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I quit school to be a father-Laurel

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said he "never finished" his education because he became a father at 19 and needed to support his eldest child. The former head of Frabelle Group of Companies made this clarification after the Varsitarian publication of the University of Santo Tomas quoted a registrar as saying that Laurel "is not a UST Computer Science alumnus."—STORY BY

JORDEENE B. LAGARE AND KATHLEEN DE VILLA

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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DA CHIEF ADMITS NOT FINISHING EDUCATION

LAUREL: I DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL TO BE A FATHER AT 19

By Jordeene B. Lagare
and Kathleen de Villa
@Team_Inquirer

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said he was not able to finish his studies because being a father at an early age took precedence over earning a college degree.

Laurel, who headed the Frabelle Group of Companies prior to his appointment two weeks ago, issued this statement on Monday after questions surfaced about his educational qualifications.

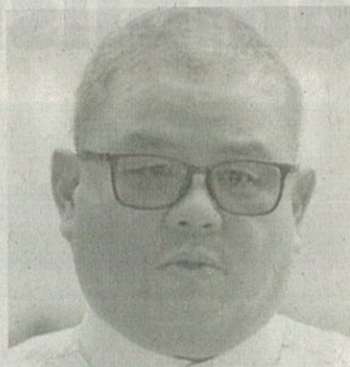
The new agriculture chief said he dreamed of wearing a graduation gown and receiving a diploma just like many other students but he felt it was not "meant to be" because his work and family obligations prevented him

from doing so.

"Let me clear the air about my educational background given news reports that claim I am an alumnus of the University of Santo Tomas (UST), or any other institution of higher learning. That is not true," Laurel said in a statement.

"I never finished my education because I became a father at 19. I needed to work to support my eldest child. My father impressed upon me that my responsibility as a father comes first," he said.

The Inquirer has reached out to both the offices of the registrar and public affairs of the UST to confirm whether Laurel is an alumnus of the College of Engineering. The latter said it would issue an official response on the mat-



Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.
—PHOTO FROM DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE FB PAGE

ter soon, but it has yet to reply at press time.

The report about Laurel being disowned by the UST first came out on the Varsitarian, the university's official student publication on Sunday.

According to Varsitarian's report, Assistant Registrar Kashmer Cruz, citing office records, disproved claims that Laurel obtained a computer science degree from the then Faculty of Engineering. The said degree is now under the College of Information and Computing Sciences.

"Based on our records in the Office of the Registrar, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. is not a UST Computer Science alumnus," Cruz said in the report.

'My university was the sea'

Laurel, the childhood pal and among the biggest campaign contributors of President Marcos, was the president of the deep sea fishing company Frabelle Fishing Corp. before the latter ap-

pointed him to the top Department of Agriculture (DA) post.

Even if he quit school to raise his eldest child, Laurel said he helped build his family's flagship company, Frabelle which expanded from a simple fishing operation to a conglomerate.

"The sea became my university, experiences in life taught me the value of perseverance, my children gave me the courage and inspiration to get to where I am now, and the good fortune I have today, I enjoy through God's grace," he added.

Today, Frabelle is also engaged in power generation, real estate development, meat and seafood processing, cold chain network, aquaculture and ship building and repair.

Laurel, who divested of his

interests in his family's company following his appointment on Nov. 3, earlier denied allegations that his new role in the Marcos administration was a "payback" for his significant contribution to his longtime friend's presidential bid.

"Definitely, there's no payback. As I said, [this is a] sacrifice. This is for the country," he said.

"The DA is a full-time job. I have no time to do anything else. The department is huge, it is somewhat complicated. This is a full-time job. I don't have much time to think about other things," he said.

"When I was asked by the President to join the DA, I actually hesitated a couple of times. At the end of the day, [I was challenged] to do something for the country," he added. INQ



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Challenges of being agriculture secretary

It made sense for President Marcos to become the secretary of agriculture if the premise was for him to use the powers and influence of the presidency to quickly repair the broken policy infrastructure of agriculture. What needed to be done? The primary task was to restore to the agriculture sector the financial, infrastructural, and extension support that was envisioned by the Marcos Sr. "New Society."

But Mr. Marcos did nothing of the kind, except to enunciate populist promises like the P20 per kilo rice that is no longer within reach, now and forever. It was a classic case of short-sightedness and policy indolence—tweaking the value chain at the point of sale, not at the point of production.

Mr. Marcos' tagline as agricultural secretary was "Agriculture is going to be a critical and fundamental part of our economic transformation." Comfortingly, this was a mere declaration, not a presidential commitment.

So now Mr. Marcos unceremoniously exits the position, after his popularity lost by several points due to the unfulfilled promises relating to increasing inflation, with the price of rice being the flagship indicator.

The best the President could do was to get a full-time secretary that was fit for purpose. Doing this for a complicated sector that was already skipping from crisis to crisis is difficult, but it could be done. But it requires a series of multistakeholder consultations not only to inventory and raise the myriad issues, but also to have a sense of a policy and programmatic roadmap. This process could also serve as a forum for identifying those sterling individuals who could possibly serve as the champion of synergized initiatives to clamber out of the doldrums in the sector.

The appointment of **Francisco Tiu Laurel**



ON THE MOVE

SEGUNDO ECLAR ROMERO

Jr. as agriculture secretary by Mr. Marcos last week raised some questions about the soundness of the appointment. This, in turn, raised questions on the context and circumstances of the appointment, and the criteria for evaluating the appointment.

