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Rice surplus at 2.98MMT

BY WENDELL VIGILIA

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) yesterday reported to the House of Representatives the country's rice production this year has increased by 0.22 percent compared to last year.

DA assistant secretary Arnel De Mesa told the House committee on agriculture and food that as of November 14, the country has a supply surplus of 2.98 million metric tons (MMT) which would last for 80 days.

The DA briefed lawmakers on the status of the country's sufficiency in rice, corn, livestock, poultry, vegetables and other key commodities.

The DA's 2022 rice supply and demand outlook as of September 15 last year was at 17.364 MMT, while the total annual usage is at 15.137 MMT, which meant that there was ending stock of 2.228 MMT equivalent to 60 days.

De Mesa earlier said the DA was not expecting any increase in the prices of rice.

DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., for his part, assured lawmakers the agency is doing its part to avoid a deficit in the supply of key commodities, including onions, especially with the holiday season nearing.

Laurel, who earlier admitted that the P20 per kilo of rice that President Marcos Jr. promised during his campaign remains unattainable

as of now, also vowed that the price surge of onion in 2022 will not happen again under his watch.

He noted that red onion prices stood at P140 per kilo, while white onions were at P110 per kilo, a far cry from the P700 per kilo in December last year.

"I'm closely monitoring this and we will do action so there won't be a repeat of what happened last year," Laurel told the panel chaired by Quezon Rep. Mark Enverga, who said, "Thank you for that assurance."

Laurel added that President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s marching order was to increase the agriculture sector's productivity, saying "this shall be the goal of the department with the invaluable help of our legislators."

The DA has projected a price range of P41 to P48 per kilo from most rice retailers come December, or the height of the holiday season.

Camarines Sur Rep. Lusi Raymond Villafuerte said rice prices of P20 and P30 a kilo remain doable starting next year, if the government will adopt his proposed "novel palay (unhusked rice) productivity program."

It involves the grant of a pre-planting subsidy of P40,000 per hectare to target farmer-beneficiaries who are tilling a total of a million hectares in the country's 10 biggest palay-producing provinces.

He said his proposed subsidy, which will cost the government

P45 billion, can only be given to farmers on condition that they will sell their produce to the government at P9 a kilo.

"With a projected total yield of 5 billion kilograms of palay from the one million (farmers), based on an average output of five metric tons or 5,000 kg per hectare, this novel subsidy-cum-contract-growing proposal will translate into three billion kilograms of rice, at the palay-to-rice, after-milling conversion rate of 60 percent," said Villafuerte.

Villafuerte said buying the farmers' produce after giving them P40,000 each before the start of the planting season "will encourage the target beneficiaries to produce more from their respective farms, as they will be paid P9 for every kilo of palay they are able to produce."

To further incentivize the farmer-beneficiaries to produce more of the grain from their croplands, he said cash prizes or farm machinery like power tillers and harvesters, fertilizers and other inputs can be offered under this rice productivity plan to the beneficiary-farmers garnering the highest per-hectare yields in the chosen provinces.

Cash prizes or other rewards can likewise be given to the local government units of the provinces where their farmer-beneficiaries achieved the highest yields per hectare of land, Villafuerte added.



DA: Importers lose SPSIC if rice not here in 30 days

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS [@jearcalas](#)

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on Monday warned that he will cancel all the sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSICs) of rice importers if their approved import volume would not arrive in the country in the next 30 days.

Laurel made the warning during a House Committee on Agriculture and Food after lawmakers asked him about the country's rice import situation.

Laurel disclosed that there are about 1 million metric tons (MMT) of rice issued with sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSICs) that are valid to enter the country.

"I actually asked the Bureau of Plant Industry how many applications are pending for rice imports and what they told me is that about 1 million metric tons are for importation. I asked them when it was

issued and they said it was issued from time to time because it is already liberalized. When I asked when it is going to be imported, they could not provide an answer," he told the committee on Monday, speaking partly in Filipino.

Ultimatum to importers

LAUREL revealed that he has instructed someone from the agriculture department to meet the rice importers to discuss the rice import situation.

"I said if they will not import those within 30 days, if they will not give a [purchase order], I will



LAUREL

cancel all the [SPSICs] because I do not want to be held hostage by permits that were issued to them upon their request," he said in a mix of Filipino and English.

Since the passage of Republic Act 11203 or the rice trade liberalization (RTL) law, the country's rice trade regime has been deregulated and opened up to foreign competition.

Under the landmark legislation, eligible rice importers would only need to secure a SPSIC from the BPI to be able to bring in foreign rice in the country. A SPSIC is a document that certifies that an inbound shipment is safe to human and animal health.

The same law stipulated that an import application must be acted upon by the BPI within seven days.

If there are no justified reasons to reject an importer's SPSIC application, then their applications are automatically approved after the above-stated time period.

The past leaderships of the agriculture department tried to manage the arrival of rice imports in the country by not issuing SPSICs to importers, a move that was questioned by pundits.

Latest BPI data showed that it formally issued 3,591 SPSICs with a total equivalent import volume of 3.341 million metric tons of rice.

Laurel's 30-day deadline to rice importers is way shorter than the prevailing must-arrive period set by the agriculture department.

Under Memorandum Circular 43 series of 2020, rice imports coming from Asean countries except Myanmar must enter the country within 60 days from the issuance of their respective SPSICs. Rice shipments from Myanmar and other outside Asean nations must arrive within 90 days.

The country's rice imports as of November 9 has reached 2.858 million metric tons, latest BPI data showed.

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DA chief urged to 'withdraw' reclamation project allegedly controlled by his family

FISHERFOLK group Pam-bansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) urged Department of Agriculture (DA) chief Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. to "withdraw" a 420-hectare reclamation project in Bacoar City, Cavite allegedly controlled by his family.

Pamalakaya made the call despite Tiu Laurel's earlier statement that he has divested from his business interests.

Tiu Laurel was the former President of the Frabelle Fishing Corp., the alleged proponent of the aforementioned reclamation project in Manila Bay.

The reclamation has reportedly displaced more than 700 fishing and urban poor families in Bacoar City, while at least 1,000 fishing households are still under the threat of displacement, according to Pamalakaya.

