicolano solon.

Salceda said the agriculture sector shouldn't be neglected.

"For the sector to maintain its peso-level contribution to GDP per capita, it should grow by at least two percent every year. Average growth so far this year has been 1.1 percent. The appointment of a DA (Department of Agriculture) secretary who comes from the leading investment drivers of the agriculture sector should bolster the effort to meet this target," he said.

He also warned of "signs of weak global trade, as shown in a much larger negative growth for imports of goods,

from -5 percent during the previous quarter to -8.1 percent."

"Exports of goods have also decelerated in growth from -0.9 percent to -2.6

percent, signs of continued lackluster global demand due to high Fed rates," Salceda explained. "In the absence of a strong global trade environment, we

must strengthen our fundamental domestic industries, especially agriculture and domestic manufacturing." (With a report from Ellson A. Quismorio)



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## Hybrid rice doubles harvest, income of Mindoro farmers

A GROUP of farmers in Oriental Mindoro is celebrating a significant increase in their harvests and income with the help of hybrid rice cultivation.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said that farmers in Oriental Mindoro were able to double their harvest and income during the wet season this year.

"Dahil sa pagtatanim ng hybrid rice, paglagay ng tamang abono, at paggamit ng makabagong paraan ng pagsasaka, lumaki ang aming ani at nadoble ang aming kita," said Leynard S. Pastoral, president of G. Antonino Gloria Farmers' Agriculture Cooperative, of Barangay Mabuhay, Municipality of Gloria, Oriental Mindoro.

According to Pastoral, they were primarily cultivating inbred rice varieties in 2020 and 2021. During this period, their yields averaged around 4.6 metric tons per hectare.

They were convinced to shift to using hybrid rice seeds in 2022 and saw that their harvest increased to 11 metric tons per hectare. PCO





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# HOT MEAT WARNING

**By Joel dela Torre**

**THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has cautioned consumers on buying frozen meat in the wet markets as it advised consumers to look for the seal of the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) to ensure food safety.**

According to Undersecretary Deogracias

Savellano, the DA is now collaborating with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to keep public markets from frozen products.

He said that frozen meats can put human health at risk due to absence of refrigeration facilities and a lack of know-how of vendors on handling these products.

"Delikado ito sa kalusugan ng tao. Ha-

napin ang papeles ng NMIS at katayan ng mga LGU (local government units). Walang problema ang imported na karne. Huwag lang ibenta na sariwa sa palengke," Savellano said.

DA Administrative Order 6-2012 prohibits frozen meat from being sold in the wet market. Frozen meat should only be confined to hotels, restaurants, and supermarkets which have the refrigeration facilities and handling expertise.

Meanwhile, Savellano said the department is also examining the price difference of poultry being sold in the

market compared to farmgate prices.

"While poultry's price sold in the wet market has been increasing, farmgate price has actually been decreasing. . . Ang mga nag-aalaga ng manok ay dumadaing sa mababang presyo na kuha sa kanila ng mga biyahero," the DA official stressed.

DA believes that the excessive dumping of frozen meat in the wet market may be the cause why farmgate price of poultry has been decreasing to the detriment of farmers.

Savellano said he also fears that poultry farm-

ers have been cutting maturity days for harvesting poultry—down to 27 or 28 days instead of 30 days as they try to meet poultry demand in time for the Christmas holidays.

Instead of increasing their income from increased production, most of them he added, may be suffering from low farmgate price due to excessive frozen meat in the wet market.

Savellano said DA's objective is three-pronged, not just raise supply but also to raise production, bring down price for consumers, and raise farmers' income.





## Attempt to smuggle vegetables foiled

BY MAHATMA RANDY DATU

**SUBIC BAY FREEPORT:** Nine 40-foot container vans loaded with P42.6 million worth of vegetables were seized here late Wednesday, November 8, thwarting an attempt to smuggle them into the country.

A team from the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) and the Bureau of Customs (BoC) apprehended the cargoes originally declared as frozen lobster balls from China.