An agriculture secretary is the chief implementor of the agricultural policy of the nation. It is clear that this policy needs urgent and comprehensive updating and reinterpretation, in view of the various volatile trends in agriculture, fisheries, and overall food security in the Philippines as it emerged from the pandemic and the lackluster performance of Mr. Marcos as stand-in secretary of agriculture.

A crucial structural reform is the reinstatement of the extension services to farmers and fisherfolk that were drastically reduced due to the Local Government Code of 1991. Without adequate devolved funding, systems, and staff, provinces and municipalities did not give extension services the high priority they merited. Most farmers and fisherfolk no longer experience extension programs on a first-hand basis.

An incoming agriculture secretary, even if appointed a year and a half ago, will not

have had the normal amount of time to deal with the regular tasks of a normal secretary of agriculture given these heightened challenges compounded by the backlog of unresolved post-pandemic issues. This requires building and harnessing a multisectoral policy and implementation surge force to work on the sector.

An incoming agriculture secretary will have to familiarize himself with the key staff of the department, which would at minimum consist of undersecretaries, assistant secretaries, bureau directors, regional directors, program directors, and key special directors.

He will have to familiarize himself with the logic, framework, breadth, and depth of the myriad programs, projects, and activities of the department, and match these with the locations and offices, facilities, systems and procedures, and geographic, demographic, and sociocultural contexts of the relevant stakeholders.

He has to know the various stakeholder groups in the public sector, the private sector, the civil society sector, and the 14 basic sectors whose well-being is directly and indirectly impacted by the agriculture policies and programs of the government, and whose interests are structurally diametrically divergent from one another.

The main challenge for the agriculture secretary is to be an effective champion of the farmers and fisherfolk in the country. The new secretary should pause a moment and get the big picture of his department. He comes into office with a huge handicap, but with discerning and a consultative style, he should be able to fight off the usual detractors of the real parties of interest in the agriculture sector and surprise us all.

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EDITORIAL

New DA chief's political baggage

Not a payback" but a "sacrifice" is how fishing magnate **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** describes his appointment as agriculture secretary by his boyhood friend, President Marcos, to whose campaign he contributed P30 million last year.

The way Laurel tells it, farming and fisheries groups ought to be grateful that the 56-year-old tycoon had chosen to leave his Frabelle empire behind to take the helm of the Department of Agriculture (DA), replacing Mr. Marcos who had warmed that seat for him for 16 months.

"This is for the country," said Laurel, noting that in compliance with the Constitution, he had divested himself of all corporate holdings and interests in, among others, deep-sea fishing and aquaculture, food manufacturing, importation and trading, shipyard operations, wharf and real estate development, and power generation.

"DA is a full-time job. I have no time to do anything else," insisted Laurel.

But the new DA chief's identity as a business mogul and his personal ties with the President are two pieces of political baggage that threaten to weigh him down as he seeks the acceptance of a sector long saddled with deep-rooted problems.

More so, his donation to Mr. Marcos' campaign kitty, a gift pregnant with the implication of future rewards, even one between old friends, will likely hound Laurel for the duration of his office, a distraction neither he nor his department needs at this time. (At least six other people who contributed to Mr. Marcos' campaign have been named to government posts, no doubt a testament to his donors' self-sacrificing nature.)

Still, it had taken the Chief Executive well over a year to pick a permanent agriculture secretary, during which the troubles afflicting the sector, from smuggling of rice, sugar, onion, and other produce to overpricing due to profiteering, had multiplied, as the overstretched Mr. Marcos failed to dazzle in his self-inflicted concurrent role.

Now the President expects his childhood buddy to accomplish what he himself couldn't.

The good news is that although Laurel doesn't hold the powers Mr. Marcos once believed are needed by an agriculture secretary, he nonetheless enjoys the President's trust, which we can only hope he can transform into meaningful action and reforms.

Laurel, according to Mr. Marcos, "understands very well the problems that agriculture is facing." But it is one thing to understand the problems and another thing entirely to go about fixing them.

We don't doubt that Laurel, as someone versed in the ins and outs of agricultural production and food processing, should be intimately familiar with the sector over which he now exercises supervision, but the trouble lies in which hat he will wear during this process: that of a businessman or a public servant.

ACT Teachers Rep. France Castro fired the opening salvo by calling attention to an allegation that Laurel's Frabelle Fishing Corp. was behind a reclamation project that displaced over 700 families from two coastal villages in Bacoar City.

Citing his divestment of his Frabelle holdings, Laurel declined to discuss the project, one of those halted by the government in August pending a review. But we ask: what difference does his divestment make when the business is family-owned anyway?

At any rate, this project bears close watching, because it may well be the first test on the inevitable clash of interests between Laurel's current role and his family and business background.

Meanwhile, agriculture stakeholders, led by the Federation of Free Farmers, are urging Laurel to reverse the government's "pro-import bias" and to listen to the concerns of "small farmers, municipal fishers and other disadvantaged members" of the sector.

In response to such calls, Laurel declared: "I'm not for importation. I am pro-production."

"While I import, I produce a lot more so I believe that the Filipinos can produce more," Laurel said, citing the need to find the perfect balance between keeping prices low and producers profitable.

That's encouraging to hear, but he should know that words are cheap, and the real measure of his leadership is if he succeeds in lowering the cost of inputs, improving infrastructure, and raising the competitiveness of small farmers and fisherfolk.

Agriculture is a vital component of the social contract the President formed with the people when he was elected last year on a platform promising rice prices of as low as P20 to P30 per kilo.

