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EYES WIDE OPEN

IRIS GONZALES

Agriculture

After more than a year and after several other names cropped up in the business grapevine, at last we finally have an agriculture secretary.

Newly appointed Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. will be racing against time because of the enormity of the work that needs to be done – from ensuring food security to addressing specific problems of our local industries.



This early, there are already some hiccups – expected of course – including the fact that he did not graduate from the University of Santo Tomas despite official documents submitted to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), saying so. (Congratulations to campus journalists from *The Varsitarian* for putting the spotlight on this).

Hiccups aside, I hope he will be able to improve a sector that was once upon a time, our country's pride, hope and source of economic growth.

It's a challenging task for sure and one must be a bit crazy to accept the agriculture post especially in these hard times. But then again, sometimes the crazy are the ones who get things done. We'll see about that.

My hope is that he would be open to huge changes in the present structure of the Department of Agriculture and work closely with people on the ground – the farmers, the fisherfolk, the local government units.

As I said before, the present structure of the agriculture department is from the top down wherein plans and programs emanate from the top with hardly any consultation from those on the ground and implemented in a one-size-fits all manner. This isn't always effective because different regions have different problems.

Sec. Laurel can change this by working closely with the different LGUs because they are the ones who are in touch with the farmers. The farmers know and listen to the LGUs' provincial agriculture and municipal officers, as former agriculture undersecretary Dr. Cristino "Resty" Collado pointed out.

This could help a lot in determining how to allocate food production budget, say the rice production budget, for example. Those in the top 10 rice producing regions should be prioritized while top performers can be rewarded with a higher budget from the DA.

Rice

In the food hierarchy, three major commodities must be tackled properly – rice, meat and sugar, as I said before.

Rice is top in the hierarchy, the mainstay in every Filipino meal.

Sec. Laurel would have to create an effective partnership with farmers to boost rice productivity. This, in turn, can be done with the DA and the different LGUs working together.

For example, the local chieftains can distribute seeds and fertilizer directly to the target. They can identify which areas need to be prioritized the most.

Pork, chicken

Next in the food hierarchy is pork. Whether we like it or not, healthy or otherwise, we are such a meat eating country.

Welcome to this *lechon* republic!

Indeed, meat products, mainly pork and chicken, are the usual food items that most Filipinos complement with rice.

Also, the price of pork is the lead barometer used to plan for family food budgets. Prices of poultry and fish follow when prices of pork go up.

Speaking of meat, we are also having problems with cheap imports.

Industry sources have said that a lot of meat products have been kept in cold storage facilities for months on end.

Normally, this is allowed but in recent months, there have been numerous reports of some of these meat products stored far too long and no longer fit for consumption yet are finding their way into stores and wet markets in the country without any information on their expiry or production dates.

The least the government can do is to make sure that every product sold to consumers is properly labeled.

Raids by the DA months ago and industry monitoring from local producers have shown that tubs and tubs of unbranded and spoiled chicken products are sold in some wet markets such as those in Bulacan and Caloocan.

There are even reports that a cold storage operator in northern Luzon buys imported meat products – some of which may be expired – and sells these goods to food kiosks selling chickens, dumplings, etc. This is a horror story, if true.

The DA must be vigilant and must look into these reports that's been going around the industry.

Data from the Bureau of Animal Industry showed that the country bought 289.52 million kilograms of chicken overseas in the first eight months of the year, 35.4 percent higher compared to the 244.8 million a year ago.

Not surprisingly, our local meat producers are hurting.

Sugar

And then there's the bitter situation surrounding our sugar industry, which is now on the brink of extinction due to neglect and our obsession with imports.

Importing goods of course is always the more convenient route because these goods are cheaper.

But there's always the issue of smuggling and poor quality of imported food, especially meat products.

The different problems surrounding our top commodities point to a common solution and that is to increase local production. This is of course easier said than done and may not be the fastest solution.

But for the sake of our farmers, producers and for our own food security, we must do it.

How we get there under Sec. Laurel's leadership remains to be seen. Would he be able to strike that delicate balance between ensuring affordable food prices and strengthening local production?

I hope we find out soon enough.

* * *

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My wish list for the new DA secretary

THE appointment of a new Agriculture Secretary in Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., who has an extensive background in agribusiness, is a welcome development amid the challenges the global and the country's farming and fishery industry faces.

Even with the challenges, however, I can say that now is the best time to become a food producer or agribusiness owner because the world we live in right now is very much connected digitally, and the rapid development of technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) can have a huge positive impact on agriculture. Also, there is a growing awareness of the need to change how we should grow food in a more sustainable manner, and this can be achieved by technology adoption, policy reform, and concerted action.

Hence, I still have high hopes that the Philippine agriculture sector's full potential can be unlocked gradually with much-needed reforms and faster adoption of technology. I also back the marching orders given by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to Laurel to modernize agriculture to make the country more food secure, lessen dependence on imports, and lift millions of farmers and fisherfolk out of poverty.

PH agri faces many challenges

But we have to face the chal-



MOVING FORWARD

WILLIAM D. DAR

lenges that have persistently impeded the agriculture sector's progress and impacted its ability to ensure food security and prosperity for the nation. Despite years of employing various approaches and solutions to level up Philippine agriculture, the stark truth remains: agriculture is still a vulnerable sector, and our farmers and fisherfolk continue to grapple with poverty, being among the poorest of the poor.

Here are the major factors that have hounded or caused the woes of the country's agriculture sector:

Small farm holdings. This limits access to technologies and reduces the bargaining power of smallholders. This also constrains investments as it is expected that the private sector seeks economies of scale. The end result of these is low agricultural productivity.

Protectionist trade policies. Excessive trade controls stifle competition, which in turn encourages smuggling. Excessive trade controls also isolate Filipino agricultural producers, especially smallholders, from accessing viable global markets.

Limited climate resiliency implementation. This makes the

country's agricultural systems vulnerable to the adverse impact of climate change. The most vulnerable are no other than the smallholders.

Limited access to financial resources. This results in reduced investment capacity by the farmers and fishers themselves, which in turn makes them vulnerable to economic and climate shocks. This factor also results in low resiliency for smallholders.

Hence, there is a need to redefine strategies and adopt modern practices to address these challenges that have been hounding the sector for many years. This requires a solid approach that embraces science and innovation, policy adjustments, and heavy investments both from the public and private sectors.

So, here is my wish list for the **DA under Laurel** to level up and gradually unlock the potential of the country's agriculture sector: accelerate farm clustering for economies of scale backed up by cooperatives development; encourage and work with the private sector to invest in agriculture and agribusiness; work with Congress to increase land limit per farmer to 25 hectares.