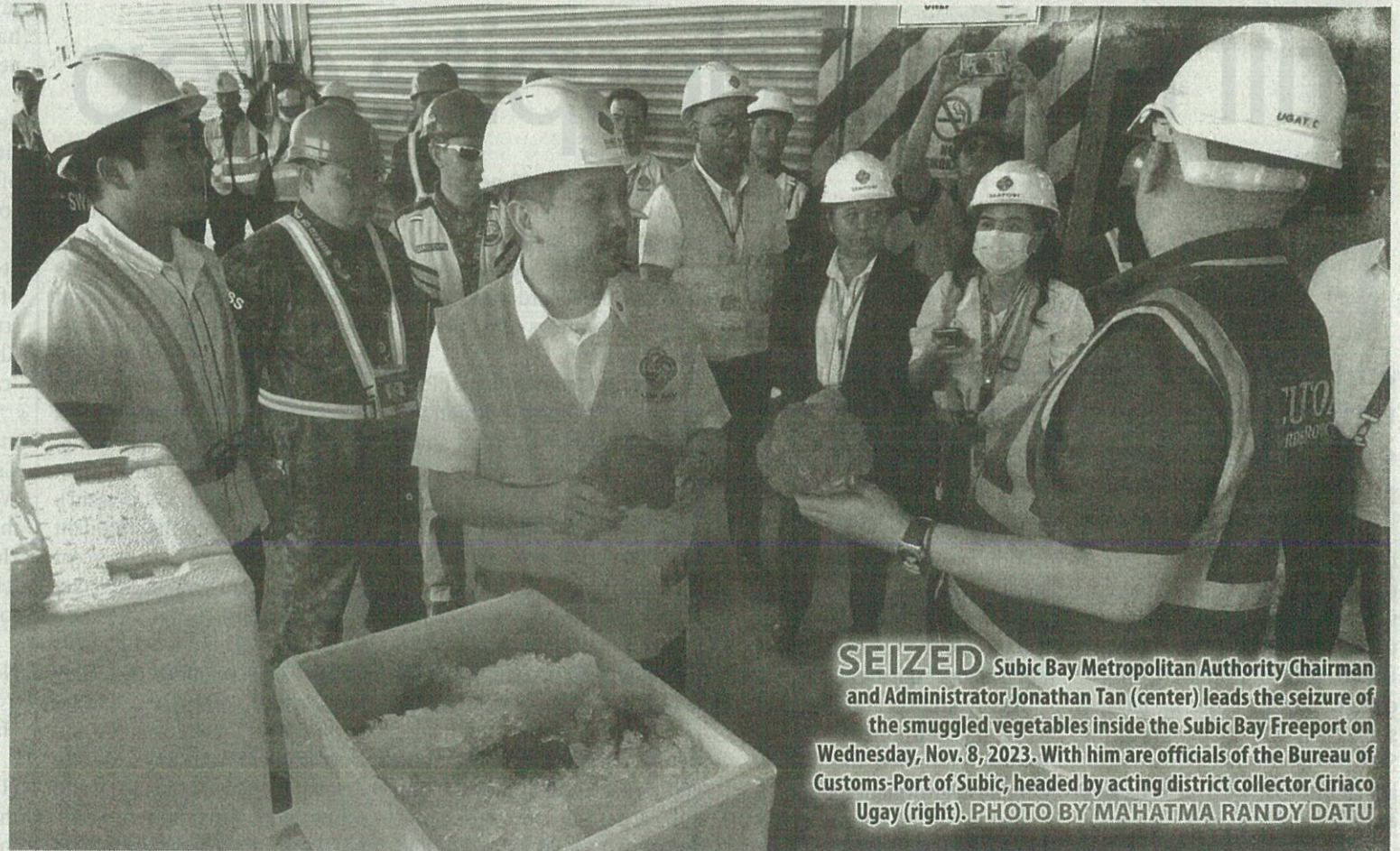
SBMA Chairman and Administrator Jonathan Tan said the nine containers arrived at the port on Friday, November 3, and were consigned to Rianne Food Products.

Upon inspection, Tan said the shipments declared to contain 40,000 cartons of frozen lobster balls yielded P42,605,847 worth of fresh potatoes, carrots, radishes and broccoli.

The discovery prompted the BoC-Port of Subic to seize the misdeclared shipment for proper disposition and appropriate action.

Tan lauded the seizure as he assured the public that both the SBMA and the BoC-Port of Subic were serious about implementing the order of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to go after agricultural smugglers.

Customs Commissioner Bi-envenido Rubio and BoC-Port of Subic acting district collector Ciriaco Ugay also commended the personnel behind the operation.