Laurel, entrusted by his good friend to realize that pledge, admits: "Today, it is not possible ... it might take a little time." But if he hopes to arrest all doubts about his political baggage and uncertain loyalties, it is in Laurel's own best interest to hit the ground running.



DA chief meets with various farmers' groups

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has met with various farmers' groups as he continues the reorganization within the Department of Agriculture.

Elias Jose Inciong, United Broilers Raisers Association president, said many issues, including those on trade policies, were discussed during the consultation yesterday.

The consultation, held in Taguig City, was attended by Sen. Cynthia Villar who chairs the Senate committee on agriculture, food and agrarian reform as well as by several lawmakers led by Rep. Mark Enverga, who chairs the House committee on agriculture and food.

Also attending were Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura chairman Rosendo So and SINAG executive director Jayson Cainglet.

Cainglet welcomed Laurel's efforts to reach out to various stakeholders, saying this "ushers in a new era of collaborative working relationship" between the agriculture industry and the new Department of Agriculture (DA) leadership.

Meanwhile, Raul Montemayor, Federation of Free Farmers national chairman, said yesterday that the spike in retail prices of rice is "a bit alarming."

This spike, he explained in a radio interview, is alarming because it is happening during the peak of harvest season and after another peasant group warned that the cost of the staple food could reach as high as P60 per kilo in December.

Montemayor described the upward trend in the farmgate price of palay and the retail cost of the grains as "very unusual."

"We are surprised at the upward trend in the farmgate price of palay when we are at the peak of the harvest. (It is) very surprising as normally, especially this October and November, we have bountiful harvest and the trend should normally be downward. (But) there are places where the farmgate price reached as high as P30 (per kilo), although the average is around P25 or P26 per kilo," Montemayor pointed out.

In an earlier interview with **The STAR**, So said the farmgate price of palay reached P31 per kilo, which might lead to a P60-per-kilo price for well-milled rice in December.

Montemayor cited as among

the reasons for the spike faulty DA data on the expected volume of harvest and the hesitance of traders to import rice, fearing raids on their warehouses and charges of economic sabotage, among others.

The spike in the retail prices of rice, he added, could persist until next year.

"I would think that on this critical issue, he (Laurel) would immediately call the stakeholders to determine the situation and the needed actions. He should not let this issue blow up in his face," Montemayor stressed.

Based on the monitoring of the DA, the retail prices of local regular milled rice ranged between P33 and P50 per kilo; P45 to P54 per kilo for local well-milled rice; P50 to P62 for local premium rice and P50 to P65 for local special rice.

For imported rice, the prices ranged from P45 to P80 per kilo for well-milled; P50 to P60 for premium and P55 to P63 for special.

Educational background

Meanwhile, Laurel clarified yesterday reports on his educational background, after the University of Santo Tomas Office of the Registrar said he was not a UST computer science alumnus and did not pursue any undergraduate studies at the university. He explained that he was forced to give up his studies to raise his eldest child.

"Let me clear the air about my educational background, given news reports that claim I am an alumnus of the University of Santo Tomas, or any other institution of higher learning. That is not true. I never finished my education because I became a father at 19. I needed to work to support my eldest child. My father impressed upon me that my responsibility as a father comes first," Laurel said in a statement. The statement added that he instead helped build the family's flagship company, Frabelle.

"Like many, I dreamt of wearing a toga and receiving a diploma. But that wasn't meant to be. The sea became my university, experiences in life taught me the value of perseverance, my children gave me the courage and inspiration to get to where I am now and the good fortune I have today, I enjoy through God's grace," Laurel said.

He also said he divested from the family businesses upon entering

public office.

Also, Laurel issued Special Order 1369 appointing Roger Navarro as officer-in-charge (OIC) of the Office of Undersecretary for Operations. Navarro previously served as special assistant to National Food Authority administrator Roderico Bioco.

"All officials and employees of the department, including its bureaus, attached agencies and corporations and regional field offices are hereby advised of this designation and directed to give the full support and cooperation to OIC Navarro in the performance of his duties and responsibilities," the order read in part.

Half-cup rice pushed

Meanwhile, Quezon province fourth district Rep. Keith Micah Tan filed a Bill at the House of Representatives that seeks to require food establishments to offer a serving of only half a cup of rice and penalize food establishments that refuse to serve half-cup rice orders.

President Marcos originally filed the measure when he was a senator, and it was subsequently sponsored by Tan's mother and now Quezon Gov. Helen Tan during the elder Tan's term in Congress.

House Bill 9510, otherwise known as the "Anti-Rice Wastage Act," seeks to considerably reduce rice wastage in restaurants, commissaries, cafeterias, cafes, lunchrooms, bistros, fast food establishments, food courts, buffets, eateries, retail bakeries, mobile food trucks and dining areas in accommodation establishments.

Tan, now a House assistant majority leader, said the proposal was filed in response to the DA's call to require food businesses to include half cup of rice in their menu.

He added that this does not only aim to reduce rice wastage, but also promote the nutritional well-being of the Filipinos.

If approved into law, food establishments will be required to provide one-half cup of rice serving as a menu option. It also imposes a fine of P5,000 for the first offense; P10,000 for the second offense and P20,000, including suspension of license or permit to operate, for not less than 30 days for the third offense and subsequent offenses.

— With Michelle Zoleta



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DA chief: I'm not a UST alum, the 'sea' was my university

BY JED MACAPAGAL

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. yesterday clarified that he was not able to finish a college degree amid reports that he completed a course at the University of Santo Tomas.

In a statement, Laurel said that he quit school to raise his eldest child and considers "the sea" as his university.

