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New DA chief: Major onion smuggler arrested in Batangas

An alleged large-scale onion smuggler was arrested in Batangas recently, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. announced yesterday.

Laurel said that Jayson de Roxas Taculog was apprehended by police operatives on Wednesday after an arrest warrant was issued by Manila Regional Trial Court Branch 26 Judge Edilu Hayag.

No bail was recommended.

"Taculog's arrest is just the beginning. With help from the police, the courts, and local government units, the Department of Agriculture will continue to run after smugglers and economic saboteurs," Laurel said.

According to Laurel, the arrest of Taculog was done after the confiscation of P78.9 million worth of illegally imported agricultural goods consigned to Taculog J Interna-

tional Consumer Goods Trading during separate operations at the Manila International Container Port from December 2022 to January 2023.

Taculog was arrested for using fictitious import permits and shipping documents, Laurel added.

He said that if found guilty, Taculog faces life imprisonment and a fine twice the fair value of the smuggled agricultural products and the aggregate amount of taxes he avoided paying.

"Smugglers and hoarders are destroying not just the livelihood of our farmers. They are exploiting Filipino consumers with high food prices," Laurel said.

Taculog's arrest was a product of "coordination among key government agencies, as well as the prompt actions of the BOC," according to BOC Deputy Com-

missioner Juvymax Uy.

"His arrest showed the commitment of the Marcos administration to go after these big-time agricultural smugglers," said BOC Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio.

Persons found guilty of "smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel of agricultural and fishery products" would be penalized with "life imprisonment and a fine thrice the value of the agricultural and fishery products involved," the agency said.

SDO terminated

Meanwhile, Laurel has terminated the contract of the special disbursing officer (SDO) assigned at the Office of the Secretary as he designated his newly appointed chief of staff to replace the employee.

Laurel issued Special Order

1393 on the termination of the designation of Rheeda Cabrera as SDO of the Office of the Secretary.

At the same time, Laurel issued Special Order 1377 appointing lawyer Alvin John Balagbag as special disbursing officer for the Office of the Secretary where he was authorized to handle the petty cash fund of P120,000.

Laurel appointed Balagbag as head executive assistant and chief of staff, replacing Assistant Secretary Rex Estoperez.

"The order shall take effect immediately and shall remain in force unless revoked in writing. All orders inconsistent herewith are deemed revoked," he added. Laurel has started implementing reorganization at the DA after his appointment on Nov. 3.

- Bella Cariaso, Ghio Ong

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Big-time onion smuggling suspect arrested – DA

Authorities have arrested an alleged big-time onion smuggler in Batangas, Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. announced on Friday, Nov. 17.

Laurel said police apprehended Jayson de Roxas

Taculog on the strength of an arrest warrant issued by Judge Edilu Hayag of Manila Regional Trial Court Branch 26 for violation of Republic Act 10845, the law declaring large-scale agricultural smuggling as economic sabotage. No bail was recom-

mended for his provisional liberty.

The arrest of Taculog, according to Laurel, is just the beginning of DA's war on smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products.

"Umpisa pa lang si Taculog. Sa tulong ng pulis, korte at lokal na pamahalaan, patuloy na tutugisin ng Department of Agriculture ang mga smuggler at suma-

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sabotahe sa ating sektor (Taculog's arrest is just the beginning. With the help of the police, the courts, and local government units, the Department of Agriculture will continue to run after smugglers and economic saboteurs)," he said in a statement. "Isa sa mga utos ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. na habulin ang mga smugglers at hoarders. Agad nating inaksyunan ang direktibang ito ng Pangulo (One of the President's marching orders is to go after smugglers and hoarders. We immediately implemented the President's directive)."

The agriculture department noted that Taculog was nabbed for

allegedly using fake, fictitious, or fraudulent import permits or shipping documents.

"Aside from evading payment of taxes and duties, he was also charged with misclassification, undervaluation, or misdeclaration of import entry and revenue declaration submitted with the Bureau of Customs. At the same time, he was accused of acting as the broker for a violating importer," the agency added.

If Taculog is found guilty, the DA said he may face life imprisonment.

"He may also be fined twice the fair value of the smuggled agricultural products and the aggregate amount of taxes, duties, and other

charges he avoided paying," it added.

Laurel said smugglers and hoarders are not only ruining farmers' livelihoods, but they are also abusing Filipino consumers through excessive food costs.

Per the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act, large-scale agricultural smuggling occurs when at least ₱10 million worth of rice or at least ₱1 million worth of sugar, corn, pork, poultry, garlic, onion, carrots, fish, and cruciferous vegetables—either raw, processed, or preserved—is illegally brought into the country.

It was recalled that prices of agricultural products shot up in the tail end of 2022 and peaked in early 2023 due to a number of factors, including smuggling and hoarding, which the government vowed to eradicate. (Jel Santos)



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Two ways 2 Tiu Laurels trudge for PH survival

ONE is the final long-term solution to the country's food security. Recall how in his inaugural, President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. was loudly applauded when he declared his veritable oath to bring down the price of rice to P20 per kilogram. It's been more than a year since, and the price of rice per kilogram has not gone down as pledged but has even skyrocketed. I cook my own rice, and I buy it myself,



MY SAY

MAURO GIA SAMONTE

too, and the last price I paid for a kilogram, which was the other day, was P59; at the nearby carinderia, one cup of cooked rice costs P20, while before Bongbong's term, it was a light P10 per cup. It's been obvious

that Bongbong's arrogating to himself the tasks and powers of the secretary of the Department of Agriculture didn't help at all in lightening the food security worries of the nation.

And we are only talking about rice. We haven't touched yet such other food necessities as sugar, salt, onion and tomatoes, whose prices have gone beyond the reach of the average wage earner.

Understandably under these

circumstances, Bongbong's decision to let go at long last of the agriculture portfolio is welcome. Hope, after all, is still better than having no hope at all. And such a hope of improved food security conditions must be what newly sworn Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. brings.