**SEIZED** Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority Chairman and Administrator Jonathan Tan (center) leads the seizure of the smuggled vegetables inside the Subic Bay Freeport on Wednesday, Nov. 8, 2023. With him are officials of the Bureau of Customs-Port of Subic, headed by acting district collector Ciriaco Ugay (right). PHOTO BY MAHATMA RANDY DATU





## Universal Food Security: This book says we already have the tools we need to solve world hunger

(Part 1)

**I**n Avengers: Infinity War, Thanos wanted to assemble the infinity gauntlet so he could eradicate half of all life in the universe because he claimed that genocide is what is needed to restore balance and to keep resources from being depleted by overpopulation. This was not his reason for doing so in the comic book, and people have since pointed out that if his only concern was resource depletion, why didn't he just snap his fingers and wish for either double the resources, or the repair of the broken systems that caused the depletion in the first place?

While movies offer us an easy solution, reality is completely different. "We have eight billion people, and somehow they are keeping... alive without a food system. We drastically altered the planet in order to

do that. Let us not forget that by 2050, we will be 10 billion. Add two billion more, and they are probably going to change their diets," says author Glenn Denning, a professor at the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). "As income increases, people want a more diversified diet; they want to eat better and eat more, so there is going to be a lot of pressure in the food system, and one of the factors driving that is the population."

### A world without hunger

In his book *Universal Food Security: How to End Hunger While Protecting the Planet*, Denning posits that a world without hunger is possible if the broken food system is repaired. Aside from three years of extensive research, he draws on decades of firsthand experience in the agriculture industry, particularly on food security issues, around the



AVANT GARDENER

YVETTE TAN

world (with a focus on Asia and Africa), including 18 years at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Los Baños.

"I really wanted it to be science-based, I wanted it to be based on evidence. I really felt there was too much confusion in the world of agriculture and food security, and I really want to bring clarity to it," he said in a video interview, which has been condensed for brevity. "I have known about every expert in agriculture and food security over the years, so I could draw on them and also draw on my own experience, particularly for contexts and giving examples. I do not draw on it as evidence; I draw on it as a context, which is an important thing."

### Not a new thing

The thought that the world already produces enough resources to feed everyone in it if only it were distributed equitably is not new. "We basically understand what it takes to achieve universal food security, and by universal food security, the core is that every person on the planet, all eight billion people, can consume a healthy diet that is good for their growth, development, immunity, and all the other good things we want from a diet," he said. "At the same time, that food can be produced and delivered in a sustainable way, meaning we are not doing it at the expense of the climate."

What the book is, is a vision: "...the core argument that I used is that it is not based on some miracle... It is really going to require a comprehensive and contextual approach that cuts across not just agriculture

but right across the food system in terms of the market infrastructure and managing post-harvest losses and waste, which means changing people's diets and helping them toward a healthy diet. It also requires effective social protection programs for people who are in a position to help themselves."

### Cooperation is required

Denning cites what he calls "the big five," a strategy for food systems investment composed of interrelated themes that need to be reinforced by core institutions such as government, businesses, universities, NGOs, and so on. These are: sustainable intensification, market infrastructure, postharvest stewardship, healthy diets, and social protection. "Agriculture is just one component; it is a very important piece, and we should not neglect it. But there are many other components that come together to create food security."

Given that the world already has the resources needed to end global hunger, the challenge is getting stakeholders on board. "I guess different people and stakeholders have different reasons for not embracing these ideas. There's a lot of ... protection in terms of people's discipline with work, whether they happen to be a rice person, a livestock person, or an aquaculture person. People focus on what they are interested in, and they kind of protect and advance."

Next week, Denning discusses what can be done to end world hunger and how to get stakeholders on board.





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## **SBMA, BOC foil smuggling of agri-produce into local markets**

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT – Combined personnel of the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) and Bureau of Customs (BOC)-Port of Subic thwarted on Wednesday afternoon the smuggling of tons of imported agricultural products worth millions of pesos into local markets.

SBMA chairman and administrator Jonathan Tan yesterday said the discovery of the agricultural produce was made possible through the close coordination between SBMA and BOC-Port of Subic law enforcers.

Tan said the goods, which were originally declared as frozen lobster balls consigned to Rianne Food Products, arrived in Port of Subic on Nov. 3 and concealed in nine container vans.

