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Aquaculture tops fisheries production in Q3

DOMESTIC aquaculture output accounted for the biggest share of the country's total fisheries production in

the third quarter (Q3) at 51.8 percent, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported.

Aquaculture production was posted at 527,150 metric tons (MT), 7.4 percent higher compared to the 490,960 MT output during the same period in 2022.

From July to September, total volume of fisheries production increased by 2.1 percent and was recorded at 1.01 million MT compared to the 996,320 MT output of last year.

The PSA reported that annual increases in production were also noted in commercial fisheries and inland municipal fisheries subsectors.

Only the marine municipal fisheries subsector reported a decrease during the quarter.

Commercial fisheries production was estimated at 230,676 MT during the quarter, representing a slight increase of 0.5 percent from the 229,478 MT output in the same period of the previous year.

The subsector comprised 22.7 percent of the total fisheries production during the period.

Inland municipal output also went up by 2.8 percent to 53,037 MT from 51,615 MT. This contributed 5.2 percent to the total fisheries production.

Marine municipal fisheries, meanwhile, fell by 7.9 percent to 206,639 MT from 224,263 MT a year earlier. It accounted for 20.3 percent of the total fisheries output.

Among the 20 monitored species, decreases in production were mainly noted in tiger prawn, which went down by 49 percent; bigeye tuna by 41 percent; fimbriated sardines by 37.8 percent; mud crab by 28.1 percent; and squid by 26.3 percent.

On the other hand, increases were reported in Indian mackerel, which went up by 60.6; big-eyed scad by 32.8 percent; yellowfin tuna by 28.5 percent; and galunggong (round scad) by 17.2 percent.

The Department of Agriculture's Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) earlier reported that regional fish ports delivered a total of 123,813.37 MT of fish in the third quarter of this year.

The PFDA said that the fish unloaded from July to September was higher by 2.27 percent from the 121,062.55 MT unloaded in the second quarter of this year with an average daily unloading equivalent to 1,345.80 MT of fish.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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Unsolicited advice

AFTER the appointment of the new Agriculture secretary and the publication of my last two essays in this paper, several esteemed colleagues from the Foundation for Economic Freedom Inc. needed me to dedicate a column on recommendations to fix the agriculture sector's problems instead of merely enumerating a litany of challenges. In response, I am providing unsolicited advice on what needs to be done to fix it to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

First, I have continually repeated that the government should encourage farm clustering and consolidation to enjoy economies of scale in production. Again, let me stress that the proposal does not necessitate consolidation of farm ownership but merely the clustering and consolidation of production, processing and marketing.

Farm clustering and consolidation is the only way by which small cultivators can become efficient to survive today's highly competitive agricultural trade regime. It is a way of ensuring that government assistance can be delivered more adequately and efficiently: instead of dealing with millions of individual farmers, the links will just be with cooperatives or tiller associations. It is also a means by which layers of traders can be eliminated to reduce retail prices of agriculture and food products, with groups of farmers directly forging supply contracts with groceries and supermarkets.

A second measure is for the DA to download its budgetary resources to local government units (LGUs) instead of coursing these through banner programs (rice, corn, high-value crops, etc.) that in turn go to the DA regional offices. The bureaucratic layers result in significant delays in the delivery of support services, not to mention



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that the assistance often does not suit the needs of the farmers.

Let provincial LGUs become food security czars in their respective areas. This is aligned with the Local Government Code of 1991 that devolved the delivery of basic services. If the LGU is to perform the food security czar function, it must be able to formulate a plan and identify the resources it requires.

Having downloaded its resources to the LGUs, which will now serve as the operations hub of agricultural development projects, what then should be the role of the DA? There are three that I can think of under this decentralized system.

First, the DA must hone its skills and capability in analytical work, which necessitates the gathering, collecting, storing and analysis of agricultural and food-related data locally and internationally. This will provide critical information to DA central management that will enable evidence-based decisions and policies on how best to allocate scarce resources. The DA should be a repository of knowledge on crop and animal production and management, and what other countries are doing to make their agricultural sectors competitive.