To many, the 50-year-old is a novato in politics. True, he is a captain in the Philippine Navy,

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but as a reservist and doesn't make him a politician. About the most credible credentials to the post he possesses is a reportedly huge P30-million contribution to Bongbong's campaign fund.

Migrant origins

But delving into his genealogy, one unravels a narrative that is veritable, to borrow from the Bishop of Canterbury, the stuff of which fairy tales are made.

In the mid-1920s, from Fujian province, China, 13-year-old Tiu Ching Po dared the waves of the South China Sea on an antiquated vessel to be able to reach Manila, at the time regarded in China as the land of golden opportunities. The pre-teener began by knocking on doors, vending whatnots just to survive in strange surroundings. One tale has it that learning of the skyrocketing price of copra in the world market, he took a bus ride to Quezon, dealt in the commodity, and came back to Manila already driving his own car.

That was how the poor migrant from China became famous as a copra tycoon, hobnobbing with top American executives, even establishing a friendship with President Manuel Quezon which enabled him to practically corner the country's exports of copra. The company he founded became the country's foremost copra enterprise and one of the 10 top corporations of the land.

Finally, in accordance with Philippine laws, with Philippine President Jose P. Laurel as his sponsor, the Chinese adopted Philippine citizenship and assumed thenceforth the name Victor Tiu Laurel. He married Maria Paz Ong of Lumban, Laguna, with whom he had 10 children, the eldest being Francisco Tiu Laurel who sired the robust fellow now known as the newly appointed Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

This citation is being made here to highlight the fact that



development of agriculture has been an expertise firmly grounded in the Tiu Laurel family. In his own prime years, Kiko (what Francisco Jr. is affectionately called) established the Frabelle Fishing Corp., a deep-sea fishing company operating in the Asia-Pacific region.

Tagged in news accounts as a billionaire, Kiko should be experiencing a transformation from serving himself to serving the nation now that he is in public service. In this regard, might we throw this question at him: Is it possible to attain food security without nationalizing the food industry?

It is in the nature of trade that profit is generated, and it is in the nature of human greed to aspire for the most profit that could be expropriated from the market of free enterprise. One cardinal rule of that enterprise is the law of supply and demand. When the demand is high and the supply is low, the price of a commodity is high. The late President Ramon Mag-saysay, when told about this, ordered: "Repeal that law!"

Poor president, he didn't know the law of supply and demand is endemic in capitalism. Quite unlike legislation passed by congress, the law of supply and demand is there to feed the insatiable greed for profits by capitalists. That's why there is hoarding of commodities. It creates artificial shortages to bring about the spiraling of prices of these commodities.

So, without a revamp of capitalism, no lowering of prices of food commodities is possible. Food security for the populace can never be attained.

A test for the sincerity of Secretary Tiu Laurel in this regard is the nationalization of the food industry. The revamp of capitalism is a political action and most likely will come about as a result of violence. Nationalization softens the transition. It skirts violence and therefore maintains social order despite radical changes in the food sector.

Practically speaking now, say, production of rice becomes a duty by every barangay (village) for its particular consumption. This is a year-round activity participated in by a representative each from the families in the barangay. Undisturbed supply of rice for the barangay is thereby assured for the entire year.

The same scheme is implemented in the sectors of vegetables, fruits, livestock and fisheries.

What the barangay produces, it consumes. Nobody gets hungry. Food security is attained.

Will Secretary Tiu Laurel nationalize his multibillion-peso fishing empire?

His lola Maria Paz raised all 10 children under the strict edict to give back the family's blessings to the country that had given them a good future. Down to the grandchildren and great-grandchildren, such edict had lived on and on.

Anti-war peace caravan

Meanwhile, of the 10 children of the couple Victor and Maria Paz Tiu Laurel, the sixth was Herman Tiu Laurel, who early on found himself immersed in the national democratic movement in the 1970s, then devoted himself to journalism, writing columns, running online publications, ceaselessly exposing oligarchs in their wanton exploitation of Philippine natural and human resources.

A rabid anti-American socialist, he strictly abides by his mother's teaching to give back to the Philippines what the country has bestowed on the Tiu Laurel family. In his view, what the Philippines urgently needs at the hour is to enlighten the people on the real issue in the escalating tension in the South China Sea. He exposed, for instance, that alleged pursuits by China Coast Guard ships of resupply boats of the Philippine Coast Guard at Ayungin Shoal was a lie tweeted by a former US Air Force official named Raymond Powell and picked up as news

by Philippine publications. The lie certainly served as impetus for the US desire of escalating tension between the Philippines and China in the disputed areas of the South China Sea.

Herman saw early on that approval by President Marcos of four additional bases for America under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) signified US success in turning the Philippines into its proxy in war with China. Bongbong's grant to the United States of those bases has so riled China that it implied readiness to retaliate in kind once those bases are used for attacking China. Before the situation gets out of control, the US must be stopped in its scheme to involve the Philippines in its war with China.

On June 1, 2023, the Anti-War Peace Caravan which Herman organized made its first sortie, passing through historical places, like the Barasoain Church in Malolos, Bulacan, where the Malolos Congress was held in 1899; the Cathedral in Nueva Ecija, site of the martyrdom of Gen. Antonio Luna; finally Cagayan, where it joined forces with Gov. Manuel Mamba, foremost opposer. At every stop, throngs welcomed the caravan and its call to coonent of the additional EDCA sites Bongbong granted to Amendemn America for embroiling the Philippines in its war with China.

When the caravan makes its swing shortly to the Visayas and Mindanao, Herman shall have made a full circle of the archipelago. Hopefully by then, the populace will have been enlightened enough to launch mass actions aimed at persuading Bongbong to recall his approval of the four additional EDCA sites and save the Philippines from the spoilage of war the US is scheming.

Isn't this amazing? From opposite sides of the political spectrum, one family struggles to stay true to its pledge of expressing gratitude to the Philippines for the good fortune it has enjoyed.