He said that while the vans were being loaded into

trucks that would bring them outside the Freeport's Customs area, Customs personnel sensed irregularities and subjected the vans to tougher inspection.

Upon inspection, he said the authorities discovered cartons of various agricultural produce such as potatoes, radish, carrots, and broccoli.

Port of Subic District collector Ciriaco Ugay ordered the confiscation of the container vans loaded with imported vegetables while criminal charges were being filed against the consignees.

Tan and Ugay commended the law enforcers of SBMA and BOC-Port of Subic for their dedication and vigilance in fulfilling the marching order of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to go after the smugglers of agricultural produce in the country. (PNA)





## Malaysia's price controls keep rice production low, exacerbating shortages



A man planting paddy saplings in a paddy field at Sabak Bernam outside Kuala Lumpur. (Reuters Photo)

KUALA LUMPUR- In September, amid a shortage of white rice in Malaysia, rice mill operator and wholesaler Allen Lim started receiving calls from supermarkets asking for additional supplies. But he had to turn them down.

Lim said his company, PLS Marketing, simply could not afford to process and package more rice because the government's years-long price control measures have eroded profit margins and prevented farmers and manufacturers from expanding capacity.

While the retail price cap of 2.60 ringgit (\$0.5556) per kilogram for locally made white rice has been in place since 2008, the tension between a government policy aimed at helping consumers cope with inflation and an industry unable to supply rice at uneconomic prices have reached breaking point this year.

The situation has become acute in recent months due to shortages of rice in Malaysia after top exporter India restricted some shipments in July, sending global

prices skyrocketing.

With the price of imported rice jumping sharply, demand for the low-cost domestic grain has increased significantly.

Yet, industry players say they are unable to raise production unless they can earn more to cover sharply rising costs of fertilizer, pesticide, equipment, logistics, and labor.

"The market price should be increased so that farmers can survive," Lim told Reuters.

"Even millers cannot survive (at this price). For the past seven years, many have started experiencing losses."

Many millers have shut down because banks won't lend money to unprofitable businesses, Lim said.

The government, which fears that lower domestic output will increase reliance on more expensive imports, has acknowledged the issue but the industry frets that little has been done to resolve the problem.

In a recent interview with Reuters, Deputy Minister of Agri-

culture and Food Security Chan Foong Hin said Malaysia is likely to see another output decline this year due to the El Nino weather phenomenon and stagnant production.

Production has fallen 6.7 percent between 2013 and 2021, while imports are expected to increase 6 percent this year from 2022, according to data from Malaysia's government and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

Chan said the ceiling price for rice should be reviewed to encourage producers to boost output and quality, and ensure long-term food security in Malaysia, which relies on local production for 62 percent of its needs.

However, the government had no immediate plans to raise the price cap, citing a need to protect consumers amid rising inflation. While overall inflation has been largely kept in check by government subsidies and price control measures, food prices have risen at faster rates, averaging at about 5.5 percent this year. -Reuters





## Soy firms, wheat falls

SINGAPORE- Chicago soybeans firmed on Thursday, with the market trading close to last session's two-month high, as strong Chinese demand and Brazilian planting delays supported prices.

Wheat fell, giving up some of the previous session's gains, while corn eased.

"There is improved demand for US beans, which is supporting prices at these levels," said one Singapore-based trader at an international trading company that sells beans to China.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 0.2 percent to \$13.67-3/4 a bushel, and not far from its highest since Sept. 6 of \$13.84-1/2 a bushel reached on Wednesday.

Wheat gave up 1.1 percent to

\$5.86 a bushel and corn dipped 0.3 percent to \$4.74-1/2 a bushel.

Chinese importers bought at least five more US soybean cargoes on Wednesday in a second day of active buying after booking their largest purchases in months a day earlier.

The purchases, containing some 300,000 metric tons of the oilseed, were for shipment from the US Gulf Coast and Pacific Northwest ports between December and March, they added.

Chicago soybean futures slumped to a 22-month low in October on US harvest pressure and weak export demand. But futures have been trending upward as erratic weather has caused problems in the world's No. 1 exporter Brazil and demand for US cargoes underpinning the market. - **Reuters**





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## Malaysia's price controls exacerbate rice shortages

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— Reuters

### FULL STORY



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