"Let me clear the air about my educational background given news reports that claim I am an alumnus of the University of Santo Tomas or any other institution of higher learning. That is not true," Laurel said.

"I never finished my education because I became a father at 19. I needed to work to support my eldest child. My father impressed upon me that my responsibility as a father comes first," Laurel added.

He said he wanted to obtain a college degree but work and family obligations prevented him.

Instead, he helped develop his family's flagship company, Frabelle Fishing Corp.

Laurel said on his entry to public office, he has divested from his family's conglomerate which now has interests in power generation, real estate development, meat and seafood processing, cold chain network, aquaculture as well as shipbuilding and repair.

"Like many, I dreamt of wearing a toga and receiving a diploma but that wasn't meant to be... The sea became my university, experiences in life taught me the value of perseverance, my children gave me the courage and inspiration to get to where I am now, and the good fortune I have today, I enjoy through God's grace," Laurel added.

The DA said in an earlier statement that Laurel was only 28 years old when he succeeded his father, Francisco Tiu Laurel Sr., as president of Frabelle, which is now considered the world's third-largest tuna fishing company.

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DA chief itinangging nakatapos ng kolehiyo

Itinama ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. ang maling balita na siya umano'y nagtapos sa University of Santo Tomas (UST) kasabay ang paglilinaw na siya'y huminto sa pag-aaral para itaguyod ang panganay na anak.

"Lilinawin ko po na hindi totoo ang balita na nagsasabing ako ay graduate ng University of Santo Tomas, o ng alin mang paaralan. Mali po ang balitang iyan na marahil ay nakuha lamang sa

online sources," ani Laurel.

"Hindi ako nakatapos ng pag-aaral dahil sa edad na 19, ako'y naging ama. Sa murang edad ay kinailangan kong mag-hanapbuhay upang maitaguyod ang aking pamilya. Iyan po ang bilin ng aking ama, unahin ang aking responsibilidad bilang ama," diin niya.

Bagamat nais niya umanong makatapos ng pag-aaral, sinabi ni Laurel na hindi siya nagkaroon ng pagkakataon dahil sa trabaho at obligasyon sa

pamilya. Sa halip, pinagsikapan niyang palaguin ang Frabelle na nagsimula sa pangangisda at ngayon ay isa nang malaking kumpanya na merong negosyo sa power generation, real estate development, meat at seafood processing, cold chain network, aquaculture, at ship building at repair.

Nag-divest na si Laurel mula sa mga negosyo nang siya ay itatalaga ni Pangulong Marcos bilang kalihim ng Agrikultura. (Malou Escudero)

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Editorial

Ireporma ang DA

SINALIN ni President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. kay **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** ang panunungkulan sa Department of Agriculture (DA) noong Nobyembre 4. Sabi ng Presidente malaki ang tiwala niya kay Laurel. Malaki umano ang maitutulong ni Laurel sa DA sapagkat marami na itong karanasan hindi lamang sa fishing industry kundi sa iba pang may kinalaman sa pagpaparami ng pagkain. Si Laurel ang may-ari ng Frabelle Fishing Corporation.

Sa mahigit isang taon na pinamahalaan ni Marcos ang DA, wala namang ipinagbago at tumaas pa ang presyo ng bigas. Pinangako ni Marcos noong nangangampanya na ibaba sa P20 per kilo ng bigas. Hindi ito natupad. Kailangan pa niyang mag-isyu ng Executive Order para maibaba sa P40-45 ang kilo ng bigas. Ang pagkakaroon ng rice ceiling ay nakaapekto naman sa mga magbibigag dahil mataas ang puhunan nila. Maski ang Presidente, hindi alam kung bakit tumaas ang presyo ng bigas.

Habang nagbabanta ang Presidente na hahabulin ang smugglers/hoarders ng bigas, patuloy naman ang pagdagsa ng smuggled rice mula China, Vietnam at Thailand. Ang mga smuggled rice ay iniimbak sa mga bodega sa maraming lugar sa bansa. Hanggang ngayon wala pang "malalaking isda" na nakakasuhan at ikinukulong dahil sa pag-smuggle ng bigas at iba pang agri products.

Ang mga problemang ito ang nararapat na lutasin ni Secretary Laurel. May mabigat pa sapagkat may mga DA officials na nakikipagkutsabahan sa importers dahil para hindi mapigilan ang pagdagsa ng bigas sa bansa. Kung saan-saang port idinadaan ang sandamukal na bigas.

Ayon sa Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG), tumatanggap ng regalo ang ilang DA officials sa mga importers dahil para bumaha ang bigas. Sinabi ng SINAG na para mapigilan ang pagdagsa ng smuggled rice, idaan sa Department of Trade and Industry ang pag-isyu ng import permits.

Matagal nang napapabalita ang kutsabahan ng DA officials, importer at BOC officials. Talamak ang korapsiyon. Maraming malalaking isda na hindi malambat. Tama ang SINAG na may mga DA officials na nakikinabang sa importer.

Nararapat ang top to bottom na paglilinis sa DA. Ito ang inaasahan ng taumbayan kay Sec. Laurel. Ireporma ang DA. Now na.



PhilMech distributes P100 M assistance under RCEF

By DANESSA RIVERA

The **Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech)** said it has distributed P100 million worth of total assistance to rice farmers in Bukidnon, Pangasinan, and Laguna.

PhilMech said this represents the assistance distributed by PHilMech to farmers under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF)-Mechanization Program for the first 12 days

of November.