Part of the building and strengthening of analytical capability would involve installing a robust monitoring and evaluation system that will track the performance of LGUs that receive funds and resources from the DA. The department must develop an input-output model, among oth-

ers, to determine whether LGUs are meeting agreed targets or underperforming. The results should be determinants of whether an LGU should be given more resources or not.

A second area of strength that must be developed as an offshoot of a restructured DA is research and development. Agriculture literature has shown that the highest returns in agriculture investments are derived from research and development.

However, the DA research agenda must be reoriented toward technologies and innovations that have immediate field application. It also must be supportive of agricultural products where the country has a comparative advantage to promote greater exports. Stronger tie-ups should be forged with state colleges and universities undertaking agricultural research. The DA must set priority agendas to ensure that results can be immediately implemented and are not just for publication.

Necessarily, the research results must be extensively disseminated and this requires an effective extension delivery mechanism. The DA must ensure that LGU extension workers and representatives of farmer cooperatives and associations are regularly trained in the latest technologies and use of farm machinery. This will require the engagement of a significant number of specialists in the DA unit whose role is to regularly update training materials and conduct training programs.

Finally, with a strengthened analytical and research capability, the DA can now focus more effectively on its regulatory function to protect humans, animals and plants from pests and diseases that pose public health hazards. This time,

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Unsolicited

its decision will be based on solid empirical evidence based on robust research work.

The task of agricultural development can be best delegated to LGUs and the private sector. The LGUs are in a better position as they are more familiar with the needs of their constituents. The private sector, meanwhile, has considerable resources it can tap if the government, through the DA, provides the policy framework conducive to greater private sector participation.

This new role of the DA can be successfully

realized if the new secretary recruits technically and managerially competent undersecretaries and directors, particularly those at the regional level. It is critical that the best DA staff are appointed as regional directors because they are faces of the agency. Regional directors are practically the DA secretary's surrogates at the local level given the devolution of agricultural workers.

Regional directors are like middle-level managers in a private company. They are at the forefront of providing services to clients. Without competent mid-level managers, it will be hard to measure the agriculture development progress of LGUs in a system where DA funds are downloaded to them.

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Cavite fish kill won't affect market – BFAR

THE recent fish kill in Cavite has no commercial value and will not affect the market, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said on Thursday, November 16.

BFAR chief information officer Nazario Briguera said during a public briefing that the main reason for the fish kill was the drop in the dissolved oxygen level and the rise of ammonia nitrogen level.

On Monday, November 13, thousands of floating dead fish were found at Cañacao Bay.

"What happened in Cavite, dead fish found in the area were

blackfish tilapia, not farm tilapia and it has no commercial value," said Briguera.

Briguera added that algal bloom also occurred in the area based on the reports on Tuesday. He attributed it to the changing temperature caused by climate change.

"We can't say that [the algal bloom] will spread, although it is a natural phenomenon. It is possible for another area to have a trigger for algal bloom, we really can't say," he said.

The official added that BFAR will provide technical assistance to affected families and

continue monitoring the area.

Twenty families have so far evacuated from their homes due to the stench of dead fish.

Briguera also announced on Thursday that the closed fishing season on sardines began on November 15 and will last for three months in the fishing areas of Zamboanga Peninsula and the Visayan Sea.

The fishing ban is done annually through the Bureau's Administrative Circular 225 which aims to conserve and protect the economically-important species in the said fishing ground during their

spawning period.

The implementation of the closed-fishing season was adjusted from December 1 to March 1.

The bureau said that the decision was based on research conducted under the National Stock Assessment Program of the BFAR and the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI) in Region 9 (Zamboanga Peninsula), which shows that the spawning period of mature sardines peaks during the months of October until January.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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Villar frowns at junked DA cases

EXPRESSING dismay during Senate debates, Senator Cynthia A. Villar revealed on Wednesday that the fight against agricultural smuggling has seen five out of the 15 cases filed by the Department of Agriculture (DA) already junked by the courts.