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Big-time onion smuggler naaresto sa Batangas - DA

Hinuli ng mga elemento ng pulisya ang isang bigtime onion smuggler sa batas ayon sa ulat ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr.

Ang suspek na si Jayson de Roxas Taculog ay inaresto sa bisa ng arrest warrant na naipalabas ng Manila Regional Trial Court kaugnay ng paglabag sa Republic Act 10845, o ang batas na nagdedeklara ng large-scale agricultural smuggling na isang economic sabotage.

Si Taculog ay nahuli dahil sa paggamit ng peke, fictitious, o fraudulent import permits o shipping documents. Bukod sa hindi pagbabayad ng tamang buwis at duties, kinasuhan din ito ng misclassification, undervaluation, o misdeclaration ng import entry at revenue declaration na naisumite sa Bureau of Customs.

Magugunitang ang DA, Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) at Bureau of Customs (BOC) ay nakakumpiska ng P78.9 million halaga ng illegally imported agricultural goods na naka-consigned sa Taculog J International Consumer Goods Trading sa magkakahiwalay na operasyon sa Manila International Container Port (MICP) mula December 2022 hanggang January 2023. (Angie dela Cruz)



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CHIT U. JUAN

Terra Madre Visayas

I have been lucky to attend Terra Madre Salone del Gusto, a bi-annual celebration of Slow Food in Turin, Italy since 2012 (on even years) until 2022, minus 2020 or the pandemic year. It is a huge meeting up of all the Slow Food Convivia and Communities from 160 countries for four days; which includes taste sessions, taste workshops, demos and spirited talks about different food cultures and practices to eat good, clean and fair food (www.slowfood.com).



This time, this year, we are celebrating Terra Madre Visayas – right in our home ground. It is exciting to know that Slow Food in the Philippines has grown to more than 18 communities, with 12 located in the Visayas and six located in Negros Island.

What is a Slow Food community anyway? These are aggrupations of like-minded farmers and consumers, food producers and cooks and just about anyone who believes in the preservation of food cultures and the consumption of good, clean and fair food. If you are interested, you just need to gather ten people in your community who will then sign a manifesto to send to Slow Food headquarters in Bra, Italy. That's it. And then you can be part of this global movement.

Thanks to support from national and local officials, Slow Food Negros spearheaded the organization of this milestone for the Philippines. Slow Food was first introduced here in the late 80s by Mara Pardo de Tavera, Doreen Gamboa-Fernandez, Beth Romualdez and their colleagues. Slow Food Negros is now headed by Reena Gamboa, a niece of the culinary icon Doreen Gamboa-Fernandez. The fruit does not fall far from the tree, as the saying goes.

Senator Loren Legarda came to support as she is also an avid environmentalist and a supporter of all things culture. She understands the Slow Food principles and also joined us at Terra Madre Day last December 2022 in Amadeo, Cavite. We hope that she can join us in Terra Madre Salone del Gusto 2024 when it celebrates in Turin once again. In previous years, former agriculture undersecretary Berna Romulo-Puyat joined us in Turin to further understand why Slow Food can make a difference in farmers' lives and in providing better food for our citizens.

And after returning from the trip she made sure we could expose old ingredients like adlai, batuan, kadyos, heirloom rice and even Barako coffee to consumers. All that exposure has now brought adlai and batuan to mainstream markets as they can now be found in more supermarkets and outlets across the country.

We also brought Benguet Arabica in 2016 to Turin and we were featured in an Italian café, yours truly doing a sharing on the Cordillera sources of organic coffee to the Italian press corps and serving our coffee to them, assisted by an Italian barista and my random translator Mickey Garcia. Now, that is something I may not be able to do again but it did bring awareness about our revered Benguet heirloom coffee varieties. I was accompanied by the successor of Usec Berna Puyat, Usec. Evelyn Laviña, who also saw how Slow Food works. She will soon form her own Davao Slow Food community, even if she has left government service. That is how contagious the movement is, which we hope Sen. Loren Legarda continues to support with the help of Department of Agriculture and Department of Tourism as Slow Travel is also a component of the community endeavors.

In the 2018 Terra Madre, Chef Jam Melchor along with Pasil, Kalinga farmers and Slow Food pioneers Rowena and Lam-en Gonnay conducted a taste workshop on heirloom rice from Pasil, which Chef Jam made into two recipes for the global audience to taste. We had a lot of questions answered about Philippine heirloom rice varieties from the press and other attendees and it is really a unique way of showcasing the richness of our food culture.

Also in 2018, Chef Margarita Fores would take turns with Slow Food Sugbu's Aurora Perez serving adobo and rice, and *budbud kabog*, respectively. Fores has been an avid participant since 2012, even serving a *lechon* which was roasted in Rome by the Filipino community.

In 2022, even with a meager budget, we managed to squeeze into a stand that stood out because of the food samplings conducted by Slow Food Negros, alternating with Slow Food Manila as we served up coffee from Davao and Negros, and various recipes using Ark of Taste ingredients.

So, this time we are in the Philippines and no less than Slow Food's executive director Paolo Di Croce and Asia Pacific coordinator Elena Aniere will witness this first ever regional celebration featuring taste workshops, Earth markets and many events that will impress upon the general public what Terra Madre does – it unites our culture to show the world. And in Turin, a grander celebration awaits us if and when plans push through, to show the biodiversity we have and to show the world what we have to offer from our rich heritage of flavors and indigenous ingredients.

So if you still have time to book a ticket, do drive or fly to Negros to witness Terra Madre Visayas, the first ever to be held in the country. If you miss it, you can save the dates for Terra Madre Salone del Gusto in Turin, Italy in September 2024. I swear it will change you and how you see food and culture.

To the Terra Madre Visayas organizers and supporters, thank you for giving the Philippines a chance to be on the Slow Food map of the world.