In Bukidnon, 50 farmers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs) were awarded various rice equipment under the program during the two-day Bagong Pilipinas Serbisyo Fair (BPSF) at Bukidnon State University on Nov. 11 and 12.

A total of 94 farm machines/equipment were distributed to the 50 FCAs, including four-wheel drive tractors, combine harvesters, mobile dryers, and a rice pro-

cessing system (RPS).

Among the FCAs that received assistance were the Lumintao Farmers Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Capinonan Irrigators Association Inc., Greenfields SN Multi-Purpose Cooperative and Mailag San Carlos Bagontaas Irrigators Association.

The Bukidnon leg of the BPSF gathered various national government agencies that extended assistance and services worth over P389 million to approximately 110,000

Bukidnon residents who registered for the two-day event.

Through the BPSF, PHilMech said it continues to provide farm machines/equipment to qualified FCAs under the RCEF-Mechanization Program.

In Alaminos, Pangasinan, a memorandum of agreement for the establishment of an RPS under the RCEF-Mechanization Program was signed between PHilMech and the Alaminos City Agriculture Cooperative (ACAC) during a

groundbreaking ceremony for the facility held on Nov. 6 in the same city.

The P18-million facility includes two units of recirculating dryers with 6-ton drying capacity per batch and 1 unit of multi-pass rice mill with 1.5-ton milling capacity per hour.

To date, the City of Alaminos has already received P40 million worth of agricultural machinery under the RCEF-Mechanization Program.

Meanwhile, PHilMech

awarded five FCAs with their own four-wheel drive tractors worth at least P11 million during the kick off for the two-day BPSF in Santa Cruz, Laguna on Nov. 4.

The FCAs were Sto. Domingo-Maitim Irrigators Association Inc.; Banca-Banca, San Francisco, San Felix, San Roque Irrigators Association Inc.; Pila Laguna Agricultural Cooperative; Bagong Samahan ng Magsasaka ng Pila, Laguna Inc.; and Tubuan-Tanza Irrigators Association Inc.



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Palay output hits 5.4MMT in Q3

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

LOCAL production of palay (unmilled rice) reached 5.04 million metric tons (MT) in the third quarter of 2023, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported, up slightly compared to the output of the previous quarter.

Based on the seasonally adjusted rice production and prices report, PSA said that palay output from July to September went up by 0.4 percent from the previous

quarter's seasonally adjusted production of 5.03 million MT.

The latest figure was also higher by 32.8 percent in comparison to the previous estimate of 3.79 mil-

lion MT for the same period.

Year on year, the seasonally adjusted palay output was higher by 1.0 percent from the 4.9 million MT recorded in the same period last year.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) earlier said that production of palay was expected to increase this year and that a record output was possible.

Agriculture Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio Sebastian said that

local palay output this year is estimated to reach 20 million MT, higher by 1.5 percent from the 19.7 million MT recorded in 2022. It was in 2021 that the country logged its highest palay output at 19.96 million MT.

The farmgate price of palay, meanwhile, was recorded at P20.24 per kilogram (kg), an increase of 7.9 percent from the previous quarter's P18.76 per kg.

The adjusted price was also higher by 16.9 percent from P17.31

per kg in the same period last year.

The National Food Authority (NFA) has set a new price range for buying palay to improve the income of Filipino farmers.

It was announced that the buying price for dry palay would be P23 per kg from P19 kg, and for wet, P19 per kg from P16 per kg.

In an earlier statement, the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) suggested reimposing the price cap on milled rice to prevent attempts to artificially increase

retail prices of the commodity.

Sinag said it is receiving reports that some millers and traders are offering to buy freshly harvested palay between P21 to P23.50 per kg and P26 and P29 per kg for dry palay.

For her part, Agriculture Undersecretary for Policy, Planning, and Regulations Mercedita Sombilla said there are other measures the government can take to stabilize rice prices aside from imposing a price ceiling.



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Bangus hatchery hub to rise in Pangasinan

BY GABRIEL CARDINOZA

LINGAYEN: Bangus farmers in Pangasinan may not have to import milkfish fry again with the construction of a P239-million bangus breeding and hatchery facility at Bolinao town in Pangasinan.

When completed, the facility will be capable of producing 100 million bangus fry and more than 48 million bangus larvae every year, Pangasinan Gov. Ramon Guico 3rd said on Monday, November 13.

The fry requirement of nursery operators in Pangasinan is 53.4 million annually, based on a 2021 study conducted by the University of the Philippines Los Baños' College of Economics and Management.

"At least with our own breeding and hatchery facility, bangus fry will now be locally sourced," Guico said.

The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, an international research institution in

Iloilo province, reported in 2022 that the country has been highly reliant on milkfish fry imports.

It said more than 50 percent of the annual fry requirements in the country were imported from Indonesia and Taiwan that year.

Westly Rosario, retired head of the National Integrated Fisheries Technology Development Center, a research arm of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, said only 10 percent of imported milkfish fry are alive when they arrive in the country.

"It usually takes 10 to 15 days for the fry to recover from stress they suffered while being transported," Rosario said.

He said that the fry are first reared in transition ponds for

60 days until they become 3- to 4-inch long fingerlings. The fingerlings are then released in the fish pond or cage, where they are grown and eventually harvested after four to six months.

Guico said the bangus breeding and hatchery facility is part of the **Philippine Rural Development Project (PRDP) Scale-Up**, one of the three core projects launched last week by the Department of Agriculture.

Some 39,399 fisherfolk, 63 bangus nursery operators, and a bangus satellite hatchery operator in 17 Pangasinan towns are expected to benefit from the project.