Citing how these dismissals underscore a significant challenge in prosecuting such illicit activities, Ms. Villar pushed for non-bailable charges against smugglers of agricultural produce to enhance legal accountability.

She raised the issue alongside news that authorities arrested a long suspected large-scale smuggler of onions.

The senator said that the DA is "trying to file a case" against the head of a group of companies that the House agriculture and food committee in May said was involved in the whole onion value chain for the price manipulation of the commodity, causing it to hit P700 per kilogram last year.

"They are investigating together with the PCC (Philippine Competition Commission)," she said. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**



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Fish kill caused by algal bloom

THE BUREAU of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said on Thursday that algal bloom was the main cause in the fish kill observed in Cañacao Bay, Cavite.

"As of yesterday (Nov. 15), our laboratory has released new results and it appears that there was an algal bloom in the area of the fish kill," BFAR spokesperson Nazario C. Briguera said in an interview with PTV channel, adding that this had caused a drop in dissolved oxygen levels and an increase in ammonium nitrogen.

"Algal bloom is a natural phenomenon especially in the Manila Bay area, so we can't really predict when it will pop up next," he said. He said that the phenomenon had mostly affected blackchin *tilapia* which does not have much commercial value. — **Adrian H. Halili**

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DA: Suplay ng bigas sapat ngayong holiday season

Tiniyak ng Department of Agriculture (DA) sa publiko na may sapat at abot kayang suplay ng "bigas sa bansa partikular sa Metro Manila laluna sa panahon ng Kapaskuhan.

Ayon kay DA Assistant Secretary at Spokesperson Arnel de Mesa, halos nakumpleto na ng palay farmers ang wet season harvest kayat walang dahilan para kulangin ang bansa sa suplay ng bigas.

"We have harvested about 90% of palay across the nation, bought at P22.00 per kilogram," sabi ni De Mesa.

Anyang, ang volume ay kasalukuyang naibebenta sa average na P23-P25 kada kilo na farmgate price. Ang average retail price para sa regular well milled ay nasa P42.80 kada kilo habang ang prevailing price para sa well milled rice ay P45 kada kilo.

Sinabi ni De Mesa na

may kabuuang 3.063 million metric tons (MMT) ng bigas ang maaani nitong Nobyembre at Disyembre.

"Based on data and information from the Philippine Rice Information System, it is generally a good harvest year for the Filipino rice farmers," sabi pa ni De Mesa. (Angie dela Cruz)

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NFA kinastigo sa kakapusan ng sapat na suplay ng bigas

WALANG sapat na suplay ng bigas sa buong bansa kaya't nanganganib na umangkat ng mas maraming butil sa mga susunod na panahon hanggang matapos ang taniman ng palay, ayon kay Senate Minority Leader Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel.

Sa kanyang interperlasyon sa badyet ng National Food Authority, inamin ng ahensya na walang sapat na rice buffer stock alinsunod sa itinakda ng batas.

"I heard wala tayong buffer stock, isn't that the function of the NFA?" ayon kay Pimentel sa deliberasyon ng badyet ng Department of Agriculture. Inamin ng NFA na hindi nito nasusunod ang 9-day rice buffer stock na nakatakda sa batas at hindi binanggit kung gaano kadami ang imbak na butil.

Inaatasan n batas ang NFA na bukod sa pagmementeni ng sapat na rice buffer stock na bibilihin sa lokal na magsasaka, kailangan pamahalaan ng ahensya ang sapat na imbak na butil sa susunod na sampung taon.

Bilang tugon, sinabi ni Roderick Bioco ng NFA na masyadong mataas ang halaga ng palay sa kapag taniman.

Ipinaliwanag pa niya na itinaas ng ahensya ang minimum guarantee price mula sa P19 tungo sa P23, pero "there was a downward pressure from a very high price" sanhi ng price ceiling sa bigas.

Kahit ganito ang pagkilos ng NFA, dismayado pa din si Pimentel sa kabiguan ng ahensiya na tiyakin ang kailangan na 9-day buffer stock.