"He might have personally divested from Frabelle Fishing Corp., but that doesn't mean that he has completely lost influence over his family-owned business. We urge Agriculture Secretary Tiu-Laurel Jr. to withdraw Frabelle's reclamation project in Manila Bay because

of its adverse impacts on fishing communities and fishing waters. Since the project officially started in 2020, fishers have experienced a significant loss of income," Ronnel Arambulo, Pamalakaya vice chair and spokesperson said in a statement.

As DA secretary, Arambulo said it should be the utmost priority of Tiu to ensure that sources of our agri-fisheries products are intact.

"It should be a no-brainer for Secretary Tiu-Laurel Jr. that dump-and-fill activities and massive displacement of fisherfolk are a scourge to local food production," Arambulo said.

Fishers and coastal residents have been fighting the Bacoar reclamation project, which has led to the lodging of an Ombudsman complaint against then-Bacoar City Mayor Lani Mercado-Revilla in 2019 due to her "approval of the destructive project and violation of several environmental laws."

Aside from the Bacoar City reclamation project, the fishers' group also called on the DA to reject all the reclamation projects across the country, which has been affecting fisheries production.

Jonathan L. Mayuga

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DA, top 10 rice-producing provinces agree to lower prices

By JEL SANTOS

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. and governors of the top 10 rice-producing provinces in the country have agreed to bring down rice prices by boosting production.

The agriculture department noted that the 10 provinces account for 48 percent of the Philippines' total rice production. The provinces are Nueva Ecija, Isabela, Maguindanao del Sur, Pangasinan, Cagayan, Bukidnon, Tarlac, Camarines Sur, North Cotabato, and Iloilo.

"Participants in the meeting agreed to coordinate efforts to bring rice prices down by increasing production. They also agreed ► 5

to meet regularly," the agriculture department said in a statement released on Monday, Nov. 20.

Last Nov. 17, the new Department of Agriculture secretary said he met with the governors from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao in San Juan City.

Laurel said he was pleased with the outcome of the meeting, adding that "everybody has the same idea..."

"Nagkaroon ng konting deliberation lang. Ang bilis nga (We had a short deliberation. It was so fast)," he said.

According to the governors, the consultative meeting was a "good first step toward a concerted effort to boost rice production."

Laurel has vowed to meet with agricultural groups as part of President Marcos' objective of modernizing agriculture to ensure the country's food security, farm products are properly priced, and

farmers and fishers are pulled out of poverty.

For his part, Nueva Ecija Gov. Aurelio Umali, whose province is the biggest producer of rice accounting for nine percent of the national production, said he appreciated Laurel's effort to "touch base" with stakeholders.

"This is the first time that local government units are being given the opportunity to address the concerns of their respective provinces. I believe that this kind of leadership he is starting will benefit not only my province but also the country's food security," he added.

Also present in the meeting were Agriculture Undersecretaries DV Savelano and Roger Navarro, the officer in charge of operations, as well as Ramon Lim of the Private Sector Advisory Council (PSAC).



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2022 onion price surge won't happen under my watch – DA chief

By ELLSON QUISMORIO

Not on my watch.

Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. gave his personal assurance to congressmen Monday morning, Nov. 20 that the absurd price surge on onions that was witnessed last year won't happen again.

Laurel—in his first appearance in the House of Representatives as DA head honcho—attended a briefing of the Committee on Agriculture and Food chaired by Quezon 1st district

Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga.

During the briefing, Enverga alluded to the onion price surge during the last quarter of 2022 that caused great burden on consumers. Back then, onions retailed for as high as ₱700 a kilo—making them more expensive than meat.

Laurel told the panel that as of Monday, red onion prices stood at ₱140 per kilo while white onions were at ₱110 per kilo.

"Your honor, basically the data coming from DA is being brought up to me everyday; I myself have my own set

of data sources from my old life. I confirm that the price of sibuyas pula (red onions) today is ₱140, ang sibuyas puti (for white onions) is ₱110," Laurel said.

"I'm closely monitoring this and we will do action para hindi na mangyari yung nangyari noong nakaraang taon (so that what happened last year won't happen again)," added the DA chief.

"Thank you for that assurance," Enverga happily replied.

"We were assured last year—just for the information of the information of the good secretary—na by August,

we were 114 percent self-sufficient sa onion noon (we would have been 114 percent self-sufficient on onion)," the Quezon solon shared.

"But unfortunately pagdating ng December, and laki pala ng discrepancy (when December came, the discrepancy was so big)," Enverga said.

Fishing tycoon Laurel was tapped as agriculture chief last Nov. 3. He took over the DA reins from President Marcos himself.

The Laurel family owns the 57-year-old Frabelle Fishing Corporation.



Fish imports not seen offsetting impact of closed season, fuel prices

FISH IMPORTS will not make up for the impact of closed fishing seasons and the dampening of fishing activity due to high fuel prices, the Department of Agriculture (DA) told a House of Representatives committee on Monday.

"The fish resources of our country are actually depleted," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. told the House agriculture and food committee. "The import request... of 35,000 metric tons (MT) this year is not enough."

The Philippine fish supply is projected to be in deficit by 358,977 MT in the fourth quarter, widening by 20.77% from the previous quarter, Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel V. de Mesa told legislators.

The deficit is equivalent to 38 days' demand, he said.

In an Aug. 15 memorandum circular, the DA said that the Philippines will import frozen round scad or *galunggong*, big-eye scad, mackerel, bonito, and moonfish for sale in wet markets.

The closed fishing season for sardines in northern Palawan and Zamboanga Peninsula started this month and will run until Jan. 31 and Feb. 15 next year, respectively.

Under the Philippine Fisheries Code, closed fishing seasons are declared over certain fisheries to help fish stocks regenerate.

Mr. Tiu Laurel also said that high fuel prices caused by the war in Ukraine have discouraged commercial and municipal fishermen from leaving port.

"A lot of fleets just stop fishing if they see (poor) yields. Usually, in commercial fishing, we stop at around November, but now, as early as September, others have been stopping," Mr. Tiu Laurel, a former commercial fisherman, said.