Guico said the facility will be constructed at the provincial government's agriculture field station in Barangay Arnedo in Bolinao town.

He said the World Bank will shoulder 80 percent of the project cost, and the rest will be equally shared by the national and provincial governments.

The components of the project

include seven units of brood-stock tanks, 120 units of larval rearing tanks, 24 units of rotifer tanks, an administrative and laboratory building, staff quarters, a triplex building, a two-unit pump house, and an intake pump.

Aside from aiming to reduce dependence on wild-caught and imported hatchery-bred bangus fry, the project is also expected to create alternative economic activities that may be derived from the bangus breeding and hatchery project.

It also seeks to improve the services of the government through the provision of alternative sources of bangus fry for aquaculture and to serve as a techno-demo and training center for bangus hatchery operations for stakeholders in the province.

Pangasinan is the country's leading producer of milkfish, contributing about 27 percent or 110,000 metric tons (MT) of bangus to the country's total production of 409,906.56 MT in 2019.

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Parusa sa 'di magbebenta ng half rice, itinulak sa Kamara

Isinusulong sa Kamara na gawing mandatory ang paglalagay ng half-rice sa menu ng mga food establishments at parusahan ang mga hindi susunod dito.

Sa Anti-Rice Wastage Act (House Bill 9510) na inihain ni Quezon Rep. Keith Micah Tan, papatawan ng parusa ang mga kainan na hindi magbebenta ng half-rice.

Ang panukala ay orihinal na inihain ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr., noong siya ay senador pa lamang. Isinulong naman ito ng ina ng mambabatas na si Quezon Gov. Helen Tan noong ito ay miyembro ng Kongreso.

Layunin ng panukala na mabawasan ang natatapong kanin sa mga restaurant, commissary, cafeteria, cafe, lunchroom, bistro, fast food establishment at mga katulad na kainan.

"Hindi naman po natin pagbabawalan ang 'unli rice' o paparusahan 'yun hindi makakaubos ng kanin sa kanilang buffet. Ang nais lang po natin ay makatulong upang hindi maaksaya ang bigas na itinuturing natin na ginto at upang bigyang pansin ang kapakanan ng ating mga magsasaka at isulong na rin ang kalusugan ng bawat mamamayan," sabi ni Tan.

Sa ilalim ng panukala, ang one-half cup ng kanin ay dapat ilagay sa menu. Ang hindi susunod ay pagmumultahin ng P5,000 sa unang paglabag, P10,000 sa ikalawa, at P20,000 at suspensyon ng lisensya o permit to operate ng hindi bababa ng 30 araw sa ikatlo at mga susunod pang paglabag.

Ayon pa kay Tan, House Assistant Majority leader, ang panukala ay bilang tugon sa panawagan ng Department of Agriculture (DA) sa mga food businesses na isama ang half cup of rice sa kanilang menu. (Joy Cantos)



Point of view

Hidden costs of food production, agrifood systems

By LIONEL DABBADIE

We've come a long way in the global battle against poverty and malnutrition. Yet, a complete eradication of hunger remains impossible as long as escalating global challenges are not addressed. From global pandemics, worldwide market crises, climate change, biodiversity loss, worsening poverty and numerous calamities, it is time for radical new approaches to the way we produce our food if we are to achieve Zero Hunger.



Dealing with these multiple challenges and feeding the growing global population will require radical new approaches to the way we manage the many intricate relationships that bring food to our plates, what we call agrifood systems. Agrifood systems yield many benefits – they nourish us, provide livelihoods and promote economic growth and at the same time strengthen cultural identities. However, they can also damage the environment, the social fabric and people's health; such "hidden costs" of agrifood systems are seldom accounted for but are borne by the society as a whole.

The United Nations Food System Summit (UNFSS) in 2021 and, more recently, the UNFSS+2 Stocktaking Moment earlier this year, underlined the importance of fully understanding and reinforcing the positive contributions, value and complexities of agrifood systems, and the need to transform them to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and decrease hunger and poverty worldwide.

Since then, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has been instrumental in gathering and publishing data and evidence on agrifood systems to foster better informed decision-making. FAO's latest flagship publication, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2023*, published on Nov. 6, is dedicated to uncovering the true impacts, both positive and negative, of global agrifood systems, to guide decision-making towards increased sustainability.

Hidden costs of agrifood in the Philippines

The report has found that, in the Philippines, the hidden costs of our agrifood systems are equivalent to 9 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). This is a huge amount, although comparable to that in other middle-income countries. Unhealthy dietary patterns leading to diseases and lower labor productivity are the main culprit. In total, these represent more than 70 percent of the total hidden costs, followed by environmental costs mostly from nitrogen (18 percent) and greenhouse gas (6 percent) emissions.

These results are worrying and beg for a moment of reflection. How can the Philippines, a country blessed with natural abundance and described by many, including the national hero Jose Rizal himself, as an "Eden" on earth, have such large hidden costs, especially from unhealthy diets? How can we ensure our agrifood systems live up to their potential and provide healthy diets to all? A comprehensive approach is necessary – one developed in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders from government, business and civil society.

Initiatives are already underway, as listed by the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028. FAO, with its vast experience in working on optimizing agrifood systems, stands ready to support these initiatives of the government.

Addressing the unique challenges of the Philippines' agrifood systems requires specificity and a deep understanding of the local values and knowledge that shape the local agrifood system. As the cornerstone of agrifood systems, farmers and fishers, especially smallholders, should be supported to enhance their business skills in order to supply affordable and nutritious food. Internal market access remains a significant hurdle. Working with traders and retailers to provide a better value to the national production is essential, as is leveraging digital innovation to improve market reach by smallholders and thus food supply in terms

of both greater quantity and quality.