★



Price of galunggong up by P40 per kilo

The retail price of round scad or *galunggong*, once considered a "poor man's fish," was up by P40 per kilo based on monitoring of the Department of Agriculture (DA) in Metro Manila markets.

Local round scad was sold as high as P320 per kilo compared to its prevailing price on Nov. 13 at P280. Imported round scad is sold as high as P240 per kilo and Indian mackerel at P340 per kilo.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) has announced the start of the closed fishing season in the Visayan Sea and Zamboanga peninsula from Nov. 15 to Feb. 15 from the original schedule of Dec. 1 to March 1.

"Catching, selling and buying sardines, mackerel

and herring in a portion of the marine biodiversity-rich Visayan Sea is prohibited. This is to conserve and protect the economically important species in the said fishing ground during their spawning period," BFAR said in an advisory.

BFAR added that the government will also enforce a three-month pause in sardine fishing activities in Zamboanga Peninsula with the implementation of Bureau Administrative Circular No. 255.

"This initiative covers one of the country's largest sardines fishing grounds, the rich and bountiful waters of the Zamboanga Peninsula, which includes East Sulu, Basilan Strait, and Sibugay Bay," it added.

— Bella Cariaso



Rice retail price up P6/kilo from last month

By BELLA CARIASO

Retail prices of rice have increased by at least P6 per kilo compared to the prevailing price a month ago as cost of the grains continued its uptrend, according to data from the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Based on latest price monitoring of the DA in Metro Manila markets, local regular milled rice is sold to as high as P51 per kilo compared to P45 on Oct. 16, or P6 per kilo difference; local well-milled rice at P54 per kilo from a previous price of P48; local premium rice at P62 per kilo compared to P60 per kilo; and local special

rice at P66 per kilo, up from P62 per kilo a month ago.

The retail price of imported rice also increased as the imported regular and well-milled rice were no longer available in the markets.

Imported premium rice was sold as high as P59 per kilo compared to P58 per kilo; and imported rice at P62 per kilo compared to P58 per kilo last Oct. 16.

Imported regular and well-milled rice were sold at P43 and P48 per kilo, respectively, a month ago.

Rice retailers group Grains Retailers Confederation of the Philippines (GRE-

CON) spokesperson and Philippine Rice Industry Stakeholders Movement (PRISM) co-founder Orly Manuntag has confirmed that the farmgate price of palay has reached as high as P31 per kilo.

He warned that the upward trend in the retail price of rice will persist amid the high demand in December, effect of the El Niño and competition among traders to buy the harvest of farmers.

"So, the prevailing price is P26 (per kilo). The farmers want traders to buy their palay at higher price, as a result traders will offer P26.50, P27 and P28. Other traders do

not want to stop milling and causing the farmgate price to increase.

Last week until yesterday, farmgate price of palay ranged between P30 and P31 per kilo," Manuntag said, adding that if the farmgate price of palay is at P31 per kilo, the retail price of rice will range between P54 and P55 per kilo.

"Especially that Christmas is nearing, there will be an increase in the demand as we are also monitoring the El Niño which is expected to affect the country. We need to act now," he added.

At the same time, Manuntag said that he also received

reports that there was a decline in palay harvest of many farmers, causing the increase in the buying price of palay.

"We received reports that the farmers were affected by the low palay output. From P80 cavans, farmers only harvested 60, 50 (cavans) and there were even farmers who harvested 40 (cavans), so the Department of Agriculture should look into this," he added.

Manuntag said that newly appointed Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. should call for a meeting with the millers, retailers, farmers and other stakeholders to ad-

dress the spike in the prices of palay and rice.

"The DA secretary should meet with all the stakeholders for us to explain comprehensively what is happening in the rice industry and we will be able to explain to the secretary what is happening on the ground," he said.

According to Manuntag, the government should also import rice to prevent the unreasonable spike in the retail price of rice. "What I observed was that if the government has no stocks, the retail price of rice goes up unlike before when the stocks of the government stabilize the prices," he noted.



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'PAHUWAY SA BAYBAY'

3-MONTH FISHING BAN IN VISAYAN SEA STARTS

By Joey Marzan
@joeymarzanINQ

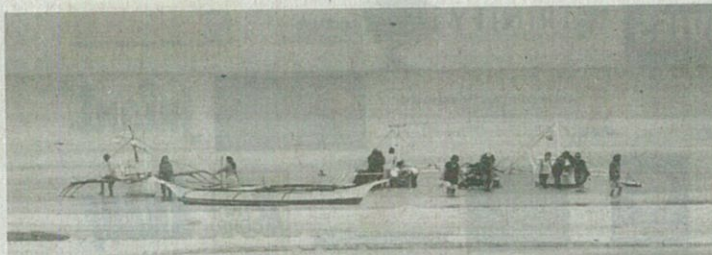
ILOILO CITY—The government has imposed a three-month fishing ban in the Visayan Sea to combat the severe decline in fish population in this area in the Visayas due to overfishing.

Harvesting of varieties of sardine ("tuloy," "tamban," "tabagak"), herring ("balantiyong") and mackerel ("guma-a," "bulao," "hasa-hasa") will not be allowed in the area starting Nov. 15 until Feb. 15, 2024.

The conservation effort covers several areas in the Visayas, including the Talisay River in Barotac Nuevo, Iloilo; Tomonton Point in E.B. Magalona, Negros Occidental; Danao River in Escalante City; Sta. Fe and Madridejos in Cebu; and Gigantes Island in Carles, Iloilo.

The Visayan Sea, bordered by the islands of Cebu, Negros, Masbate, Panay and Leyte, is known for its rich marine biodiversity. Over 100,000 fisherfolk depend on it for sustenance and livelihood.

The Bureau of Fisheries



NEEDED BREAK For the third straight year, the Visayan Sea spanning the major islands in the Visayas is closed to commercial fishing. —PHOTO COURTESY OF BUREAU OF FISHERIES AND AQUATIC RESOURCES

and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) office in the Western Visayas region will monitor marine resources during the three-month closed season which locals call "Pahuway sa Baybay" (respite of the sea).