Meanwhile, rice production rose 0.22% year on year to 3.80 million MT, Mr. De Mesa said.

He said rice supply of 7 million MT is currently "larger than demand," which was estimated at 4.02 million MT for the fourth quarter of the year, implying a rice surplus of 2.98 million MT.

Land planted to rice declined 0.51% year on year to 926,923 hectares (ha) in the third quarter, Mr. De Mesa said.

He also said that the DA is expecting 176,932 MT of imported rice to arrive in the fourth quarter.

"To date our imports have totaled 2.86 million MT. This is very significant reduction versus (a year earlier), when imports were at 3.8 million MT," he said.

Albay Rep. Jose Ma. Clemente S. Salceda said that a campaign promise made by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. to lower rice prices to P20 per kilogram is "not impossible" with subsidies.

"We can set up a subsidy fund for it. If there's no NFA (National Food Authority), then somebody can do it. If he wants (rice that costs) P20, it's not impossible," he told the committee. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**



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Sibuyas bomalabs umabot uli ng ₱700 per kilo

TINIYAK ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. na hindi aabot sa ₱700 ang kada kilo ng sibuyas gaya noong nakaraang taon sa ilalim ng kanyang pamumuno.

Sa isinagawang briefing nitong Lunes, nagtanong si House Committee on Agriculture and Food chairperson at Quezon Rep. Mark En-

verga kaugnay ng presyo ng sibuyas na biglang tumaa ang presyo noong huling bahagi ng 2022.

Ayon kay Laurel ang presyo ng sibuyas ngayon ay ₱140 kada kilo at ang puting sibuyas ay ₱110 kada kilo.

Your honor, basically the data coming from DA is being brought up to me everyday. I myself

have my own set of data sources from my old life. I confirm that the price of sibuyas pula today is ₱140, ang sibuyas puti is ₱110," sabi ni Laurel.

"I'm closely monitoring this and we will do action para hindi na mangyari yung nangyari noong nakaraang taon," dagdag pa ni Laurel.

Nagpasalamat naman si Enverga sa ginawang pagtitiyak ni Laurel pero ipinaalala nito ang nangyari noong nakaraang taon. **(Billy Begas)**



SC to hear today fishing companies' arguments to stop implementation of IUUF, VMS measures

By JOEL R. SAN JUAN

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THE Supreme Court (SC) will resume today, Tuesday, the oral argument on the petition filed by the government, through the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG), seeking to set aside a 2021 ruling issued by the Regional Trial Court of Malabon City, which declared the Fisheries Administrative Order (FAO) No. 266, unconstitutional.

FAO No. 266 mandates fishing vessels to report their catches through a vessel monitoring system (VMS) and an electronic reporting system (ERS) in order to curb illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing (IUUF).

The respondents fishing companies—Royal Fishing Corporation, Bonanza Fishing and Market Resources Inc. and RBL Fishing

Corporation—through their counsel, lawyer Arnold D. Naval are expected to be interpellated by the magistrates on their position that FAO No. 266 is unconstitutional.

The fishing companies argued that information on the fishing grounds of fishing companies constitute trade secrets and the mandatory installation of real-time VMS under FAO 266 violated the

fishing companies' right to privacy and unlawful searches.

He added that FAO 266 violates the equal protection clause of the Constitution by regulating only commercial fishing vessels and leaving the regulation of municipal fishing vessels to the discretion of local government units.

Likewise, they maintained that FAO 266 violates the constitutional right against unlawful searches, noting that the constant real-time monitoring facilitated by VMS amounts to an unwarranted and unconstitutional intrusion, conducted without probable cause or judicial authorization.

However, OSG warned resources in the country's fishing grounds would continue to decline due to IUUF if FAO No. 266 is not immediately implemented.

Solicitor General Menardo Guevarra noted that the value of Philippine exports of fishing products amounting to around \$1 billion in 2021 has significantly declined over the years.

He added the country has a

commitment under various treaties and agreements to implement conservation and management measures for the protection of the marine environment and the long-term sustainable use of living marine resources.

Guevarra said the country stands to lose access to foreign markets for its fish exports if we fail to comply with our obligations under these treaties and agreements.

He said around \$320 million worth of fish products bound to Europe every year are in danger of being rejected if the Philippine government fails to certify that such fish products were not caught through IUUF.

Guevarra also denied the claim of the respondents that FAO 266 violated their right to privacy and unreasonable searches.

He said a fishing vessel's fishing area, fish catches and spoilage, landing points and estimated quantity and value of fish caught have long been required to be recorded and reported to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

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Shortages in key food stocks seen by yearend

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

[@jearcalas](#)

THE Philippines could end the year with thin or deficit stocks in key commodities like pork, fish, corn and onion as overall supply falls short of the country's total demand.

The country may suffer shortages in corn, onion and fish while it could face a thin supply of pork by the end of the year, according to the Department of Agriculture's (DA) presentation during a House Committee on Agriculture and Food hearing.

The DA's presentation showed that the country would have a 712,206 metric tons (MT) deficit in corn supply

intended for feed consumption at the end of the year, which is equivalent to 31 days of stocks.

The country's total corn supply, which takes into account both local production and imports, is estimated at 7.667 million metric tons (MMT), 8.5 percent lower than the 8.379 MMT overall estimated demand of the feed industry.

Broken down, 5.379 MMT would come from local corn production while the remaining 2.287 MMT would be imported feedstock, a combination of both yellow corn and feed wheat.

The country is estimated to import 505,195 MT in yellow corn and

1.782 MMT in feed wheat this year to somehow fill the gap in its shortfall of feed supply, according to the DA.

The DA presentation indicated that the country could face a 38-day shortfall in fish supply.

Based on the department's estimates, total fish supply this year is pegged at 3.267 MMT, insufficient to meet the 3.625 MMT estimated total demand.

The DA's presentation pegged local production at 2.928 MMT while imports could reach 338,798 MT.

For onion, the country is expected to suffer a three-day shortage as total supply of 285,781 MT falls short of meeting the 288,018 MT total es-

timated demand, DA presentation showed. The country's estimated onion supply deficit is at 2,237 MT.