Boost productivity and competitiveness by using modern technologies and innovations, including climate-smart techniques; invest more in public goods like post-harvest facilities, cold storage facilities, farm-

to-market roads and rainwater catchment; elevate the implementation of the Province-led Agriculture and Fisheries Extension System (Pafes); and strengthen partnership with local government units (LGUs) and pursue decentralized extension system.

Recommended measures

For accelerating farm clustering, organized farmers whose lands are consolidated are in a better position to adopt modern technologies, equipment and other big interventions, resulting in higher production.

Coop development should go hand-in-hand with farm clustering, as this empowers smallholder farmers to collectively manage and operate their agricultural endeavors. And cooperatives are in a better position to forge joint venture agreements or partnerships, also resulting in more efficient use of agricultural resources and better market opportunities for smallholder farmers.

As for private sector investments, these could lead to the adoption of modern technologies and best practices, leveling up production. This is because the private sector has the capacity to expand production facilities, processing plants, and distribution networks, creating

more jobs, which has been clearly demonstrated by the Go Negosyo Kapatid Angat Lahat Agri Program (Kalap) program that now counts 45 "big brothers" or major agri-food companies that have forged partnerships with organized smallholder farmers.

Also, private sector involvement in agriculture promotes value addition, agribusiness growth, and innovation, making the farming and fishery sector more competitive and resilient.

However, I see the private sector increasing its involvement and investments in the industry if farmers are allowed to own up to 25 hectares of land, which needs legislation. This policy change can stimulate economic growth, increase income, and strengthen the sector's contribution to the national economy.

In boosting productivity and competitiveness, there is a need to utilize modern technologies and innovations, including climate-smart techniques. This will also require investments in public goods like post-harvest facilities, cold storage facilities, farm-to-market roads, rainwater catchments, and more irrigation facilities. For irrigation, new technologies that can reduce water use and improve yields, such as the network piping system developed by Israel, can be applied on a massive scale in the country.

In elevating the implemen-

tation of Pafes, we empower and transform provinces as agricultural hubs, promoting commodity specialization and the comparative advantage of the provinces. This results in the decentralization of the management of the country's agriculture sector.

Eventually, the synergy ushered by Pafes enhances collaboration among LGUs and the DA, bridging the gap between national policies and local agricultural needs. The DA also coplans, co-invests, co-implements and co-monitors as Pafes takes the lead.

And through Pafes, the DA and other concerned national government agencies can strengthen their partnership with LGUs and pursue decentralized extension systems.

Let me add that the government's budget for agriculture, particularly for the DA and the National Irrigation Administration, should be substantially increased. For next year, the proposed budget for agriculture is P167.5 billion, which I believe is a good starting point, but that level is not yet enough.

And I wish the best for the current DA leadership that the department, with the cooperation of the private sector and stakeholders, will be able to carry out the marching orders set forth by President Marcos Jr. for the agriculture sector.

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DA forms group to refine anti-hoarding policy

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

[@jearcalas](#)

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has formed a technical working group (TWG) that would oversee improvements in the government's implementing guidelines for preventing hoarding and the manipulation of prices of farm goods.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. issued Special Order (SO) 1379 that mandated the creation of the TWG for the formulation of the guidelines on the definition and scope of hoarding and other acts of illegal price manipulation of agri-fishery commodities.

Under the order, the TWG will review existing state policies and guidelines in relation to the implementation of Republic Act 7581 or

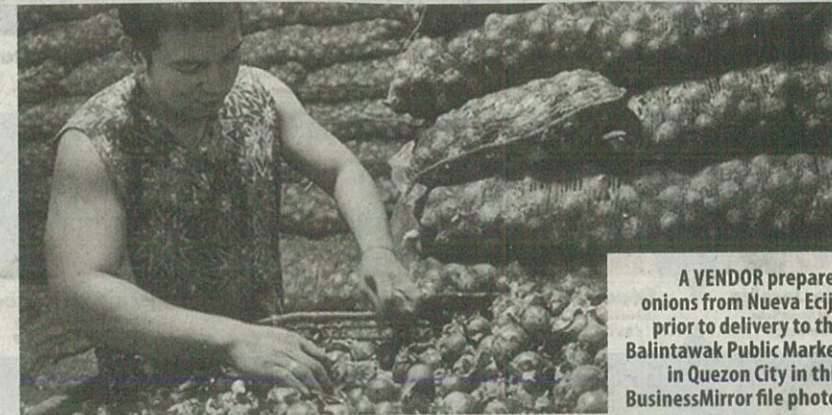
the Price Act of 1992.

The TWG will oversee the formulation of a memorandum circular that would clarify and determine the scope of hoarding and other illegal acts of price manipulation identified under the Price Act.

It will conduct public consultations and other activities for the implementation of the prospective memorandum circular.

The TWG will endorse the final draft of the memorandum circular to Laurel through Senior Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban for approval.

"This Order shall take effect immediately and shall remain in force until revoked in writing. All orders, memoranda and other issuances inconsistent herewith are hereby deemed revoked," Laurel said in SO 1379



A VENDOR prepares onions from Nueva Ecija prior to delivery to the Balintawak Public Market in Quezon City in this BusinessMirror file photo.

dated November 14.

The TWG will be chaired by Agriculture Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and Regulations Mercedita A. Sombilla while Assistant Secretary for Regulations

Paz J. Benavidez II would serve as vice chair. Assistant Secretary for Inspectorate and Enforcement James A. Layug will be a co-vice chair of the TWG.

It would also consist of various

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representatives from different agencies attached to the agriculture department including the Bureau of Animal Industry, Bureau of Plant Industry, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, National Meat Inspection Service and Sugar Regulatory Administration.

Stakeholder representatives from three sectors (animal, fisheries and plant) will also sit in the TWG.

Under the Price Act, the agriculture department must oversee the implementation of the law concerning crops, fish and other marine products, fresh meat, fresh poultry and dairy products, fertilizers, and other farm inputs.

The same law stipulated that some of the identified illegal acts of price manipulation include hoarding, profiteering and cartel. The law had included


certain computations for determining if a seller is engaged in manipulating prices.

In recent months, the Marcos administration blamed unscrupulous traders for manipulating prices and causing an "undue spike" in various commodities sold in the domestic market, including rice.

Lawmakers had vowed to "intensify" their scrutiny of hoarders and traders that manipulate prices of agricultural goods.

The House Committee on Food and Agriculture vowed that it will "leave no stone unturned" in its pursuit to protect consumers from unscrupulous traders.