The closure is meant to repropagate different fish species to ensure stable supply for fisherfolk.

"This [closed season] is a reflection of the government's commitment to support the fishing industry while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the fishery resources. Through cooperation and col-

laboration, we can collectively design a brighter future for the Philippines' fisheries sector," said Agriculture Undersecretary Drusila Esther Bayate.

Assistance

BFAR Western Visayas Director Remia Aparri, in an interview, said livelihood assistance through shellfish propagation would be extended to affected fisherfolk.

"From the [regulation of fishing activities] through limiting before, we are now advocating for a 'respite of the sea' during this three-month period. We will

give the Visayan Sea time to recuperate and for the fishes to reproduce and grow," said Aparri.

Former Agriculture Secretary Proceso Alcala in 2013 issued Fisheries Administrative Order No. 167-3 to implement the fishing ban in the Visayan Sea every year.

A BFAR study shows that November to February is the peak of the spawning period for sardine, mackerel and herring.

The closure will affect commercial boats weighing 3.1 gross tons and up. Violators will be fined P6,000 or may be imprisoned for up to six years.

Aside from BFAR, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, the Philippine National Police, Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine Navy, Regional Maritime Group, National Intelligence Coordinating Agency, Maritime Industry Authority, National Telecommunications Commission, Philippine Fisheries Development Authority and the Bureau of Customs in the Port of Iloilo have been tasked to monitor the situation during the closed fishing season. INQ



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Agriculture franchising next sunrise industry

Agriculture franchising can be the next sunrise industry. It deserves all the exposure and support the Department of Agriculture (DA) can give—especially with a new business and job-oriented secretary and a supportive Senate that is now deliberating on a bigger industry budget of P167.5 billion.

According to Investopedia, "A franchise is a type of license that grants a franchisee access to a franchisor's proprietary business knowledge, processes, and trademark under the franchisor's business name."

Today, franchising contributes 7.8 percent to our gross domestic product (GDP). Franchised businesses are mostly in food (44 percent), retail (28 percent) and services (27 percent).

Last November 7, the Agri-Business and Development

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

Foundation (ABCD), in partnership with the Management Association of the Philippines (MAP), held its agriculture business and technology forum. A project started by Ramon Ilusorio and Bernadette Yap, ABCD has been holding a forum every week for the last 18 years. It also has a youth-oriented board led by Julius Barcelona.

Franchising benefits

Sammy Lim and Alegria "Bing" Limjoco founded the franchising industry in the Philippines. During the forum, Limjoco, also the former president of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(PCCI), identified the unique benefits of agriculture franchising.

For the franchisor, it is a method that allows a business owner to grow a successful business using other people's money, time and network. For the franchisee, it is an effective way to start a business with a higher success rate compared to starting a business from scratch.

A successful agriculture financing case was presented by Hannah Mamon. Having worked for 13 years in one of the biggest fast-food company that grew from franchising, Mamon saw an opportunity for a business that promotes healthy food.

She initially planned for outlets bearing the "Barefoot" brand. With help from Limjoco on franchising technology,

Mamon has since opened 200 branches nationwide. Her mission is "to provide extraordinary experience in food and beverage, while having a continuous and sustainable impact on the community by promoting local farm products to the world."

Though Mamon started her business for personal reasons, her purpose evolved to helping others. She wanted to contribute to her community by "inspiring Filipinos to turn idle lands into sustainable farms with assurance of market. If we made use of our local resources and create extraordinary local products, the Filipinos should not be poor."

Mamon's franchisees give seeds to farmers to secure the supply of the franchisees' products. They also share the right production technology and give them buying agreements. For example, for every

five franchisees who sell guyabano, they develop one hectare for guyabano. With the outreach, idle lands thus turn into productive enterprises, thereby contributing to poverty reduction.

Next steps

Limjoco cited "Potato Corner" as another franchising success story. Due to correct financing technology, "Potato Corner" now has more than 1,000 outlets in the Philippines and is present in six continents.

Based on experience, Limjoco proposed four strategic actions: "First, an information and education campaign on how the agriculture sector can use franchising as a tool for growth and raising standards. Second, capacity building for farmers. Third, government support to the agriculture sector to enable

it to increase the quality and quantity of yield. Fourth, a holistic development plan."

For the fourth, Limjoco cited for example that the Ministry of Agriculture in Korea supports food franchises in international shows to promote Korean cuisine.

With government and private support, agriculture financing can indeed become a sunrise industry that will bring light, hope and progress to our neglected farmers and fisherfolk. **INQ**



The author is Agriwatch chair, former secretary of presidential flagship programs and projects, and former undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Trade and Industry. Contact is agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com.



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'Algal bloom caused massive fish kill in Cavite'

By JEL SANTOS

The culprit behind the massive fish kill in Cañacao Bay in Cavite was algal bloom, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) revealed.

BFAR spokesperson Nazario Briguera said algal bloom is a natural phenomenon that usually occurs in nature, especially in marine waters.

"Pinatingnan din natin kung bakit nagkaroon ng pagbagsak ng dissolved oxygen level, and as of yesterday ay may inilabas na bagong resulta ang aming laboratoryo at lumalabas na nagkaroon po ng algal bloom doon sa area ng fish kill kung saan nangyari iyong paglutangan ng mga patay na isda (We checked why the dissolved oxygen level went down, and as of yesterday, a new result from our laboratory came out and it showed that an algal bloom happened in the area of the fish kill where the dead fishes floated)," he said in a televised media briefing on Thursday, November 17.

According to the BFAR official, algal bloom happens when there is an increase of micronutrients in the water.