For the first time in history, the Philippines suffered an "onion crisis" late last year until earlier this year due to "insufficient" stocks, causing retail prices to shoot over P500 per kilogram.

Meanwhile, the country's pork supply would just be ample to meet the population's total demand, ending the year with a surplus of 4,907 MT or good for one day stock.

Based on the DA's estimates, total pork supply this year is around 1.624 MMT while demand is at 1.62 MMT.



Bigas papalo hanggang P48 per kilo sa December

Inaasahan ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na maglalaro sa P41 hanggang P48 per kilo ang presyo ng bigas sa Disyembre.

Sa isinagawang briefing nitong Lunes, Nobyembre 20, nagtanong si House committee on agriculture and food chairperson at Quezón Rep. Mark Enverga kaugnay ng 'price prediction for rice' ng DA para sa susunod na buwan.

Sinabi ni DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa na inaasahan nila na ang presyo ng well-milled rice ay P48 kada kilo habang nasa P41 hanggang P43 naman ang regular milled rice.

Ayon kay De Mesa, inani na ang mahigit 95% ng mga palay sa bansa at karamihan sa mga ito ay nabili sa P20 hanggang P23 kada kilo. Ang nalalabi umano ay premium grade na ng bigas.

Tinanong ni Enverga kung mayroong sapat na suplay ng bigas sa unang bahagi ng 2024 at kinumpirma naman ito ni De Mesa.

"As I mentioned, going into first quarter, our production is 90 days. Right now it's 80 days without additional imports," dagdag pa ni De Mesa. **(Billy Begas)**



Shrimp, shark washed ashore no link to Mindanao quake – BFAR

CEBU CITY – A fishery technician of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) yesterday said the appearance of tiny shrimps and megamouth sharks along Leyte and Negros Oriental shorelines has no connection with the 6.8 magnitude quake that struck portions of Mindanao last week.

Johann Tejada, technical assistant of BFAR-Central Visayas, said the washing ashore of crustaceans was a sign that the biodiversity of the coastal water is clean thus complementing the marine

life in an area.

Tejada made the comment following videos that went viral on social media showing residents gathering shrimps along the shoreline of Bgy. San Vicente in Hindang, Leyte.

"One reason is the complex dynamics at sea. In general, quality seawater has an impact on marine life. Quality seawater also means food that can make the marine life in an area productive," Tejada said in Cebuano.

He also said the emergence of megamouth

sharks found washed ashore at District 2 of Silago, Southern Leyte, and Bgy. Domolog in Bindoy, Negros Oriental could not also be associated scientifically with the earthquake that struck Sarangani last week.

Another megamouth shark was washed ashore in Aurora.

Giant fish would usually wash ashore if their navigational sensory organs went dysfunctional and became disoriented while chasing their food such as small fish and shrimps, he said.

"Marine mammals are

the most vulnerable to being washed ashore due to diseases from ingesting garbage at sea," he said.

Meanwhile, Tejada said there is no existing red tide ban on Cebu coasts following a negative test result in Madridejos seawater.

He also said that the "closed fishing season" covering sardines, mackerel, and herrings – which took effect on Nov. 15 and will end on Feb. 15 next year – in the Visayan Sea was to allow these species to propagate. (PNA)

MEGAMOUTH SHARK. A dead megamouth shark is washed ashore in Southern Leyte. Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources-Central Visayas technical assistant Johann Tejada yesterday advised the public not to worry about the latest phenomenon where shrimps and megamouth sharks emerged at the shoreline in three different places in the Visayas as it has no connection with the earthquake that struck parts of Mindanao on Nov. 17, 2023. Screenshot from Facebook video/PNA





FIRST PERSON

ALEX MAGNO

Merger

Competition is usually a good thing. It curbs profiteering, encourages innovation and, as a general rule, protects consumers.

That should not be dogma, however. There are business conditions where bigness or market dominance serves the community better.

First, there are natural monopolies. These are industries where the barriers to entry are so high that consumers are better served by a single provider. An example of this is electricity distribution. It is uneconomical for rival firms to compete in the same market.

Then there are natural oligopolies. Our telecoms industry, for example, cannot take more than the three major players already in the game. A new entrant will need to invest in redundant infrastructure that may not be supportable by the market.

There are instances where merging the major players works better for consumers. Such mergers may create economies of scale and encourage investment in new technologies.

An example here is the impending merger between the Philippine Clearing House Corporation (PCHC) and Bancnet. The two companies are clearing switch operators for PESONet and InstaPay, respectively. The two use new digital technologies to hasten payments and settlement.

Although they may look alike at first glance, the two companies are distinct from each other. PESONet is a batch electronic fund transfer (ETF) credit payment scheme. It is the electronic alternative to the traditional paper-based check system.

On the other hand, Instapay is a real-time low-value ETF credit push scheme for transactions amounting to P50,000 or less. This is the scheme that makes possible the extensive ATM banking system we now have in place. The ATM system benefits the consumers because the service is available all hours. It benefits the banks because of its labor-saving features.

Therefore, the two entities are not really competitors.

Combining the two entities will make transferring funds more efficient for everybody. The merger of the two will allow a company with more financial resources to invest in further innovation.

Some might fear that the merger might result in higher transfer fees and lower quality of service for end users. This is unlikely. The shareholders of these two entities are also direct customers. They are interested in achieving greater efficiency in fund transfers. They want the merger to happen precisely to achieve the corporate size capable of investing in new technologies.



Fund transfers are the most common services used by Filipinos. It is unlikely that the banks will want higher, rather than lower transaction costs for these services.

Furthermore, the merger will open the door for other non-bank financial institutions to become shareholders. The resulting broader ownership base will foster a wider array of services offered.

This merger is a classic case where the pooling of resources will produce better synergy beneficial to all consumers.

Out-of-the-box

A legislator has offered a plan to bring down rice prices to P20 per kilo for the poor and P30 for all consumers. It is a plan that involves some out-of-the-box calculations.