"You must in good faith and through best efforts comply with that mandate," ayon kay Pimentel. "Come closer to the quantity mandated by law."

Ikinatuwiran naman ni Sen. Cynthia Villar—nag-isponso sa DA budget—na nabigyan ng NFA P9 billion kada taon upang matiyak na may sapat na suplay ng bigas para sa kalamidad.

Pero, umabot lamang sa P500 milyon ng naturang badyet ang nagamit ng ahensiya, ayon kay Villar.

ERNIE REYES



BIGATING SIBUYAS SMUGGLER TIMBOG

ISANG pinaghihinalaang bigating smuggler ng sibuyas ang inaresto noong Miyerkoles nang umaga, ayon kay Senador Cynthia Villar sa deliberasyon ng Senado sa panukalang 2024 budget ng Department of Agriculture (DA).

Sabi ni Villar, ang naaresto ng Anti-Smuggling Task Force ng DA ay nagngangalang Jason de Roxas Taculong na nasa likod umano ng ilegal na importasyon ng 30 container ng sibuyas.

"They said that they issued warrant of arrest to Jason de Roxas Taculong...and they have arrested him this morning [Wednesday], so that's good news," pahayag ni Villar, chair ng Senate committee on agriculture and food.

"It's large-scale smuggling, onions, daw," dagdag pa ng senadora matapos tanungin ni Senate Minority Leader Aquilino 'Koko' Pimentel III.

Sabi pa ni Villar, sasampahan din ng DA ng kaso ang isang pang-onion smuggler na may-ari ng anim na kompanya.

"They are investigating daw together with the Philippine Competition Commission against Leah Cruz but this Leah Cruz has been there for a long, long time...when I entered there is a Leah Cruz so I guess it's taking them a long long time," sambit pa ng mambabatas.

Binanggit pa ni Villar na 15 kaso na ang nathain ng DA sa korte laban sa mga smuggler subalit lima na ang nabasura.

"You can see that everything is dismissed by the court. That's why I want them to be non-bailable para at least kung i-dismiss man ng court, nakaranas na siyang makulong. Eh alam mo mayayaman, sila ayaw nilang makulong," ani Villar. **(Dindo Matining)**



A bill to exterminate the 'unli rice' culture?

WHITE rice, the staple food of Filipinos and other Asians, has been proven to cause spikes in blood sugar because it has a high glycemic index (GI). Studies have linked high rice consumption with increased risk of type 2 diabetes.

Eating high-GI foods can cause blood sugar levels to rapidly rise—triggering the pancreas to release more insulin—and then quickly fall. This can promote cravings and overeating. Repeating this cycle frequently may lead to weight gain and insulin resistance, factors associated with type 2 diabetes and higher cardiovascular risk, according to a Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) research.

The HSPH researchers reviewed four earlier studies involving more than 352,000 people from China, Japan, the United States, and Australia who were tracked between four and 22 years. They found that people who ate the most rice—three to four servings a day—were 1.5 times more likely to have diabetes than people who ate the least amount of rice. In addition, for every additional large bowl of white rice a person ate each day, the risk rose 10 percent. The link was stronger for people in Asian countries, who eat an average of three to four servings of white rice per day.

A perspective paper in *Diabetes Care* recommends reducing white rice in your diet. Avoiding large portion sizes can help reduce insulin and blood sugar levels and decrease the risk of diabetes. In fact, eating too much food at one time has been shown to cause higher blood sugar and insulin levels in people at risk of diabetes.

According to the International Diabetes Federation, there are 3.9 million people with diabetes in the Philippines as of May 2020. As a chronic illness, diabetes can bring about an increased risk of developing heart disease and stroke. In 2020, 6.5 percent of deaths in the country were caused by diabetes mellitus diseases.