"Ito po iyong nangyayari kung bakit nagkakaroon ng algal bloom at kapag may algal bloom po, ibig sabihin dumami iyong mga micro algae doon sa tubig, nagkakaroon po ng paghigpit ng oxygen. So ito pong dissolved oxygen kasi, napakahalaga nito para sa survival po ng isda doon sa tubig (This is what happens why there is an algal bloom and when there is an algal bloom, it means that those microalgae increase in the water, there is a restriction of oxygen. So this is

dissolved oxygen because it is very important for the survival of fish in the water)," Briguera said.

The BFAR noted that there is no way of knowing when and where an algal bloom will occur and when it will vanish.

"Ang tanging puwede lamang nat-ing gawin ay magkaroon ng continuous monitoring doon sa water quality (The only thing we can do is to have continuous monitoring of the water quality)," Briguera said.

Briguera added that climate change may have caused the algal bloom.

"Algal bloom kasi could be attributed to the changing of temperature, iyong pag-init, tapos biglang pag-ulan. So, doon po natin mai-attribute iyan (Algal bloom could be attributed to the changing of temperature, that warming, then sudden rain. So, we can attribute it to that)," he said.



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DA targets farm logistics gains

IN order to reduce the price of produce in the country, the Department of Agriculture (DA) aims to enhance farm logistics and reduce middlemen from the value chain.

Agriculture chief Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. presented his priorities for the agriculture sector during the plenary session on the department's 2024 budget on Wednesday.

"In order to optimize yield, we must process our produce after harvest. Our goal is to launch them into the market for the lowest feasible price," said Laurel.

Some measures he mentioned to boost the farming sector were the use of fertilizers and technologies, mechanizing farming to increase food production, expanding irrigation coverage and providing farmers with better seeds.

In order to optimize yield, Laurel also noted that harvested products must be processed right away and to reduce the price of produce, he said logistics need to be enhanced.

"We must also lessen the [number of] times these products exchange hands by reducing middlemen," he added.

"By increasing production, we will hopefully lessen importation," Laurel said, acknowledging the growing trade deficit as the nation imports more fish, rice and onions.

According to the data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, the country's balance of trade in agricultural products in 2022 had a bigger deficit of \$11.8 billion since farm imports increased at a rate twice as fast as agricultural exports.

In 2020, the trade deficit was \$6.38 billion and it stood at \$8.89 billion in 2021.

The Agriculture department noted that the Philippines will benefit from increased domestic production in two ways — first, it will assist local farmers earn more money. Second, it will save foreign exchange that might be used to fund new ventures that would generate employment.

The value of agricultural imports was \$19.3 billion in the previous year, this is about P1 trillion at the current exchange rate, according to the DA.

While the agriculture sector contributes about 9 percent to the domestic economy, it accounts for one in every four jobs with 10 million farmers and fishermen considered poor. **JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL**



Bulacan conducts summit to boost farmers' capabilities

CITY OF MALOLOS: A total of 250 agricultural extension workers (AEWs) seeking latest relevant updates in agriculture joined the AEW Summit 2023 at the Merryland Integrated Farm and Training Center in Barangay Taal, Pulilan on Thursday, November 16.

The participants gathered to get updates on the current status and prospects in agriculture relevant to the provision of

agricultural extension services.

Anchored on the theme "Dynamic Resilient Farming: Agriculture in the Age of Climate Transformation," several topics, including the Implementation of the National Soil Health Program, Collaborative Action in Addressing Soil, Land Degradation, Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss were discussed by engineer Oscar Carpio

from the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Soils and Water Management.

Lawyer Eric Reynoso from the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture discussed the web-based Integrated Spatial Engine and Smart Ecosystem Carbon Farming.

The awareness of El Niño phenomenon discussion was handled by Nestor Nimes from the Department of Science

and Technology-Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, while the Central Luzon's Action Plan for El Niño was discussed by Lowell Rebillaco from DA-Regional Field Office 3.

In his message delivered by Crispin de Luna, Gov. Daniel Fernando cited the pivotal role of AEWs in guiding local farmers and fisherfolk.

Vice Gov. Alexis Castro recognized the relentless efforts of AEWs in the province, acknowledging their significant contribution in the improvement of agriculture, fisheries and livestock sectors amid challenges.

The summit played an important role in equipping AEWs in the province with the latest knowledge necessary for guiding farmers in the face of evolving climatic challenges.

FREDERICK SILVERIO



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Cavite fishkill isinisi sa sobrang lumot

TINUKOY ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) ang sobrang lumot bilang dahilan ng fishkill sa Cañacao Bay sa Cavite City.

Batay aniya ito sa isinagawa nilang inisyal na pagsusuri sa lugar kung saan toneladang blackchin tilapia ang lumutang at namatay.

Ayon kay BFAR spokesperson Nazario Briguera, bumaba dissolved oxygen level sa

tubig kaya dumami ang algal bloom o lumot sa lugar.

Isa aniya itong natural phenomenon at hindi matutukoy kung kailan lalabas sa tubig.

Nauna nang klinaro ng BFAR na walang malaking epekto ang fish kill sa kabuhayan ng mga mangingisda sa lugar. Ito'y dahil maliit lang ang commercial value ng mga namatay na isda partikular na ang blackchin tilapia.



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Sen. Poe prods Congress to frontload passage of bill creating dept of water

SENATOR Grace Poe, conveying concerns to ensure clean water supplied to consumers, pressed Congress to frontload passage of an enabling law creating the proposed Department of Water, reminding that "the country's water woes are too big to be met by fragmented responses."

In a statement, Poe urged the private sector to work with the government in ensuring sustainable water management and access of the people to safe drinking water and sanitation.

"The irony is that although there is a horde of offices involved in water, there is no one agency that has overall responsibility," Poe pointed out in a forum on Water Security Strategy organized by the Coca-Cola Company.

"Simply put: Our 'tubig' sector is too big. So before we all sink, we need nothing less than a Titanic reform to prevent a Titanic disaster," the senator added.

The presiding chairperson of the Senate

public services committee lamented that while a number of water-related agencies exist, "there is evident lack of leadership and holistic planning for the sector."