"We are committed to working hand-in-hand with the DA and other relevant agencies to ensure that the Filipino people are safeguarded from price manipulations and hoarding activities."

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PBBM's choice for DA chief defended

By Jester Manalastas

A veteran House member is appealing to Filipinos to support the newly-appointed Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

Surigao del Norte Representative Robert Ace Barbers made the call as he expressed full backing to the choice of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

To date, there are criticisms hurled against Laurel like his educational background to which he is not a college degree holder.

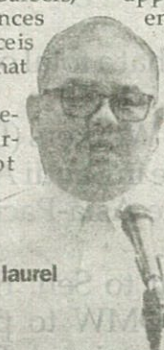
According to Barbers, there are instances wherein experience is more important than college degree.

"A college degree while desirable does not make a holder qualified for any and all employment positions that he or she may desire or apply in. As a matter of fact, in all employment applications, experience is always required and is an obvious advantage. We always say and acknowledge that 'experience is the best teacher,' he said.

In the case of Laurel, Barbers said, who would say that he lacks the necessary tools, expertise and know-how to better run the agriculture portfolio when we all know that he has spent almost 40 years of his life in the industry.

"I am confident that no Summa Cum Laude candidate can beat him in this arena. I call on everyone to support him so that we can achieve at the soonest possible time our goals of food security and self-sufficiency. This should be our focus instead of finding faults and loopholes where there exists none," Barbers added.

Jester Manalastas



laurel



PCG monitoring fish kill in Cavite

By MARTIN SADONGDONG

Authorities are monitoring a massive fish kill in Cavite, and have started an investigation to determine the cause of the unusual incident, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said on Wednesday, Nov. 15.

PCG spokesperson Rear Adm. Armando Balilo said an undetermined number of dead fishes in the vicinity waters off Barangay 61, Cavite City was spotted by the Coast Guard Sub-Station (CGSS) Cavite last Nov. 13.

Majority of the dead fishes were classified as tilapia by the CGSS Cavite, with the foul odor emanating from the dead fishes affecting residents living nearby.

The sighting was immediately reported to the Cavite City local government and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) for appropriate action.

BFAR personnel conducted an area inspection and water sampling to determine the cause of the incident while the PCG Marine Environmental

Protection (MEPCOM) also took water and dead fish samples for laboratory analysis.

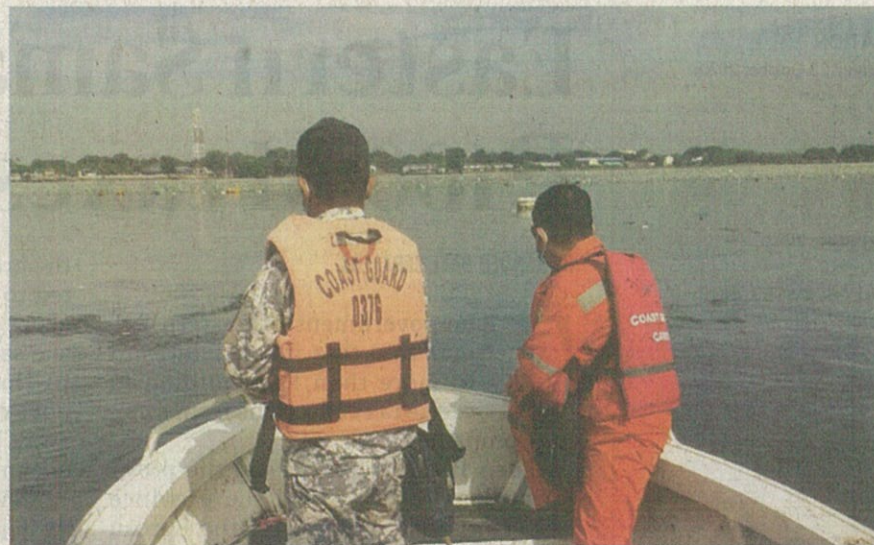
Meanwhile, the collected dead fishes were turned over to the garbage collector truck of Cavite City and transported to Material Recovery Facilities for proper disposal.

The PCG National Headquarters directed the CGSS Cavite to continue monitoring and conduct further incident assessment.

Activist fisherfolk group Pamalakaya said the fish kill could be caused by the reclamation activities in Manila Bay or water pollution.

"It's possible kasi hinalukay mo so maaari na lumutang ang mga heavy metal at lason na nakalubog dyan sa matagal nang panahon (It's possible because you dug there so the heavy metals and poisons that have long been submerged may have floated)," Pamalakaya Chairman Fernando Hicap said in a radio interview with DZXL.

Hicap said there were fishermen in Cavite City who were also attributing the fish kill to "alig".



TIGHT WATCH — Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) personnel monitor the waters off Barangay 61 in Cavite City on Wednesday, May 13, 2023, where a massive fish kill was earlier reported. (Photo from the PCG)

"Ito yung tubig na may lason na parating sa dagat kaya nagkakaroon ng fish kill. Malinaw na ito'y galing sa pollution, possible dahil sa Cavite lang ay doon lang mismo 'yun tapos ang apiktado lang ay mga tilapia lang. Itong tilapia naman ay dito lang sa tabi tabi hindi naman napupunta 'yan sa Manila Bay (This is the water mixed with poison from the sea which caused fish kill. It's clear that this is caused by pollution, possible the affected area is Cavite only and the only affected fish is tilapia. This type of tilapia is found only nearby and it does not go to Manila Bay),"

Hicap explained.

"Itong mga tilapia may tolerance kapag mababa ang oxygen, kaya nila magsurvive kaya mayroong kailangan na malalim na pag-aaral kung ano ang dahilan bakit namatay ang mga tilapia. Maaaring mayroon talagang may mataas na lason na nakaapekto sa kanila (These tilapia have high tolerance in low oxygen surface so they can survive that's why there should be an in-depth investigation what caused the death of these tilapia. It's possible there is a potent poison that affected them)," he added.

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Meat imports down by 10% in 10 months

By DANESSA RIVERA

The country's overall meat imports dropped by nearly 10 percent at end-October, pulled down by lower pork and beef shipments, which accounted for over 60 percent of the total.

Latest data from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) showed the country imported 1.02 billion kilos of meat and meat products in ten months ending October, a 9.69-percent decrease from the 1.13 billion kilos in the same period last year.

Pork – which accounts for 49.48 percent of the total volume – saw a 16.94 percent drop in shipments to 504.31 million kilos from 607.14 million kilos a year earlier.