This journey is one we must embark on together. This is a daunting task, but with a pragmatic, united and holistic approach, bolstered by good quality data and knowledge, the Philippines can work towards a future where sustainable and equitable agrifood systems are not

just aspirational goals, but tangible realities that will benefit all of society, help decrease hunger and combat poverty while providing healthy food for all.

Lionel Dabbadie is the Food and Agriculture Organization representative in the Philippines.



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Bill on serving half-cup rice pushed

ILOILO 1st District Rep. Janette Garin filed a bill limiting rice servings in restaurants to half a cup to cut food waste. "The bill on serving half-cup rice in restaurants nationwide shall be revived and passed in Congress to minimize food

waste, promote balanced and sustainable eating habits, and ensure healthier meal portions," Garin said in a statement. "Restaurant owners should also opt for sweet potato fries over regular potato fries, not only to

add a flavorful twist to meals but also to enhance nutritional value," she said. Garin, a former Health secretary, said sweet potatoes are rich in Vitamin A and fiber. "This increased reliance on sweet potatoes will

likely bolster local farmers' livelihoods and contribute to the growth of sustainable agriculture within the community," she said. "It is high time to have it implemented in our count," she said. REINA C. TOLENTINO



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Bill seeks half-cup rice serving option

BY WENDELL VIGILIA

ILOILO Rep. Janette Garin yesterday filed a bill mandating restaurants, canteens, eateries, and other food establishments to make the half-cup rice serving option available to customers to reduce food wastage. The proposed bill, also known as the "Rice Waste Reduction Act of 2023," seeks to "minimize food waste, promote balanced and sus-

tainable eating habits, and ensure healthier meal portions."

"By implementing this measure, the legislation envisions a future where individuals are more conscious of their food choices, establishments prioritize responsible serving practices, and society as a whole benefits from a more sustainable and balanced approach to food consumption," the bill said.

Under the proposal, establish-

ments that will fail to abide the law will be fined P10,000 for the first offense; P20,000 for the second offense, and P30,000 for the third offense.

"I hope my fellow lawmakers will back this legislation. Marami ang nasasayang na kanin na dapat mas marami ang pwedeng makinabang. Panahon na para maipatupad ito at mabawasan ang rice wastage," Garin said.

The bill noted a Philippine

Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) report showing that the country has a total amount of P7.2 billion wastage worth of rice, adding that 46 cities have already implemented the half-cup rice serving option, including Quezon City, Manila, Davao, Cebu, Puerto Princesa, Baguio, and Iloilo.

"It is high time to implement this measure nationwide as it can play a pivotal role in addressing

the country's rice self-sufficiency goals," Garin said.

Two other lawmakers have also filed bills seeking to require restaurants to offer half-cup rice options.

Quezon Rep. Keith Micah Tan filed House Bill No. 9510 which defines half rice as 100 grams and seeks to penalizes violators with P5,000 for the first offense; P10,000 for the 2nd offense; and P20,000 for the third offense as well as the

suspension of license or permit to operate for 30 days for the third offense and subsequent offenses.

For his part, Rep. Nicanor Briones (PL, Agap) filed House Bill No. 9511 which seeks to impose higher penalties of P20,000 for the first offense; P50,000 for the second offense; and P100,000 for the third offense as well as suspension of license or permit to operate for 30 days for the third and subsequent offenses.



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Half-rice bet gawing sapilitan sa mga resto

INIHAİN sa Kamara de Representantes ang isang panukala upang maging mandatory ang paglalagay ng half-rice sa menu ng mga restaurant at parusahan ang mga hindi susunod dito.

Sa panukalang Anti-Rice Wastage Act (House Bill 9510) na inihain ni Quezon Rep. Keith Micah Tan papatawan ng parusa ang mga kainin na hindi magbebenta ng half-rice.

Ang panukala ay orihinal na inihain ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., noong siya ay senador pa lamang. Isinulong naman ito ng ina ng mambabatas na si Quezon Gov. Helen Tan noong ito ay miyembro ng Kongreso.

Layunin ng panukala na mabawasan ang natatapon ng kanin sa mga restaurant, commissary, cafeteria, cafe, lunchroom, bistro, fast-food establishment at mga katulad na kainin.

"Hindi naman po natin pagbabawalan ang 'unli rice' o paparusahan 'yon hindi makakaubos ng kanin sa kanilang buffet. Ang nais lang po natin ay makatulong upang hindi maaksaya ang bigas na itinuturing natin na ginto at upang bigyang pansin ang kapakanan ng ating mga magsasaka at isulong na rin ang kalusugan ng bawat mamamayan," sabi ni Tan.

Ang hindi susunod ay pagmumultahin ng P5,000 sa unang paglabag, P10,000 sa ikalawang paglabag, at P20,000 at suspensyon ng lisensiya o permit to operate ng hindi bababa ng 30 araw sa ikatlo at mga susunod pang paglabag. (Billy Begas/Eralyn Prado)



Ngayong araw na ito ay ibabahagi ko sa inyo ang isang garden na nililalang ng mga Person With Disability (PWD) na kung tawagin ay Multi Skilled Urban Farming sa Project 4, Quezon City.

Conventional farming ang ginagawang pagtatanim ng mga PWDs sa bakan-teng lote sa kanilang lugar sa Bistek Ville, 18 Kawad Kalinga PWD Village, Mapag-pala St., Brgy. Escopa, Project 4, sa nasabing lungsod.