Now comes a bill filed at the House of Representatives that may unintentionally help Filipinos prevent the risk of diabetes. House Deputy Majority Leader Janette Garin's proposed legislation mandates restaurants, canteens, eateries, and food establishments to provide a half-cup rice serving option. Dubbed the "Rice Waste Reduction Act of 2023," the bill is geared towards curbing rice wastage, estimated at P7.2 billion a year. **(Read the BUSINESSMIRROR report, "With P7.2-B wastage, bill mandates half-cup rice," November 15, 2023).**

Incidentally, President Marcos filed a similar bill—Senate Bill No. 1863—seeking to penalize restaurants for refusing to serve half a cup of rice when he was a senator during the 16th Congress. Unfortunately, the Senate failed to act on his proposed measure.

Garin said her bill seeks to minimize food waste, encourage balanced and sustainable eating habits, and promote 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," she said.

Garin's bill, if signed into law, is like throwing two strikes with one pitch. Her primary purpose is to help reduce rice wastage in the country. But the incidental health benefit of this measure is potentially huge. It helps prevent overconsumption of white rice, which can raise blood glucose levels and increase the risk of diabetes.

In the age of social media, however, we can't predict the effect of half-cup rice image posts on the reputation of a restaurant, particularly on people who don't know that this is a customer's option and not the restaurant's regular serving size.

Under the regime of "unli rice," we also don't know who would avail themselves of just a half-cup rice serving. But, who knows, this may just be the legislation needed to make people aware that we cannot continue cultivating an "unli rice" culture if we want to lower our blood sugar level and reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes.



P8.5B agri trading hub to rise in Clark complex

THE Clark International Airport Corp. will enter into a joint venture for the establishment of a \$152-million agriculture trading hub inside the Clark civil aviation complex.

Arrey Perez, CIAC president, said in a statement the planned Clark National Food Terminal will include research and quality control, warehousing, food processing, international shipping, marketing services, and trading for local and foreign markets.

"The feasibility study of industry experts will soon commence, then we'll start exploratory talks with prospective investors for a joint venture partnership so we're looking forward to project completion in two years' time. This is a huge infrastructure investment

but will serve as a major support pillar to the national government's efforts to boost the country's agricultural economy," Perez said.

He said the project will support the national government's vision to make the Philippines a leading agricultural resource hub and is aligned with the government's goal of putting food security at the forefront of the country's national agenda.

The food trading hub will be built in a 64-hectare portion near the Clark International Airport and cargo giants FedEx and UPS. It is also accessible to major road networks connecting northern and eastern parts of Luzon with an upcoming cargo railway station linking the Subic seaport, Perez said.



Fisheries output up 2.1% by volume in 3rd quarter

FISHERIES production rose 2.1% year on year by volume in the third quarter, led by the aquaculture and municipal fisheries segments, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

In its quarterly situation, the PSA said production volume in the quarter was 1.02 million metric tons (MT).

"Annual increments in production were noted in commercial fisheries, inland municipal

fisheries, and aquaculture sub-sectors," it added.

Production volume for aquaculture rose 7.4% to 527.15 thousand MT. The segment accounted for 51.8% of fisheries output.

Inland municipal fisheries production rose 2.8% to 51.62 thousand MT, accounting for 5.2% of fisheries production.

The commercial fisheries segment posted growth of 0.5%

to 230.68 thousand MT and accounted for 22.7% of overall production.

"However, the marine municipal fisheries subsector reported an annual decline in production," the PSA added.

Marine municipal fisheries, which accounted for 20.3% of overall output, saw production decline 7.9% year on year to 206.64 thousand MT.

Of the 20 major species, production gains were reported for seaweed (14%), big-eyed scad (32.8%), round scad or *galunggong* (17.2%), yellowfin tuna (28.5%), and Indian mackerel (60.6%).

Declines were reported for milkfish or *bangus* (12%), skipjack (12.6%), and fimbriated sardines, known in the Philippines as *tamban* (37.8%). — **Adrian H. Halili**



Small-farmer receipt exemption rules issued

THE Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) said it has released the regulations that will govern the small-scale farmer exemption from issuing receipts and invoices.

BIR Revenue Regulations (RR) No. 12-2023 relieves small farmers of the need to issue principal and supplementary receipts or invoices covering the sale of their agricultural food products.