Pork offals – or internal organs – were the most imported pork products at 184.17 million kilos followed by pork cuts at 183.14 million kilos.

Spain remained as the top source of pork products at 121.77 million kilos, followed by Brazil at 92.12 million kilos and Canada at 92.09 million kilos.

Figures from BAI also showed beef imports sipped by 20.95 percent to 120.64 million kilos or about 11.84 percent of the total.

Beef cuts accounted for the bulk with 77.54 million kilos followed by fats at 19.93 million kilos.

Brazil is the top source of beef shipments with 46.58 million kilos while the country imported 34.44 million kilos from Australia, making it the second top source.

Chicken – the second most imported meat product at 35.25 percent – registered a 9.63 percent rise in imports to 359.23 million kilos from 327.68 million kilos last year.

Mechanically deboned chicken meat was the top imported product with 193.61 million kilos, followed by chicken leg quarters with 95.55 million kilos.

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Fish kill monitored in Cavite

A fish kill, which affected seven tons of tilapia, has been monitored in Cañacao Bay in Cavite City.

Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) chief information officer Nazario Briguera said an analysis is ongoing.

"Based on initial reports, the primary reason for the fish kill was the drop in dissolved oxygen level... There was a significant decrease in dissolved oxygen level in the area and high ammonia nitrogen," Briguera said.

He said the drop in dissolved oxygen was due to high water pollution and sudden change in temperature.

Briguera said BFAR has yet to establish if the fish kill was connected with a reclamation project in the province as claimed by fishermen's group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas.

"I don't have evidence that will directly connect it (to the reclamation project). The general possibility is water pollution in the area," he said.

Briguera gave assurance that BFAR is coordinating with the Cavite city government to ensure proper disposal of the dead fish.

He advised the public not to eat fish harvested from the area.

Residents have complained of a foul smell in the area since Sunday night. Thirty-one families were forced to transfer to an evacuation center due to the stench.

— **Bella Cariaso, Evelyn Macairan**



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Palay harvest to be 'generally good'

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said the palay (unmilled rice) harvest for this year would be "generally good" with an expected yield of 3.063 million metric tons (MT) for November and December.

"Based on data and information from the Philippine Rice Information System, it is generally a good harvest year for the Filipino rice farmers," Agriculture Assistant Secretary

and spokesman Arnel de Mesa said on Tuesday.

The Agriculture department also said that a sufficient supply of affordable rice would remain in the market as the wet season crop was almost complete.

"We have harvested about 90 percent of palay across the nation," de Mesa said.

He added that palay was currently being sold at an average

of P23 to 25 per kilogram (kg) at the farmgate, still in line with the new price range set by the National Food Authority (NFA).

In September, the NFA announced that the new buying price for dry palay would be P23 per kg from P19 and that for wet at P19 per kg from P16.

The DA said the average retail price for regular milled rice was P42.80 per kg while the prevailing price for well-milled rice

was P45 per kg.

For the national rice outlook for this year, de Mesa said this was estimated to reach around 20 million MT and likely a new record harvest.

In 2022, the Philippines logged 19.7 million MT of palay output. The record is 19.96 million MT, attained in 2021.

Local production of palay hit 5.04 million MT in the third quarter of 2023, the Philippine

Statistics Authority (PSA) has reported.

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 5.03 million MT.

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



DA promotes rice delicacy packaging

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

PAWA, a special Filipino native rice delicacy, or "kakanin," sold to visitors and neighboring towns in Piat, Cagayan, is getting support from the **Department of Agriculture-Region 2 (Cagayan Valley)** office in improving its packaging to prolong its shelf life and ensure its safety for human consumption.

Through its Integrated Laboratory Division (ILD), DA-Region 2 has successfully transferred the developed technology on improved pawa packaging to the women agripreneurs of the Piat Pawa Association.

On Nov. 10, 2023, the ILD conducted a technology transfer combined with a briefing at the Municipal Hall in Piat town to improve the pawa packaging and prolong the native delicacy's shelf life.

Paul Marco Andal, a chemist from the DA-Feed Chemical Analysis Laboratory, conducted a study to expand pawa's market by extending the native rice cake's shelf-life.

In his presentation, Andal said many things have been made in developing the packaging process for the product samples "using retorting techniques and vacuum packaging."

"Based on microbiological tests

and physical observations conducted, pawa samples using the developed retorting technology could be a potential technique to extend the shelf life of this product," he said.

"We also found out that the new food packaging can increase the pawa's shelf life from three to seven days at room temperature. However, with proper refrigeration, it can last up to 21 days," Andal said.

He said Piat Pawa can avail of the new packaging that costs only P1.60 per piece, less than the traditional packaging worth P2.50 per piece.

DA-Region 2 Executive Director Rose Mary Aquino said Piat Pawa received a band sealer machine and a mini retort machine worth P68,000 funded under the 2023 Rice Research for Development Project.

She said the recipient organization comprised "empowered



■ Photo shows members of the Piat Pawa Association based in Piat, Cagayan, who underwent training for the packaging of pawa, a native rice delicacy, under the Integrated Laboratory Division of the Department of Agriculture-Region 2 (Cagayan Valley) office on Friday, Nov. 10, 2023.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

women who preserve the natural taste and sell their native rice cake with homemade peanut butter fillings."

Aquino said DA-Region 2 also

forged an agreement with the local government of Piat and Piat Pawa to provide more tools, equipment, and technical support to the women's group.

She said that by improving the packaging and extending the shelf-life of Pawa products, "their sales will increase because of their beautiful packaging."

DA-Region 2 also plans to coordinate with the Department of Trade and Industry for a possible partnership to promote and market pawa.



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Marcos seeks fibercrop output boost

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has called for the advancement and promotion of the Philippine fibercrop industry to drive economic growth and provide livelihood opportunities.

In his message sent to the 2023 National Fibercrops Summit on Tuesday, Marcos urged the Philippine Fiber Industry Development Authority (PhilFIDA) to continue providing support to seize new opportunities for the development of the fiber sector.

"I therefore urge the PhilFIDA to remain steadfast in utilizing its mission of providing research, production, education and trade regulation support so that the fiber industry can take advantage of new avenues for development and growth," he said.

"As we stand at the crossroads of agricultural innovation, let this summit be a testament to our shared commitment to shaping a resilient and flourishing future for your industry. I trust that this gathering will be a conducive platform where ideas flourish, collaborations thrive and the seeds sown

today blossom into a harvest of success for our nation," President Marcos added.

The Chief Executive expressed hope that with the combined efforts of government, growers, farmers associations and the private sector, the country could usher in a "new era of growth and development in the agriculture sector toward national progress."