In place of the scattershot distribution of P40 billion in subsidies to the rice industry, Rep. L-Ray Villafuerte proposes a scheme where one million hectares of riceland will be engaged in a contract-growing arrangement. This scheme will concentrate on the top ten rice producing provinces.

Under the Villafuerte plan, government hands out P40,000 per hectare to rice farmers before the planting season begins. The amount may be in cash or in fertilizers and seeds for high-yield varieties. In exchange, the farmers agree to sell the palay harvested to government at only P9 per kilo. The higher the yield per hectare, the more the farmers will earn.

This scheme, says Villafuerte, will bring down retail prices for rice to close to P20 per kilo. He estimates that, based on an average output of five metric tons of palay per hectare, on a post-milling conversion rate of 60 percent, it will yield three billion kilos of rice. Government can then sell half of that output through the Kadiwa network at P20 per kilo. The balance can be sold through regular retail outlets for P30 per kilo.

Villafuerte speaks from his experience as three-term governor of Camarines Sur. During that time, the province rose from being the 12th biggest rice producer in 2008 to 8th place by 2011. By 2016, Camarines Sur had become the 4th biggest producer of rice.

In addition to the P40 billion for pre-harvest rice contracting, the Villafuerte plan requires government to set aside another P45 billion for palay procurement. The amount will be recovered after retail sales. By his computation, rice prices could be dramatically brought down by next year.

To further sweeten the pie, Villafuerte also proposes that cash prizes or other rewards be given to local governments where rice production achieves the highest yields per hectare. The additional incentives should get local governments directly involved in raising domestic rice production.

Villafuerte estimates that government will earn P30 billion from selling 1.5 billion kilos of rice at P20 per kilo and P45 billion more from selling the other 1.5 billion kilos at P30 per kilo. That makes for a total of P75 billion in government earnings. At the end of the cycle, government outlay will amount to only P10 billion – about the equivalent of what government collects from rice tariffs.

In exchange, the legislator argues, the scheme should boost local rice production and lessen our dependence on imports. We still await the reaction of farmers to this proposal.

This is an audacious plan to be sure.

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Price hikes not seen to slow, India rice export ban is key

AS the year of high inflation comes to a close, Filipinos may not be able to see price increases slow down next year, especially with the recent decision of India to extend its rice export ban to 2024.

Rice, the country's food staple, could remain expensive next year given the ban on exports of the commodities.

The ban imposed by India could make the international prices of rice elevated, at least by the middle of 2024.

Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) Senior Research Fellow Roehlano Briones said, however, that this

is not considered a major shock since current prices have already incorporated this.

"This was expected owing to the timing of their election. The high price limits imports which domestic production has been unable to compensate for. Rice prices will remain elevated and temporarily boost inflation," Briones told BUSINESSMIRROR on Monday.

"Nothing much to do except perhaps [provide] targeted food safety net for the poor such as food stamp. In the long run, pursue productivity growth in rice industry," he added.

SEE "PRICE," A2

Price...CONTINUED FROM A1

Monetary Board Member Bruce J. Tolentino noted that the elections in India is within the April-May period in 2024. He expects that once the election blows over, the ban could be lifted and international rice prices could ease.

Tolentino said, however, that the ban is not a total ban. He said the Government of India decided to honor its existing contracts. This includes government-to-government discussions that it has had with its partners.

The Philippines is one of those who will benefit from this arrangement. Tolentino, therefore said, it remains imperative for the country to "keep and even deepen diplomatic discussions with India to ensure continued supplies."

This should cushion the impact of expensive imported rice from hurting Filipino consumers too much in 2024. Tolentino also said the "very good harvest" will also mute the impact of high rice prices due to the ban.

"Global as well as domestic price levels for food as well as non-food items are always a factor to be monitored and considered [by the Monetary Board]. If India continues the

general ban on rice exports, that will keep global prices elevated," Tolentino told BUSINESSMIRROR on Monday.

Rice has a weight of 8.87 percent in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for All Income Households and as much as 17.87 percent in the basket of goods for the Bottom 30 percent of households.

In October, amid the slowdown in inflation to 4.9 percent, rice prices increased 13.2 percent for the All Income Households. Rice inflation for the Bottom 30 percent of households was higher at 14.8 percent.

Bloomberg reported that India is expected to extend its export ban for rice to 2024. This is expected to keep grain prices elevated "to its highest price levels since the food crisis of 2008."

However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who will seek reelection next year, has repeatedly tightened restrictions on shipments in a bid to curb domestic price rises and shield Indian consumers (**Full story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/11/20/india-seen-keeping-rice-export-bans-into-2024-holding-up-global-prices/>**). Cai U. Ordinario



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Palay prices up 18.1% in October

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE average farmgate price of palay (unmilled rice) increased by 18.1 percent to P20.60 per kilogram (kg) in October, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said on Monday.

Latest PSA data showed that the latest average price of palay is higher than the P17.44 per kg average recorded in October 2022.

Likewise, the P20.60 per kg

is 3.4 percent higher than the P19.91 per kg average in September 2023.

The PSA said that 15 regions, except the National Capital Region, continued to record positive

year-on-year growth rates in the average farmgate prices of palay in October this year.

Only the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) posted a decrease in farmgate prices by 4.0 percent to P17.36 per kg.

Northern Mindanao (Region 10) registered the highest annual increase of 29.2 percent, and the highest palay farmgate price average of P23.56 per kg. The Ilocos Region (Region 1) and Davao Re-

gion (Region 11) followed with an average price of P22.92 per kg and P21.73 per kg of palay, respectively.

On a monthly basis, 10 regions recorded increases in the average farmgate prices of palay, while five regions posted decreases during the month.

Meanwhile, Cagayan Valley (Region 2) remained at its September 2023 average farmgate price of P21.30 per kg. The highest month-on-month growth was registered in BARMM at 30.5 percent.

The highest monthly decrease was posted in Caraga (Region 13) at 3.8 percent.

Michael Ricafort, chief economist at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., attributed the higher prices of palay to costly farm inputs, adding these also reflected higher world rice prices.

"Higher palay prices year on year may partly reflect higher input costs, as well as the upward adjustments made by local authorities to support farmers in terms of higher

incomes," he said.