Poe's Senate Bill No. 102, to be known as the National Water Resource Management Act as soon as it is enacted pitches for the creation of a Department of Water Resources. The bill is currently pending at the committee level.

This new agency will be the primary policy planning, coordinating, and implementing entity responsible for the comprehensive and integrated development and management of water resources in the Philippines, said Poe.

"Undoubtedly, the impact of having access to clean water is life-changing. But who decides which communities will receive this blessing? Consequently, one area that needs to be immediately addressed is our fragmented institutional, regulatory, and management framework," the senator stressed.

She conveyed concerns that "the proposed department is urgent and needed as water has become a critical resource all over the world. This calls for investments in infrastructure, technology and capacity building to meet the increasingly growing needs of the population."

"Lamentably," Poe deplored that in the Philippines, "two out of every 10 families do not have access to an improved source of drinking water. Two out of 10 families also do not have access to any sanitation facility. And three out of 10 Filipino families do not have access to a hand-washing facility."

Based on a study of the National Economic and Development Authority, the water availability per person in the country also amounted to 1,553 m³ (cubic meters) per year.

She described this as "worrisome because 1,553 m³/year falls below the international 'water stress' threshold of 1,700 m³/year and approaches the 'water scarcity' threshold of

1,000 m³/year."

"A regulatory authority is necessary to ensure efficient allocation of this scarce resource. In addition to this important task, a regulator is also needed to determine just rates for water services," she said.

Poe said that the government alone couldn't accomplish developing the water sector. Her bill seeks to enable the private sector, civil society and community-based organizations to be involved in the delivery of water supply, sanitation, and septage services to end-users. "Our proposed law could be a game-changer in the area of water stewardship," she said.

"Water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. Let us work together to lift the floodgates of bureaucracy, attain sustainable consumption and production, and ensure that clean water flows to every household like a mighty stream," Poe added.

Butch Fernandez



Bakong plant: from 'pest' to livelihood source

LOCALLY known as Bakong, the Hanguana Malayana has become one of the major sources of livelihood for farmers in the Santa Teresita town in Cagayan province, helping them overcome poverty.

Bakong is a good source of fiber for various products such as gifts and housewares, textiles, high-grade paper, wall decor, and other artworks and furniture, among others. Santa Teresita's local government unit (LGU) said finished products made from Bakong are now internationally admired and have been exported to customers abroad on a "made-to-order" basis.

In the town's Barangay Luna, a total of 108 hectares of Bakong plants managed by Laguna De Cagayan Association is where John Benedict de Asis, Grassroots Innovation (Grind) Program regional coordinator of the Department of Science and Technology (DoST) in Region 2 (Cagayan

Valley), discovered that the raw material "Bakong" had an unusual size.

De Asis noted that unlike what is typically found in the Visayas, particularly in Romblon, the Bakong in Santa Teresita was longer.

De Asis said the DoST could assist the association through technology equipment innovation, research and development, capacity building, skills training and market linkages to strengthen the dissemination of information about this product. "These measures will help them produce more materials from this commodity," he said.

Through the assistance of Santa Teresita LGU and the Cagayan's first district Provincial Science and Technology Office led by Ferdinand Michael Magusib, their monitoring process led to a better understanding of the farmers' needs and

how to assist them. The DoST is aiming to empower the Bakong farmers by involving them in a solution-mapping process that Grind has been focusing on.

Indigenous to the area

"The Bakong farmers in this town also hope to develop this commodity as it holds the promise of sustaining their lives," de Asis said.

Meanwhile, local historian Benjamin de Yro said there are no records the plant was brought by the Spanish conquistadors who first landed in the original site of today's town in 1557. Instead, Bakong started propagating in a lake in the village then called Barrio Namunit.

"Particularly found growing in the Bangalau Lake (now Laguna De Cagayan)

in Santa Teresita along the national road, one is easily greeted by the dominant Bakong plant with its prominent long wide leaves as soon as reaching the place," de Yro said.

While known as Bakong in the Northern Philippines, the plant is popularly known in Myanmar as Sumsum.

Research in 2013 by the Department of Trade and Industry-Product Development Design Center revealed the plant's economic benefits to the farmers; prior to that, the Bakong had long been regarded as "pests" by the residents.

Research further showed that the perennial rhizomatous herb is native to the Philippines, the Malay Peninsula, Palau and Australia.

Bakong only has two subspecies that grow from 1 to 2 meters tall identified as the "kassintu" and "anthelmintika." Its



A source of livelihood for farmers.

linear leaves are clustered at the base of the stem and have long perennial longitudinal veins.

With the help of the DTI and the Department of Labor and Employment, the Bakong has become an alternative source of livelihood among 500 farmers in the town who have been trained to produce fiber from it. LEANDER C. DOMINGO



Bakong is regarded as a good source of fiber for various products.

PHOTOS FROM DOST REGION 2



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Agribusiness training for Tarlac farmers launched

THE Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) Northern Luzon Command (Nolcom) in partnership with hundreds of land tillers under Rice Up Farmers Inc. and Sakahon have launched an agribusiness training program for the Malayan Magbubukid ng Hacienda Luisita (Malaya) in Tarlac City.

The training that will run for 15 days in Barangay Balete, Tarlac City will be attended by 100 farmers who will undergo comprehensive community-based training programs on financial literacy management. The training started on Thursday, November 16,

The participants are expected to become more efficient and effective in their respective agricultural enterprises.

The agribusiness training under the

Nolcom project "KaPALAYpaan" is aimed at empowering the Malaya farmers and seeks to boost their agricultural productivity and improve their livelihood.

The Regional Task Force in Ending Local Communist Armed Conflict (RTF-Elcac) and its private partners are currently providing various forms of interventions to the Malaya members who were once part and supporters of the communist terrorist group.

Nolcom is prioritizing these Malaya members since they are being readied for reintegration into the community and in their livelihood.

Together with its stakeholders, the Nolcom ensures that farmers can apply what they learn from the training and will have capital to establish their

agricultural enterprises.