He also pledged that the government would continue to work hard to uplift the lives of Filipino farmers and advance economic prosperity in rural communities.

An attached agency of the Department of Agriculture (DA), PhilFIDA is responsible for promoting the accelerated growth and development of the fiber industry in the Philippines, such as abaca (Manila hemp) and cotton.

PhilFIDA organized this year's summit at the DA-Bureau of Soils and Water Management convention hall in Diliman, Quezon City, to discuss possible solutions besetting the fibercrop industry.

PNA



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DA: Patronize local produce

LA TRINIDAD, Benguet — The Department of Agriculture's (DA) regional director in the Cordillera highlands up north is urging Filipinos to prioritize local agricultural produce amid challenges rooted in importation.

"Let us be the voice crying in the wilderness against smuggling. It is our responsibility as consumers, as government players, and as stakeholders to report this immediately," Regional Director Jennilyn M. Dawayan said at Tuesday's opening of the Benguet Agri-Tourism Fair at the Benguet Cold Chain in Wangal, here.

Emphasizing the integral role of Benguet province in the Cordillera region's farming industry, Ms. Dawayan said this province maintains the status as the leading producer of semi-temperate vegetables and the premier source of strawberries in the country.

Data from the DA-Cordillera Administrative Region, the province produces 88% of the Cordillera's total vegetable output and 59% of its heirloom rice. It also holds the sixth position nationwide in green bean production.

— Artemio M. Dumlao



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Meat imports drop 9.7% in 10 months to October

IMPORTS of meat declined 9.7% year on year in the 10 months to October, with shipments of beef, pork, buffalo, and turkey dropping, according to the **Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI)**.

The BAI said imports amounted to 1.02 billion kilograms (kg) during the period.

October imports totaled 95.98 million kg, down from 105.81 million kg in September and 118.45 million kg a year earlier.

Brazil was the top supplier, accounting for 343.86 million kg. This was followed by the US and Spain with 179.64 million kg and 123.36 million kg, respectively.

Pork accounted for 504.31 million kg or 49.5% of the total over the first ten months. Pork shipments fell 15.9% year on year.

Spain remained the top supplier of pork with 121.77 million kg, followed by Brazil with 92.12 million kg and Canada with 92.09 million kg.

Imports of beef fell 22.1% to 120.64 million kg for the period, or 11.8% of meat shipments.

The top supplier was Brazil with 46.58 million kg, followed by Australia with 34.44 million kg and Ireland 13.11 million kg.

Buffalo meat shipments fell 13.8% to 33.65 million kg, ac-

counting for about 3% of total imports.

Shipments of turkey declined 4.9% to 391,630 kg.

The BAI also reported that imports of chicken, duck, and lamb rose during the period.

Chicken imports were up 4.3% from a year earlier to 359.23 million kg, or 35.3% of total imports.

The primary source for chicken was Brazil with 205.13 million kg, while the US supplied 130.5 million kg and Canada 11.87 million kg.

Duck imports totaled 252,783 kg, while lamb totaled 669,030 kg. — **Adrian H. Halili**



PHILIPPINE STAR/WALTER BOLLOZOS

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Project of PhilRice, Kiwanis aims to make agriculture attractive to young Pinoys

THE government and the private sector are intensifying efforts to revitalize agriculture through youth education to help prevent the imminent shortage of food due to the aging of farmers.

The Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) and two clubs of Kiwanis International will undertake a project that seeks to make agriculture more attractive to the youth.

Citing information from the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture, Glenda Hufano, governor of Kiwanis International-Philippine Luzon District, said that with the typical age of Filipino farmers falling between

55 and 59 years old, experts have projected that the Philippines will confront a critical decline of farmers in 10 to 12 years.

"The project we are collaborating on aims to educate children not only about rice but also to raise them to be progressive, entrepreneurial food producers," she said during the signing of the memorandum of agreement in Science City of Muñoz, Nueva Ecija last November 7.

Based on the agreement, the Kiwanis Club of Pasay and Rice Granary Science City of Muñoz will establish and maintain a campsite at the FutureRice Farm in Nueva Ecija.

"This campsite, called SPARK, will provide an engaging, educa-

tional alternative to malls and digital entertainment. Campers can try farm adventure games such as kayaking and obstacle races while learning about rice technologies including farm machines, digital apps, and renewable energy," Hufano said.

In the FutureRice Farm, campers will see high-yielding rice varieties and experience farm automation and diversified farming.

Kiwanis International will also co-sponsor the annual ceremonial harvesting at the Rice Garden in Rizal Park, which was established for urban dwellers, especially the youth, to appreciate the importance of rice to the country's culture, nourishment, and economy.

This partnership builds upon

earlier initiatives between Kiwanis International Philippine Luzon District and PhilRice supporting farming communities of the Rice Business Innovation System (RiceBIS) Program.

Rice supply

MEANWHILE, the Department of Agriculture (DA) has assured the public that there is enough affordable supply of rice in the market.

According to DA Assistant Secretary and Spokesperson Arnel de Mesa, the country has almost completed the wet season harvest.

"We have harvested about 90 percent of palay across the nation, bought at P22.00 per kilogram," he said.

He added that the volume is currently sold at an average of P23-25/kilo farmgate price. The average retail price for regular well milled is at P42.80 while prevailing price for well milled is at P45.

Abante

UNA SA BALITA

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Abante Dunong

Sardinas sa 'Pinas

MAY siyam na uri ng sardinang sa Pilipinas, ayon sa **Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources**. Anim sa mga ito ang major species: *Sardinella lemuru*, *Sardinella gibbosa*, *Sardinella albella*, *Amblygaster sirm*, *Escualosa thoracata*, at *Sardinella fimbriata*.

Anim na lugar naman sa Pilipinas ang pangunahing pinag-

kukunan ng sardinas: Ragay Gulf-Ticao Pass-San Bernardino Strait, Bohol Sea, East Sulu Sea/Sulu Archipelagic Waters, Visayan Sea, Moro Gulf-Illana Bay, at Sibuguey Bay, Mayroong ding sardinas sa Sulu Sea, Palawan Passage, Mindoro Strait, Lamon Bay, Burias Pass, Samar Sea, Lagonoy Gulf, Tayabas Bay, Sibuyan Sea, Dinagat Sound, at sa Manila Bay



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Fishkill sa Cavite tinutukan ng PCG

Karamihan umano ng mga namatay na isda ay tilapia at nabubulok na at apiktado na rin ang mga residente sa lugar. Kaagad namang iniulat sa Cavite City local government at Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) ang insidente para sa kaukulang aksiyon. (Juliet de Loza-Cudia)

The Manila Times®

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'Global action needed to preserve fish stocks in SCS'

A MARITIME security analyst said international collective action is urgently needed to protect and preserve what is left of the fish stocks and marine ecosystems from the destruction caused by China's "theft" of natural resources "on a grand scale."