"Through these revenue regulations, we hope to support our small agricultural producers by making it easier for them to comply with the tax laws," BIR Commissioner Romeo D. Lumagui, Jr. on Thursday.

The RR exempts agricultural producers whose gross sales do not exceed P1 million a year.

It added that small producers are still required to register their

principal place of business or residence with the BIR's Revenue District Office (RDO).

The BIR also classifies agricultural suppliers, sellers, producers, contract growers and millers that do not exceed the P1 million threshold to be small-scale agricultural producers.

The BIR agricultural producer category includes produce, livestock, and poultry farmers, as well as producers of marine products, ordinary salt, and agricultural inputs.

"The agricultural food products shall still be covered by these revenue regulations even if they have undergone the simple process of preparation or preservation for market," it said.

It added that producers also need to maintain a records of

sales for every transaction in a simplified sales book.

If an agricultural producer sells goods or services other than food products, the total value of the other products must not exceed P1 million and be equivalent to up to 30% of total sales per year.

"Should the annual gross sales/receipts of small agricultural producers exceed P1 million at any time..., they will be required to issue official receipts/sales invoices for every subsequent transaction valued at P100 or more," the BIR said.

It added that those exceeding the threshold can buy and use official printed receipts or invoices from district offices and are required to issue official receipts "pursuant to an Authority to Print (ATP) to be issued by the RDO."

Buyers are also required to issue a Certificate of Income Payment Not Subject to Withholding Tax (BIR Form No. 2304) or Certificate of Creditable Tax Withheld at Source (BIR Form No. 2307) for every transaction.

"These forms will serve as evidence of purchases made to support claims for deductible expenses of the buyers or purchasers of Agricultural Food Products, for tax purposes," it said.

Producers which do not exceed P300,000 in net income for the tax year are exempt from withholding taxes. Those above the threshold are subject to a 1% withholding tax rate.

Small-scale agricultural producers are still required to pay income taxes and file quarterly and annual income tax returns. —

Adrian H. Halili



Coffee jumps amid improved risk appetite, Brazil heat

NEW YORK — Coffee prices on ICE closed sharply higher on Wednesday as risk appetite improved thanks to easing inflation fears globally, while there were worries about excessive warm weather in top grower Brazil.

COFFEE: March arabica coffee settled up 3.75 cents or 2.2% at \$1.7515 per pound (lb) after hitting the highest price in nearly five months at \$1.7610 per lb.

Dealers noted worries regarding a heat wave in Brazil that could hurt fields that are in development stage for next year's crop,

although soil moisture remains at relatively good levels.

On the macro front, benign inflation readings in the US and Britain have spurred investors to bet on an end to the global interest rate hike cycle, boosting risk appetite for commodities, while currencies such as the Brazilian real have gained versus the dollar.

A stronger real deters Brazilian exporters from selling dollar-priced coffee, sugar and grains by lowering their local currency returns.

Longer term, Rabobank expects the coffee market will re-

cord a 6.8 million bag surplus in 2024/2025 thanks to improved output in Brazil and Colombia.

January robusta coffee rose \$75 or 3% to \$2,549 a metric ton.

SUGAR: March raw sugar was little changed at 27.15 cents per lb.

Dealers said improved macro-economic signals should boost sugar in the short term, as should the fact that top producer Brazil is fast approaching the end of its harvest. Longer term however, sugar fundamentals are turning more bearish.

The International Sugar Organization has sharply reduced its

global sugar deficit forecast for 2023/2024 to 0.33 million metric tons from 2.11 million previously, citing Brazil's record production.

Germany's refined sugar production in the 2023/2024 season now finishing is forecast to rise some 9.8% to about 4.24 million metric tons.

December white sugar rose \$3.30 or 0.4% to \$746.60 a ton.

COCOA: March London cocoa rose £18 or 0.5% to £3,445 per ton, but remained some way off Tuesday's record high of £3,569.

March New York cocoa firmed 0.2% to \$3,992 a ton. — Reuters