"With the government and its private partners, we are committed to supporting sustainable agriculture and rural development, and we are hopeful that upon completion of the training program, these farmers will be provided with financial assistance to start their local agri-business, and no matter how small it is, it will surely boost food security and foster peace and community development," said Nolcom Commander Lt. Gen. Fernyl Buca.

RiceUp Farmers Inc, a social enterprise project that allows farmers to directly connect with consumers, assured its support to the farmers' development goals.

"Once you have completed the training, we will assist you in obtaining a

bank loan with zero percent interest to start your agricultural enterprise," Elvin Laceda, CEO, RiceUp Farmers Inc. and president of Young Farmers Challenge Club Inc., told farmers.

The farmers conveyed their gratitude for empowering them and providing avenues for them who are seeking to engage in agribusiness.

The AFP expressed appreciation to RiceUP Farmers Inc. for the partnership and volunteerism to bring opportunities closer to the farmers.

The Nolcom said the training will ensure the success of the training program for farmers and will foster community development and establish peace and prosperity in rural areas.

FRANCISCO TUYAY



Farming fintech wins P1-M SPC grant

BY CORA LLAMAS

FARMVOCACY, a Mindoro Island-based social climate fintech (financial technology) startup running a circular inclusive business model to support an environment-friendly and high-yielding farming system, bagged the P1-million funding grant during the Final Pitch Day of Shell LiveWIRE 2023.

Shell LiveWIRE is the flagship enterprise development program of energy giant Shell Pilipinas Corp. (SPC), with the vision to strengthen local economies by promoting entrepreneurship, innovation and meaningful employment.

Vincent Roy Mendoza, the chief executive officer of Farmvocacy, shared how their advocacy of ensuring a sustainable future has been empowered by Shell LiveWIRE which validated "... that what you're thinking and what

you're trying to innovate can actually contribute to creating better lives for us and specifically more to the future generations."

Farmvocacy's vision came from two objectives: to provide incentives for the farmers aside from an increased harvest and to encourage them to take care of the environment. It also addresses the farmers' perennial challenge of decreased revenue as they are often forced to sell their crops at very low prices.

Farmvocacy, in return, offers the

following solutions. First, it provides the farmers adequate storage where they can safely store their yield, avoiding spoilage and thus enabling them to consistently supply the market at fair prices. It also connects them to a community of fellow farmers for mutual support.

Mendoza described the new cycle they are introducing: "The farmers can deposit their harvest in the storage to maintain the quality." Because they have more chances of earning more, "farmers can have seed capital for the next cycle."

Farmvocacy has also invested in teaching the farmers "climate-smart farming" which can increase their yield by 51 percent and raise their revenue by 16 percent while reducing carbon emission from their processes by 30 percent.

Promoting local growth

Climate-smart farming is de-

veloped in techno-farms where farmers can see firsthand its difference with traditional farming, comparing the two.

In the next 18 months, Mendoza said the startup is planning to target 20 percent of the overall market which is worth \$277 million. A more immediate goal is to raise \$600,000 to help 15 small farmers improve their processes and their earnings while making them more aware of their environmental impact.

Farmvocacy was among Shell LiveWIRE 2023's top three finalists out of 200 candidates. The other two were Lithos Manufacturing OPC, a producer and trader of industrial and feed-grade minerals, such as calcium carbonate, zeolite and bentonite; and Lycan Motorcycles, a Filipino motorcycle and technology startup that is developing two-wheeled electric

motorcycles and smart products.

"Shell LiveWIRE remains committed to its vision of promoting local growth by empowering individuals and communities," said Serge Bernal, SPC vice president for corporate relations. "This is why it remains our flagship development program."

Since it launched in 2020, Shell LiveWIRE has helped 42 innovators and business owners through the Acceleration Program. Twelve of these enterprises have entered SPC's supply chain. The program's equipping of tech startups and community enterprises has led to creating more than 500 local jobs for Filipinos.

Judges for Shell LiveWIRE's Final Pitch Day were Geraldine Samson, real estate facilities manager of SPC; Rui Bom, a resident mentor of 500 Start-

ups; Emmy Lou Versoza-Delfin, director for ICT Development Bureau of the Department of Information and Communications Technology; Liezl Sueño, senior technology transfer officer of Department of Science and Technology; and Sebastian Quinioñes Jr., Pilipinas Shell Foundation Inc.'s executive director.

Rafelita Aldaba, PhD, Department of Trade and Industry undersecretary for the Competitiveness and Innovation Group, acknowledged the work of both winners and finalists, saying that they "showcase a dedication to sustainability, covering a wide range of innovations from industries like transportation and innovations for climate and smart agriculture — leading us on into our future without limits." She added, "Let's all rally behind innovation that really inspires."

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Tech startup Farmvocracy was awarded the grand prize of P1 million at the Shell LiveWIRE 2023 Final Pitch Day.
PHOTO FROM SPC



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ASF gumapang sa 6 bayan ng Cagayan

Anim na bayan sa lalawigan ng Cagayan ang nakapagtala ng African Swine Fever (ASF) ngayon buwan, ayon sa Cagayan Provincial Veterinary Office (CPVO) kahapon.

Sa pahayag ni CPVO veterinarian II officer Dr. Myka Ponce, ang mga bayan na mayroong kaso ng ASF ay Barangay Angaoang and Santo Tomas, Tuao; Bauan West, Solana; Plaza, Aparri; Iringan, Allacapan; Namuccayan, Santo Nino, kabilang ang Catugan at Malanao sa Lal-lo.

Ayon kay Ponce, nasa 16 na alagang baboy na may ASF ang puwersahang pinatay at ibinaon para hindi na ito makahawa pa sa iba pang baboy.

Sinabi ng CPVO, naglagay na ng mga checkpoint sa iba't ibang lugar sa lalawigan upang bantayan ang pagpasok ng mga baboy sa nasabing probinsya. (Allan Bergonia)