"The desecration of maritime habitats and life-sustaining coral reefs is a clear and present threat at the hands of China's massive fishing fleet," Kevin Edes wrote in Seelight, a web-based think tank that focuses on maritime issues,

particularly on Chinese activities in the West Philippine Sea.

He said China's "unrestricted warfare on natural resources" is happening in maritime areas within the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of other countries.

"China's predatory fishing fleets are denuding fish stocks and marine ecosystems on an unprecedented industrial scale. International collective action is urgently needed," Edes said.

➤ **PreserveA2**

■ PRESERVE FROM A1

'Global action needed to preserve fish stocks in SCS'

"The maritime equivalent to poisoning a sovereign nation's local farms, this threat has already had multi-generational impacts on the economy, climate and food supplies. Collaborative and bold solutions are imperative," he added.

Edes, a commander in the United States Coast Guard, cited in particular the recent discovery

by the Philippine government of the massive coral harvesting off Rozul (Iroquois) Reef in the West Philippine Sea. Rozul Reef lies just 125 nautical miles from Palawan, situated at the southwest edge of Reed (Recto) Bank, and therefore well within the country's EEZ.

The divers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) discov-

ered the destruction of the corals during underwater surveys conducted after numerous Chinese maritime militia vessels left the area last September.

The Philippine government said the increased presence of China militia ships in maritime areas covered by the country's EEZ raises concerns about the potential implications for maritime

security, fisheries conservation, and preservation of the marine environment aside from being a source of tension in the West Philippine Sea.

It also announced that it will be pursuing the filing of environmental cases against China for its numerous destructive activities in the West Philippine Sea.

"The recently publicized de-

struction of Iroquois Reef in the West Philippine Sea and subsequent movement by the Philippine government to bring an environmental case against China is assertive transparency in action and is well within Manila's EEZ rights under the terms of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea," said Edes, who has advanced degrees from the School of Global

Policy and Strategy at University of California in San Diego and the US Naval War College.

He noted that United States Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Linda Fagan identified China as one of the prime culprits in illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing.

Numerous monitoring and documentation also showed that Chinese fishing vessels steal coral for jewelry, giant clams for the ivory industry, and fish stocks to feed their own population.

FRANCO JOSE C. BAROÑA



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SCS confers first-ever Career Scientist 5 rank

THE Scientific Career System (SCS) conferred to Mudjekeewis Dalisay Santos of the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI) the rank of Career Scientist 5, the first in the Philippines.

According to SCS, Santos, or "Doc Mudjie" as he is fondly called, is a fishery scientist and marine biologist widely recognized for his work on utilizing genetics, resource assessment, and policy studies to support fisheries management and aquaculture for food security, biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation in the country.

SCS said his works on fisheries management and aquaculture promote objectives crucial for food security, biodiversity conservation, and climate change adaptation.

A conferred career scientist at the NFRDI, Santos is an academican of the National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) Philippines, a faculty at the Graduate School of the University of Santo Tomas, and an affiliate professor at the Central Luzon State University.

He obtained his Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of the Philippines Baguio, and Master of Science in Aquatic Biosciences and Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Marine Biosciences from the Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology.

He authored and co-authored over 100 scientific articles, book chapters and books. Santos is currently the editor-in-chief of The Philippine Journal of Fisheries, Section Editor of the Philippine Agricultural Scientist, and an editor of Fisheries Science, the official journal of the Japan Society for Fisheries Science.

A recipient of numerous awards, Santos received from the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and the Office of the President of the Philippines the prestigious Presidential Lingkod Bayan award.

With his official Facebook page, "Doc Mudjie," with over 10,000 followers, he is into science communication via social media to promote his advocacy on fisheries sustainability and marine biodiversity conservation.

The SCS also noted that in recognition of his significant contribution to the advancement of fisheries science and management in the country, two of the world's leading fish taxonomists in the world, Jeffrey Williams and Kent Carpenter, who are both doctorate holders, named a fish after Santos in 2015, the "Chelidoperca santosi."

An Islet in Zamboanga City was named in his honor, "Mudjie Wise Key Islet," by the people of Barangay Dita, Zamboanga City, also in 2015.

Santos is sometimes called "Mr. Fisheries Research" or the "Fisherfolk's Scientist" since the Zamboanga City and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources officially recognized him "as one of the prime movers of the sardine fishing closure in the Peninsula that not only benefitted the City but the entire country as well," the SCS said.

Administered by NAST Philippines, the SCS applies to scientific personnel in government service holding at least a master's or doctorate and extends to non-faculty full-time researchers from



■ Mudjekeewis Dalisay Santos, fondly known as 'Doc Mudjie,' of the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute. PHOTO FROM DOC MUDJIE FACEBOOK PAGE

state universities and colleges. Since its establishment, the CSC has conferred 198 Filipino researchers to scientist ranks, 63 of whom are active career scientists. LEANDER C. DOMINGO



Half-rice order

According to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), in its Food Waste Index Report for 2021, the world generated "around 931 million tons of food waste" in 2019, and of this, 61% came from households, 26% from food service, and 13% from retail. "This suggests that 17% of total global food production may be wasted (11% in households, 5% in food service, and 2% in retail)," it added.

FREPIK



**I am averse to any
"portion" mandates,
whether in restaurants
or at home.
Government should
just stay out of this.
We do not need Big Brother
controlling how we eat.**



The UNEP also noted in its 2021 report that “previous estimates of consumer food waste significantly underestimated its scale,” and that “food waste at consumer level (household and food service) appears to be more than twice the previous FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization] estimate.” Moreover, “household per capita food waste generation is found to be broadly similar across country income groups.”

Simply put, all countries, and all people — whether rich or poor — waste food. And most of that waste is generated in households, averaging 76 to 91 kilograms of food waste per person per year, in homes in lower middle-income to high-income countries.

At a median of 83.5 kilograms, that comes out to roughly 23 grams of food per person daily. One cup of uncooked rice is estimated at 180 grams, while one cup of cooked rice is roughly 200 grams in weight. That 23 grams is equivalent to two tablespoons of cooked rice daily.