Ricafort also cited the risk of El Niño that could reduce rainfall and affect palay output and, in turn, could lead to some pick up in rice prices as seen last October.

"Though there is no large storm damage in October 2023, some storm damage from late July 2023 to early September 2023 could have led to some adverse spillover effects into October 2023 in terms of some reduction in palay output," said Ricafort.



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Palay farmgate average price rises 18.1% in Oct.

THE farmgate price of palay, or unmilled rice, rose 18.1% year on year to an average of P20.6 per kilogram in October, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The PSA reported that all regions except the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) posted increases in average farmgate prices during the period.

The highest farmgate price in October was reported in Northern Mindanao at P23.56 per kilo, up 29.2% from a year earlier.

This was followed by the Ilocos Region with average palay prices increasing 22.8% to P22.92 per kilo from a year earlier.

The lowest farmgate price was posted in BARMM, with farmgate prices of P17.36 per kilo. The region recorded the only year-on-year decline at 7.3%.

The National Food Authority in September approved higher buying prices for palay of P19-23 per kilo for dry grain and P16-19 per kilo for wet. The previous buying price for palay was P16 per kilo wet and P19 per kilo dry.

On a month-on-month basis, the PSA said that the average farmgate price rose 3.5% from September.

The PSA said 10 regions saw higher farmgate prices of palay month on month, while five regions posted declines. — **Adrian H. Halili**



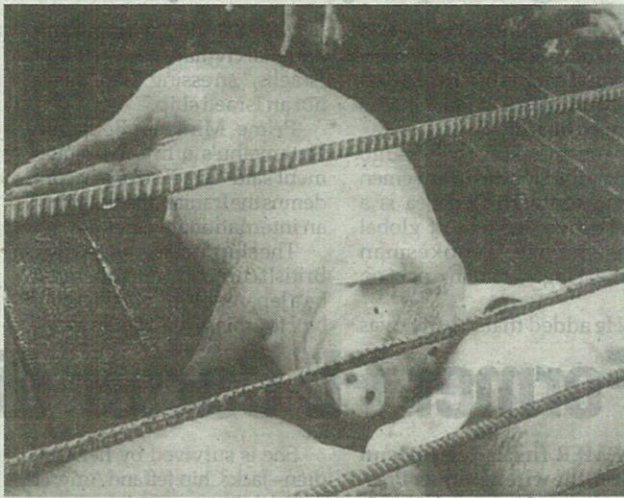
Iloilo swine supply dips to 33.12% due to ASF

ILOILO CITY – Iloilo has to import pork free from African swine fever (ASF) to address the demand of consumers in the province as the swine sufficiency went down to 33.12 percent, records of the Provincial Veterinarian's Office showed.

"In terms of swine inventory, we are almost short of our local production. Before ASF, our swine inventory was 277,421. As of today, we have 75,478, a reduction of 203,672. This means more or less 73 percent of our swine inventory in the province was lost," Provincial Veterinarian Dr. Darel Tabuada said in an interview Friday.

The province was 289 percent sufficient before the ASF.

Citing the Nov. 6, 2023 data, Tabuada attributed the decline of supply to swine deaths due to ASF and farmers disposing of their stocks rather than taking the risk of being hit



by the contagious disease in response to the campaign to reduce inventory.

The reduced stocks resulted in the hike in prices of hogs, which is at P359 per kilogram for pork and P214 for live weight.

"It will stabilize once we have huge stocks coming in from other provinces and countries. Considering the

buying capacity of consumers, when the price gets too high, they will divert their other sources of protein, like chicken," he added.

From January until November, the province brought in 15,064 heads and 3,420,299.5 kilograms of frozen and processed food from other provinces across the country. PNA

Ngayong araw na ito ay ibabahagi ko sa inyo ang rooftop garden na pinangalanang Lettuce ni Vien Greenhouse na makikita sa North Calocan City.

Hydroponics method ang ginagawang pagtatanim ng iba't ibang variety ng Lettuce si Erwin Agua sa kanyang rooftop garden.

Ipinangalan ni Erwin sa kanyang anak na lala-

sa kanyang lettuce farming.

"Farming is enjoyable and profitable," ani Erwin.

Stage by stage ang estilo ng pagtatanim ng lettuce ni Erwin para hindi siya mawalan ng supply at patuloy na makakaavail sa kanya ang marami na niyang suki.

Limang stages ang ginagawa ni Erwin, mula sa simpleng pagpupunta ng seeds, transplanting,

kanyang mga suki.

Nagka-conduct na rin ng tutorial/seminar training on lettuce farming si Erwin.

Bukod sa lettuce ay marami na ring tanim na strawberry si Erwin na kanyang ibinebenta sa mga nais magtanim at mag-alaga nito.

Nagsisimula na rin si Erwin ng kanyang pagtatanim ng grapes o ubas sa kanyang rooftop

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

Sa darating na araw ng Linggo, November 26, 2023 ay mapapanood ninyo ang panayam kay Erwin at garden tour sa programang Masaganang Buhay TV at Radio Show ng Magsasakang Reporter.

Samantala, para sa



Ang mga tanim ng lettuce ni Erwin.

Rooftop Garden...

LETTUCE NI VIEN GREENHOUSE

ki na si Vien ang kanyang garden.

Si Erwin ay Psychology graduate, Payroll Specialist, Full time BPO employee na may pagmamahal at malasakit sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman.

Bukod sa pagtatanim ay wine maker o gumagawa rin ng alak mula sa Lipote fruit si Erwin.

Ayon kay Erwin, mahilig siyang mag-research sa internet sa ano mang nais niyang matutuhan tulad ng pagtatanim ng lettuce sa hydroponics na pamamaraan.

Aniya, noong una ay trial and error siya sa pagtatanim pero ngayon ay na-perfect na niya at unti-unti na ring kumikita

pagpapalaki hanggang sa tuluyang pag-ani.