Ayon kay Rodel De

tanim ang grupo ni Rodel sa mga pet-bottle.

"Natuto po kami sa inyo, Magsasakang Reporter sa mga ibinabahagi nin-yong kaalaman sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman sa pamamagitan ng organikong pamamaraan," pahayag pa ni Rodel.

Sa pagbisita ng Masaganang Buhay Team ng Magsasakang Reporter sa lugar nina Rodel ay dinatnan namin si-lang nagtatanim at nagsasagawa ng land



Hinihikayat ni Rodel ang lahat, may kapansanan man at wala, bata at matanda, babae o lalaki na magtanim na rin.

Ani Rodel, nagawa nila ang pagtatanim kahit sila ay mga PWDs, kaya magagawa rin ito ng iba.

Nakagawa na rin ang grupo nila ng sa-

Samantala, sa mga nagnanais naman po na mapalalim pa ang kaalaman kaugnay ng natural at organic farming, panoorin po ninyo ang mga video tutorial ko sa aking Youtube Channel na ANG MAGSASAKANG REPORTER tungkol sa step by step na pagtatanim,

PWD Gawad Kalinga... MULTI SKILLED URBAN FARMING

Guzman, Presidente ng PWD Urban Farming, may kapansanan sa kamay at paa, malaking bagay sa kanila ang pagtatanim nila ng iba't ibang uri ng gulay at prutas sa ipinagamit na bakanteng lote sa kanilang lugar.

Sinabi ni Rodel, noong kasagsagan ng pandemya ay muli nilang napatunayan ang kahalagahan ng pagtatanim ng sariling pagkain.

Aniya, hindi na nila kailangan pang lumabas ng kanilang village para bumili ng gulay na kanilang kakainin, sa halip ay pipitasin lang nila sa kanilang hardin.

"Naging malusog kami at energetic dahil sariwang gulay ang palagian naming kinakain at ang sobrang tanim sa aming pangangailangan ay naibabahagi pa naming sa mga kalapit na community," ani Rodel.

Giit ni Rodel, kung hindi sa kanilang mga tanim na papaya, malunggay at iba pang gulay, magkakasakit sila at magugutom.

"Dahil sa biyaya ng Diyos, pagbubungkal ng lupa at pagtatanim ay maluwalhati naming nalampasan ang COVID-19," sabi pa ni Rodel.

Bukod sa mga tanim na direkta sa lupa ay marami ring



Ang Magsasakang Reporter kasama si Rodel De Guzman at kanyang misis.

preparation para sa bagong bakanteng lote na ipinahiram sa kanilang mga PWDs.

Tila Rice Terraces sa Banaue ang bagong lote na tinataniman ngayon ng grupo ni Rodel.

Aniya, malaking benepisyo ang nakukuha nila sa pagtatanim, nagkakaroon pa sila ng mainit na "bonding" na magkapitbahay.

"Sa halip na tambay-tambay at mag-marites ang aming mga misis ay sama-sama kami nagtatanim ng aming sariling pagkain," aniya pa.

riling produkto na chili sauce.

Sa mga nais bumili ng produkto ng grupo ni Rodel, i-text lamang po ninyo siya 09128757569.

Sabihin lang po ninyo na nabasa ninyo rito sa **Pilipino Star Ngayon (PSN)** ang tungkol sa kanilang grupo.

Sa darating na araw ng Linggo, November 19, 2023...

mapapanood ninyo ang panayam kay Rodel De Guzman at garden tour sa programang Masaganang Buhay TV at radio show ng Magsasakang Reporter.

pag-aalaga at sikreto sa pagkakaroon ng magandang tanim na halaman.

Para sa iba pang tips sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman, maaari po kayong manood at makinig ng aking TV at radio program na Masaganang Buhay tuwing Linggo, alas-7:00 hanggang alas-8:00 ng umaga sa OnePH Signal TV, Channel 1 ng TV-5. Mapapakinggan din po sa Radyo Singko 92.3 News FM.

Maaari rin kayong manood at mag-subscribe sa aking Youtube Channel na ANG MAGSASAKANG REPORTER at Facebook na Mer Layson at Facebook page na Ang Magsasakang Reporter, TV host Vlogger para sa iba pang kaalaman at impormasyon sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman sa pamamagitan ng organikong pamamaraan.

Tuwing araw ng Martes ay regular nin-yong mababasa ang aking kolum dito sa **Pilipino Star Ngayon (PSN)** ng Star Group of Publications.

Sa mga tanong at komento ay maaari ninyo akong i-text, huwag po tawag, sa 09178675197.

STAY SAFE, HAPPY FARMING, GOD BLESS US ALL.



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Corn at 3-year lows

CANBERRA- Chicago corn futures on Monday hovered near three-year lows as the market absorbed last week's US government forecast that farmers will produce the biggest corn crop on record this year.

Soybean prices rose and wheat fell.

The higher US production estimate caught the market off guard, said Rod Baker at Australian Crop Forecasters in Perth.

He said the market also was watching to see if dry conditions in Brazil would damage the coun-

try's second corn harvest.

"If those dry conditions continue, that's going to be supportive of prices. If it turns around and they get that second crop in, that would be bearish," he said.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) last week raised its US 2023-24 corn harvest estimate to 15.234 billion bushels from 15.064 billion.

Farmers said a lack of rainfall in Brazil's top grain state Mato Grosso was compromising the second corn crop. - Reuters