These measures are relevant given recommendations for Congress to pass a national law that will make it mandatory for restaurants to sell smaller meal sizes, in particular, a half-cup order of rice. As if “cup” size is the same for all food service establishments and that there is an actual standard in place for meal size or volume that is consistently monitored by government for compliance.

The proposed law’s primary intent is to reduce food waste. Perhaps a secondary intent is to combat obesity. In part, the latter also helps address the “silent” pandemic: diabetes. But, if global data shows that most food waste occurs in households, why should rice order sizes in restaurants be the target? Should we even regulate by law meal sizes in restaurants?

Common sense dictates that if the meal size is too big, or has too much rice, then one should not order it. One can order something smaller. It is a case of one wanting to order a meal but refusing to take responsibility for finishing it. Why should this be the establishment’s problem? And, the government solution to this problem is to dictate by law the availability of a smaller-sized rice order? An order of half-cup rice, in particular?

Who determines “reasonable” portion size, based on science and

research data? What is a half-cup? This will depend on whether one is measuring dry or wet ingredients. In the case of cooked rice, it is both wet and dry. So, what standard should be used? For water, a half-cup is an exact unit of measure equivalent to a quarter of a pint, or roughly 120 grams. For honey, it is about 170 grams. For sugar, it is about 100 grams. By some estimates, one cup of uncooked rice is 180 grams, while one cup of cooked rice is roughly 200 grams in weight.

In short, cup size can be arbitrary. Weight is a more accurate measure. In this line, perhaps we should just require food service establishments to sell meals by weight?

Even rice, not by portion size, but by weight. Pay only for weight you ordered. Like buying items from the market. After all, uncooked rice is sold in the markets by weight.

So, if Congress passes a national law requiring half-cup rice orders in all restaurants, will it set the exact unit of measure? Will it set guidelines for compliance and monitoring? How will it penalize restaurants that do not conform to the standard? Will it also penalize consumers who do not finish their food? After all, the intent is to prevent food waste. Shouldn’t we also penalize customers who waste food?

Why penalize only restaurants for not serving half-cup rice but not customers who waste their food? Who generated the waste, anyway? The producer or the consumer? And who will enforce the half-cup rice law? Compliance without monitoring of waste is half-baked. If people do not finish their food, they should be penalized as well.

And while we are at it, why not require by law half-order sizes for all food and not just rice? Again, food waste is the problem that needs to be addressed, right? So, why set “standards” for cooked rice only? Perhaps the wasting of food should be included in the revised penal code as a criminal offense punishable by a jail term. Food waste is a crime against humanity. In this line, Congress should also outlaw “unlimited rice” offers by restaurants.

The fact of the matter is, because of inflation and significantly higher food prices nowadays, meal sizes have already become smaller in most restaurants. Requiring that a half-cup rice order be made available is superfluous.

All set meals offered with rice will have to be customized and repriced.

Frankly, what I want to see at this point is scientific data that a national law dictating rice order size is urgently needed, and that it will effectively address the issue of food waste, and curtail excessive consumer demand for rice. As opposed to programs that encourage people to be healthy and not to waste food.

Reports indicate that 46 local governments already have local ordinances on the half-cup rice option. But do these ordinances have a basis in science and research? By now, they should have data as to how many customers opt for half-cup rather than full-cup orders. What does the data indicate? Are the local ordinances effectively reducing food waste?

A bill filed in Congress provides that establishments that fail to abide by the proposed law will be fined P10,000 for the first offense, P20,000 for the second offense, and P30,000 for the third offense. But not customers who order more than what they can eat? Food is wasted only if people do not finish what they ordered, and do not take home the leftovers. So, how then does a full-cup order of rice become food waste?

I assume the government has data on rice waste, but does it have scientific data to pinpoint the source of waste, and by how much it can be reduced by the proposed law? If most waste occurs in households rather than in restaurants, what is Congress doing about that? Nothing, obviously. And rightly so. I am averse to any “portion” mandates, whether in restaurants or at home. Government should just stay out of this. We do not need Big Brother controlling how we eat.

The bill’s explanatory note says it envisions a future where individuals are more conscious of their food choices, and establishments prioritize responsible serving practices. Its goal is a society with a sustainable and balanced approach to food consumption. And all this, it believes, can be achieved by a law penalizing restaurants for not offering half-cup rice portions. Good luck with that. ■

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PHILIPPINE Red Cross (PRC) Chairman and CEO Richard Gordon

Gordon: Red Cross, agri scientists must join hands to fight child malnutrition

PHILIPPINE Red Cross (PRC) Chairman and CEO Richard Gordon urged Asia's agricultural scientists to partner with Red Cross in waging war against food insecurity and child malnutrition.

"In this country, every day, I witness a disaster," Gordon remarked on the pressing issues of food insecurity and child malnutrition in the Philippines.

According to the 2021 Expanded National Nutrition Survey (ENNS) by the Philippines' National Nutrition Council (NNC), 2 percent of Filipino households are severely food insecure. This translates to over 500,000 households, as indicated by the Philippine Statistics Authority's 2020 Census of Population and Housing (CPH). UNICEF reports that every day, 95 children in the Philippines succumb to malnutrition.

Addressing agricultural scientists from Southeast Asia at the International Society for Southeast Asian Agricultural Sciences (IS-SAAS) conference last November 8 in Manila, Gordon urged them to collaborate with humanitarian leaders, including himself and

the government, to "wage a war" against food insecurity and child malnutrition and emphasize the urgency of addressing these issues.

"PRC will concentrate on tackling malnutrition among zero-to-five-year-old children, a critical phase in a child's development. During the first two months, the PRC plans to distribute food to children aged zero to five and those from impoverished households using its fleet of food trucks. Simultaneously, the PRC will train mothers or guardians on how to prepare nutritious food independently, providing them with sustainable livelihoods," Gordon said.

He shared some of the PRC's ongoing interventions related to food security and nutrition, including hot meal distribution during disasters through PRC's Hot Meals on Wheels, food distribution to impoverished communities through the Food Donation Law (which he authored), the establishment of vegetable and fruit farms nationwide, and the deployment of payloaders to clear farms inundated by mud after typhoons or flooding.



Soybeans up, wheat down

CANBERRA- US soybean futures hit a 2-1/2-month high on Wednesday, with concerns that unfavorable weather will shrink the harvest in top producer Brazil, fueling a rally that had lifted prices by 11 percent in the last five weeks.

Corn and wheat futures edged lower.

Soybeans are also benefiting from a rise in demand for US beans from domestic crushers and buyers in China, said Ole Houe, director of advisory services at Australian agricultural brokerage IKON Commodities.