"Napag-aralan ko na mas maganda ang stage by stage na pagtatanim dahil anytime ay mayroon akong puwedeng anihin. Hindi tulad ng iba, by volume o isang bagsakan ang kanilang pagtatanim. Kaya kapag magha-harvest na sila ay maghihintay na naman ng mahigit sa isang buwan bago umani, samantalang ako ay Linggo-Linggo ay may ani, aniya.

Sinabi pa ni Erwin na noong una ay ginagamit niya ang social media at dinadala sa palengke ang kanyang harvest na lettuce para maibenta, pero ngayon ay siya na ang pinupuntahan ng

garden.

Sa pagbisita ng Masaganang Buhay Team ng Magsasakang Reporter sa garden ni Erwin ay dinatnan naming na siyang abala sa pagpapalawak pa ng kanyang hardin sa rooftop na nagkaroon na rin ng extension.

Hinihikayat ni Erwin ang lahat na magtanim na rin ng kanilang sariling pagkain.

Ani Erwin, nagawa niya ang pagtatanim kahit sila ay may trabaho, magagawa rin ng iba.

Sa mga nais bumili ng fresh na lettuce at mag-alaga ng strawberry na tanim ni Erwin, i-text lamang po ninyo siya sa 09154219870.

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

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

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

Sa mga tanong at komento ay maaari ninyo akong i-text, huwag po tawag, sa 09178675197. STAY SAFE, HAPPY FARMING, GOD BLESS US ALL.



Ang Magsasakang Reporter kasama si Erwin Agua sa kanyang Vien Rooftop Lettuce Garden.



Sugar prices rising worldwide

As El Niño hammers farms in Asia

Skyrocketing sugar prices left Ishaq Abdulraheem with few choices. Increasing the cost of bread would mean declining sales, so the Nigerian baker decided to cut his production by half.

For scores of other bakers struggling to stay afloat while enduring higher costs for fuel and flour, the stratospheric sugar prices proved to be the last straw, and they closed for good.

Sugar is needed to make bread, which is a staple for Nigeria's 210 million people, and for many who are struggling to put food on the table, it offers a cheap source of calories. Surging sugar prices – an increase of 55 percent in two months – means fewer bakers and less bread.

"It is a very serious situation," Abdulraheem said.

Sugar worldwide is trading at the highest prices since 2011, mainly due to lower global supplies after unusually dry weather damaged harvests in India and Thailand, the world's second- and third-largest exporters.

This is just the latest hit for developing nations already coping with shortages in staples like rice and bans on food trade that have added to food inflation. All of it contributes to food insecurity because of the combined effects of the naturally occurring climate phenomenon El Niño, the war in Ukraine and weaker currencies. Wealthier Western nations can absorb the higher costs, but poorer nations are struggling.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization is predicting a two percent decline in global sugar production in the 2023 to 2024 season, compared with the previous year, translating to a loss of about 3.5 million metric tons (3.8 million US tons), said Fabio Palmeri, an FAO global commodities market

researcher. Increasingly, sugar is being used for biofuels like ethanol, so global reserves of sugar are at their lowest since 2009.

Brazil is the biggest sugar exporter, but its harvest will only help plug gaps later in 2024. Until then, import-dependent countries – like most of those in sub-Saharan Africa – remain vulnerable.

Nigeria, for instance, buys 98 percent of its raw sugar from other countries. In 2021, it banned imports of refined sugar that ran counter to a plan to build up domestic sugar processing and announced a \$73-million project to expand sugar infrastructure. But those are longer-term strategies. Abuja traders like Abba Usman are facing problems now.

The same 50-kilogram (110-pound) bag of sugar that Usman bought a week ago for \$66 now costs \$81. As prices rise, his customers are dwindling.

"The price keeps increasing every day, and we don't know why," Usman said.

It's partly due to the El Niño, a natural phenomenon that shifts global weather patterns and can cause extreme weather conditions ranging from drought to flooding. Scientists believe climate change is making El Niño stronger.

India endured its driest August in over a century, and crops in the western state of Maharashtra, which accounts for over a third of its sugarcane production, were stunted during the crucial growing phase.

India's sugar production is likely to decline by eight percent this year, according to the Indian Sugar Mills Association. The world's most populated nation is also the biggest consumer of sugar and is now restricting



A vendor arranges packages of sugar at a market in Jakarta, Indonesia. Indonesia — the biggest sugar importer last year, according to the United States Department of Agriculture — has cut back on imports. AP

sugar exports.

In Thailand, El Niño effects early in the growing season altered not just the quantity but also the quality of the harvest, said Naradhip Anantasuk, leader of the Thailand Sugar Planters Association. He expects only 76 million metric tons (84 million US tons) of sugarcane to be milled in the 2024 harvest season, compared with 93 million metric tons (103 million US tons) this year.

A report by US Department of

Agriculture predicted a 15 percent dip in output in Thailand in October.

Thailand reversed a hike in sugar prices within days, imposing price controls for the first time since 2018. Anantasuk said this would discourage farmers from growing sugar by capping their income.

Wholesale prices had been allowed to rise to help farmers cope with higher costs – partly due to government demands that they not burn their fields, which makes har-

vesting cheaper but envelops much of Thailand in heavy smog.

The next few months are the greatest concern, said the Food and Agriculture Organization. Population growth and rising sugar consumption will further strain sugar reserves, he said.

The world now has less than 68 days of sugar in stockpiles to meet its needs, compared with 106 days when they began declining in 2020, according to data from the USDA. –AP

Malaya Business Insight

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Soybeans, wheat recover

SINGAPORE- Chicago soybean futures rose on Monday, recovering from two-week lows as strong Chinese demand underpinned prices, although expectations of rains in Brazil's dry oilseed growing areas limited the upside.

Corn and wheat futures edged higher.

"The beans complex is being supported by reports of dryness in Brazil, although prices have set back to a small extent with expected showers," said Pranav Bajoria, a director at Singapore-based commodities brokerage

Comglobal.

"A choppy weather market is expected to continue."

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) climbed 0.7 percent to \$13.50 a bushel, after dropping to the lowest since Nov. 3 at \$13.27 earlier in the session.

Corn rose 0.3 percent to \$4.68-1/2 a bushel and wheat gained 0.2 percent at \$5.76-3/4 a bushel.

China, the world's biggest soybean importer, has stepped up purchases of US beans. -Reuters



India's farmers wrestle with shift to eco-friendly agriculture

MUMBAI — Mumbai chauffeur Nutah Pathak is a farmer at heart.

Mr. Pathak, 44, migrated from his village in eastern Bihar state over two decades ago to work in the big city on the other side of the country, hoping to supplement his family's income reliant on wheat and rice from their 1.5-acre (0.6-hectare) farm.

His decision to leave paid off. Mr. Pathak's steady salary from the city job kept his family afloat even as crop yields dropped consistently due to the droughts and floods ravaging his farm.

"It either doesn't rain or it rains so much that it floods. We get just one yield every year. It wasn't like this when I was growing up," Mr. Pathak told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Now he leases his field to villagers who share half of any profit with him. But he would like to go back to his land if a push towards eco-friendly agriculture helps farmers cope with worsening climate pressures and pays off financially.

Agriculture is India's biggest employer, supporting the livelihoods of 250 million farmers and informal laborers — but their work is getting harder as climate change makes living off farming difficult, pushing up debt, migration and suicides.

Worries over falling yields have driven up the use of chemical fertilizers that are stripping the soil of nutrients and fueling agricultural emissions on a warming planet.

In response, green farming projects have taken root in India, where staple crops include rice, wheat, maize, sugarcane, cotton and groundnut. But experts say the scale and success hinges on how well the approach protects poor farmers' incomes.

"If you want to sustain agriculture as the biggest employer, and want to bring in sustainable farming, first bring living income to farmers," said Devinder Sharma, an independent expert on agricultural policy.

"As a nation, we need to move towards agro-ecology but these (sustainable farming projects)

will only bring about cosmetic changes until you provide farmers an assured income," he added.

A government-backed guaranteed price for natural produce, subsidies to cover losses and stronger marketing channels would all help, he said.

A TALE OF TWO FARMERS

Worldwide, rice is a staple food for more than 3 billion people while flooded paddy fields account for 12% of humanity's methane emissions — equivalent to 1.5% of total greenhouse gas emissions — according to the Asian Development Bank.

Asia-Pacific accounts for the highest emissions from agriculture, partly because of the region's rising use of synthetic fertilizers in rice cultivation, the bank says.

Farmers' incomes in India, the second-largest producer of rice globally after China, are wedded to paddy yields. That makes them reluctant to shift away from conventional methods of pumping fertilizers onto fields to raise production.

But farmer Jitendra Singh in northern India has made the switch from high fertilizer use, incentivised by the prospect of extra income from generating carbon credits through lower-emitting methods, which can be traded on international markets.

He no longer transplants paddy seedlings into flooded fields, but directly sows them into the soil. Besides reducing methane emissions, that has cut water use, time needed for sowing and the use of chemical herbicides and fertilizers.

On a rice farm in eastern Odisha state, however, Gurcharan Mahanta seems uninterested in a regional project to promote millet, a long-forgotten crop making a comeback because it is resilient to droughts fuelled by climate change.

Mr. Mahanta, 54, said his high-yielding hybrid rice variety fetched him a good price, which millet would not with a small consumer base. Growing paddy is also less labor-intensive.

"I go by the market demand," he said.

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS CURB GREEN SHIFT

More than 80% of farmers in India own less than five acres — and many keep spending on fertilizers and pesticides, hoping for good yields even though they face a crushing burden of debt.

Nearly 11,000 farmers, cultivators and agricultural laborers took their own lives in 2021, averaging about 30 deaths a day, with bankruptcy the leading cause, according to government data.

In a bid to support these smallholders and make farming more climate-friendly, India is promoting organic and natural farming, encouraging diversification to cut dependence on one major crop and incentivising solar-powered water pumps for irrigation to reduce the use of fossil fuel power.

At a meeting of Group of 20 agriculture ministers this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the disproportionate impact of climate change on agriculture in the Global South and said Indian farmers are taking up natural farming to revive the soil.

"Our policy is a fusion of back to basics and march to the future. We are promoting natural farming as well as technology-enabled farming," he said in a speech.

Yet agricultural scientists estimate that fewer than 5% of Indian farmers have switched to sustainable farming methods, even though many are aware of the threat of global warming and the rising costs of conventional practices.

"Farmers understand climate change. They worry about rain and droughts. But they will not understand sustainable agriculture until their problems are first understood," said Vikram Singh, joint secretary of the All India Agricultural Workers' Union.

TRADITIONAL TIES TO THE LAND

Despite the challenges, sustainable farming has brought some success stories, including young people who have given up city careers in tech or pharmaceuticals to return to family farms.

But the wins are patchy — and, in some cases, the eco-friendly switch has added to farmers' stress.

In the southern Indian state of Telangana, for instance, millers are turning away from genetically modified BT cotton in response to rising global demand for sustainable organic cotton.

But organic seeds are rare in India where BT dominates and cotton-processing infrastructure is designed for large volumes.

Addressing issues like these — and ensuring that sustainable methods boost crop yields and incomes — will be key to bringing would-be farmers like Mr. Pathak back to the land they love.

Wrapping up his day driving through the manic Mumbai traffic, Mr. Pathak said he pined for the clean air of his village, his jute bed and the farm-fresh gooseberries he enjoys on his annual vacation back home.

He hopes to return to that traditional rural life if the economics stack up and local markets for naturally grown produce thrive.

He suggested farmers could find other income sources too like selling milk to dairies with village networks, helping them earn between harvests and protecting them from climate extremes.

Shiraz Wajih, president of the nonprofit Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group, urged farmers and agricultural scientists to work together to create solutions on the ground.

Local production of inputs for natural farming can cut costs and dependence on outside markets while creating jobs, he said. And fine-tuning farm processes suited to each region's ecology would boost acceptance of greener methods, he added.

Mr. Wajih said most farmers do not want to leave their land, as seen during COVID-19 lockdowns when migrant factory workers returned to their farms to keep them going in tough times.

"People are aware of job options that can pay them better. But land is always the permanent address of farmers," he said. — Reuters