But he said the rally was unlikely to last because production from Brazil and Argentina would together be higher than last year even if some yield is lost to bad weather.

"Over the next couple of weeks I expect prices to lose ground," he said.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was down 0.1 percent at \$13.88 a bushel after touching \$13.92-1/4, the highest since Aug. 30, earlier in the session. - *Reuters*



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London cocoa futures close lower after record high

NEW YORK — London cocoa futures on ICE closed lower on Tuesday after earlier rising to a record high, while coffee and sugar prices also fell.

COCOA: March London cocoa settled down £76 or 2.2% to £3,427 a metric ton after setting a record high of £3,569 earlier.

Dealers said the market had become technically overbought after the recent strong advance and there may be a period of consolidation in the short term.

Overall sentiment, however, remains constructive with poor crops in Ivory Coast and Ghana helping to tighten supplies.

"It looks at the moment as if considerably less cocoa is reaching the market from Ivory

Coast. If this were to continue, the cocoa market could show a supply deficit for the third consecutive year in 2023/24," Commerzbank said in a note.

March New York cocoa fell \$80 or 2% to \$3,984 a metric ton.

COFFEE: March arabica coffee settled down 1.8 cents or 1% at \$1.714 per pound (lb).

Dealers said the market continued to be underpinned by short-term supply tightness, with front month December trading at a premium of about 5.10 cents to March, but a downward correction was expected after the recent rally.

ICE-certified exchange stocks stood at 302,235 bags on Tuesday, the lowest level

in at least 24 years, with 4,400 bags pending grading.

January robusta coffee fell \$29 or 1.2% to \$2,474 a ton.

Dealers said drier weather had allowed a pick up in the coffee harvest in top robusta producer Vietnam, with about 10% of the crop gathered so far.

SUGAR: March raw sugar settled down 0.53 cent or 1.9% at 27.18 cents per lb as the market slipped further from last week's 12-year high of 28.14 cents.

Hot, dry weather in Brazil is allowing mills to extend the crushing season.

December white sugar fell \$13 or 1.7% to \$743.30 a ton. — **Reuters**

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Report: Global food import bill to hit \$2T by yearend

GLOBAL food import bill could reach \$2 trillion by the end of the year, some \$35.3 billion or 1.8 percent higher than in 2022, according to a report published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The latest "Food Outlook," a biannual publication, noted that fruits and vegetables along with beverages and sugar would account for the bulk of the increase, the lion's share of which is driven by high-income and upper-middle-income countries.

"Low-income countries, by contrast, are expected to see an 11-percent contraction in

their aggregate food import bill," said FAO.

"Those developments often reflect world price trends, as international quotations for fruits, vegetables and sugars have surged while those for animal and vegetable oils have declined during the year. Nonetheless, the volume effect on the global food import bill is predicted to exceed the price effect, although not for high-value or processed products such as coffee, tea, cocoa and spices."

The FAO report indicated that food import bills of the least developed countries, net food importing developing countries and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa

are expected to contract due in part to lower quantities. This suggests that additional factors—ranging from weakening currencies to mounting debt levels and high freight costs—are impeding their ability to access international food markets.

The report also noted that production prospects across most basic foodstuffs are favourable, but extreme weather events, rising geopolitical tensions and sudden policy changes pose risks for global food production systems and could potentially tip delicate demand-supply balances and dampen prospects for trade and global food security.

"Trade volumes in coarse grains and rice are expected to decline in 2023/24, even as global maize output is forecast to post a significant increase driven by increased plantings in Brazil and the United States of America."

World trade in vegetable oils and fats is also expected to dip modestly, while global production and consumption are anticipated to expand.

Trade volumes are expected to decline in the coming year for sugar, dairy products, meat and fish, according to the report, which also offers a compendium of major policy developments in the food commodity sector since mid-May.



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Amazon drought hits river grain shipments harder than expected

A SEVERE drought in the Amazon region is disrupting grain shipments more than anticipated, according to one of Brazil's top barge operators.

Unable to move its barges filled with products like corn and soybeans, Hidrovias do Brasil SA is forecasting lower results for this year than previously predicted, company executives said on an earnings call Tuesday.

"The situation escalated very abruptly," Chief Executive Officer Fabio Abreu Schettino said.

The company operates along a route known as the Northern Arc, an array of ports along the Amazon and northeastern Atlantic coast that transport crops from farms in central Brazil. According to the company's own measurements at one of the rivers in the region,

water levels are about 40 percent lower than they were in the same period last year.

The drought reduces the amount of cargo that can be shipped, and forces volumes to be split into smaller portions so barges can make it through critical points where rivers are at their lowest. Due to such difficulties and the expectation of maintenance downtime, Hidrovias cut its guidance.

Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization will reach no more than 770 million reais (\$158 million) this year, the company said in a filing. That's nearly 15 percent lower than previous market expectations, according to a report by XP Investimentos. The company will incur high costs from inefficient operations, analysts led by Pedro Bueno wrote



A DROUGHT-HIT branch of the Amazon River in Manaus, Brazil, on October 4. BRUNO ZANARDO/GETTY IMAGES/BLOOMBERG NEWS

in the report.

While Hidrovias expects water levels to recover in the coming months, the Amazon dryness already has had consequences across Brazil's entire logistics system. That's because grain exports are getting rerouted to crowded ports



in the southeast. As farmers harvest bumper crops of grains and a record sugar crop, ships are waiting as much as 40 days to load sugar at Brazil's largest port.

Australian beef

CHINA'S punitive trade actions

on Australian beef and lobster exports may be lifted by the end of the year, Trade Minister Don Farrell said, in what would be the latest sign of warming ties between the two governments.

Farrell told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. he is due to meet with Commerce Minister Wang Wentao on the sidelines of APEC meetings in the US on Wednesday. He said the restrictions around lobster and beef were "biosecurity issues" compared with tariffs imposed on wine and barley more than three years ago.

"I remain very confident, based on my meeting last week and hopefully my meeting today, that by Christmas all of these trade impediments will be removed," Farrell said on ABC radio in an interview on Wednesday.

Relations between Australia and China have rapidly improved over the past 18 months following the election of the center-left Labor government in Canberra. A visit to Beijing by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese this month marked the first such trip by an Australian leader in more than seven years.

As ties have warmed, China has steadily rolled back the punitive trade measures imposed at a low-point in relations in 2020, when then-Prime Minister Scott Morrison called for an investigation into the origins of Covid-19.

Beijing responded to Morrison's call with tariffs on Australian wine and barley, while limiting the purchases of other products including beef, timber and coal.

Bloomberg News