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Rice stocks down in October

The country's rice inventory slightly declined by two percent in October, but the government continues to assure that supply of the commodity is sufficient.

Latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that total rice inventory stood at 2.04 million metric tons (MT) as of October, slightly down by 1.9 percent from the 2.08 million MT recorded the previous year.

On a monthly basis, however, this marked a 32 percent improvement from the previous month's stock of 1.55 million MT.

Commercial warehouses had more

than half of the total inventories at 52.9 percent, while households held about 44.9 percent. Supplies from the National Food Authority depositories comprised 2.2 percent of the total.

On a monthly basis, rice stocks inventory in households, commercial warehouses and NFA depositories all went up by 52.9 percent, 19.8 percent and 1.4 percent, respectively.

In a recent statement, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Laurel said the DA is closely watching the market and is taking steps to assure sufficient supply of food items, including rice, at affordable prices.

Laurel said he gave importers less

than five weeks to use the permits granted to them to buy an additional one million metric tons of rice from abroad to boost local stocks.

"I told them that if they don't use it within 30 days, I will cancel (their permits) because I don't want to be held hostage by permits that were issued to them upon their request," Laurel said.

For this year, the DA expects total palay harvest to exceed 20 million MT while rice imports are projected at 2.86 million MT.

Based on current numbers, the country has a rice surplus of 2.98 million MT which should be enough to last 80 days.

- Louise Maureen Simeon



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DA chief meets governors of Top 10 rice- producing provinces

By Joel dela Torre

GOVERNORS of the Top 10 rice-producing provinces in the country praised new Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. for initiating the first-ever consultative meeting in an effort to know the concerns in their respective areas that need to be addressed in pushing for grain output and food security.

Governors from Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao, who gathered in San Juan City to meet Secretary Laurel, said that the move was a good first step towards a concerted effort to boost rice production.

The 10 provinces account for 48 percent of the country's total rice production.

According to a DA report, among the issues raised by Laurel during the November 17 meeting were efforts to increase grain supply, reduce imports and lower prices of the national food staple, which he said part of President Marcos Jr.'s vision of modernizing agriculture, where the country is food secure and its farm products reasonably priced.

Nueva Ecija governor Aurelio Umali, whose province is the biggest producer of rice accounting for nine percent of national production, said he really appreciated Secretary 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.

Isabela Governor Rodolfo Albano III said the meeting would foster cooperation among various stakeholders in rice production.

"Maganda ang resulta. Kasi iyan ang unang-una — dapat, makipag-usap si Secretary sa mga stakeholders na tulad namin. Maganda 'yung ginagawa niya, tulungan. Kung may mga makakatulong sa kanya, magagawa natin ang mga programa, maaayos natin lahat," Albano said.

Maguindanao del Sur Gov. Bai Mariam Mangudatu said she looks forward to the mechanization farm process that should help increase rice yields in her province.



P20 a kilo rice possible through subsidy – Salceda

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

Bringing the price of rice down to P20 per kilo, as promised by President Marcos during the campaign, is "not impossible," according to Albay Rep. Joey Salceda.

Salceda expressed this sentiment yesterday during a briefing of the House committee on agriculture on the status of the "country's sufficiency in rice, corn, livestock, poultry, vegetables and other key commodities."

The lawmaker told the Department of Agriculture (DA) that during the presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, bringing down the price of rice was "very simple as the National Food Authority (NFA) was subsidizing rice by buying the staple at higher prices and then selling them at lower prices.

"If Bongbong (Marcos) really wanted P20 per kilo, it is easy... It's just that NFA had incurred debts amounting to P15 billion then. But at least P20 was achieved, and it was even P18," he said in Filipino.

But Deputy Speaker and Isabela Rep. Antonio Albano reminded Salceda that NFA "no longer has the power to do so."

To this, Salceda replied that a "subsidy fund" could be set up for rice instead.

"You can set up a subsidy fund for it. If there's no NFA then somebody can do it if you want P20. It's not impossible, that's what I am saying. (Former) president Gloria was into importation at P30 and

then sell it P18," he added.

Meanwhile, rice watchdog group Bantay Bigas dared Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. to go to the different palay farms in the country and hear the sentiments of farmers amid the continued spike in retail prices of rice, as the lowest cost is now at P53 per kilo.

In an interview with The STAR yesterday, Bantay Bigas spokesperson Cathy Estavillo said based on their monitoring, the retail price of well-milled rice ranged between P53 and P56 per kilo.

She added that Laurel has been meeting with the rice traders and importers but not with the peasants.

According to Estavillo, consumers can no longer afford the high price of rice.

"The P53 to P56 (per kilo) is too costly for ordinary people," she noted.

Estavillo reiterated the need to scrap Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law.

She said that the P27 and P32 NFA rice should be returned, adding the government should provide P15,000 subsidy to the farmers.

Based on monitoring of the DA in Metro Manila markets, the retail price of local regular rice was as high as P53 per kilo; local well-milled rice, P55 per kilo; local premium rice, P62 per kilo and local special rice, P66 per kilo.

On the other hand, the retail price of imported premium rice was P60 per kilo and imported special rice, P65.

— With Bella Cariasio



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Region 2 seeks more coconut, cacao, coffee investments

■ Department of Trade and Industry-Region 2 Assistant Regional Director Winston Singun speaks at the first-ever Coffee, Cacao, Coconut Industries Regional Investment Forum in Cauayan City, Isabela, on Nov. 16 to 17, 2023. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Manila Times®

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BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

TO attract more investors for the coconut, cacao and coffee industries in Region 2 (Cagayan Valley), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in a groundbreaking initiative partnered with the **Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA)** to organize the first-ever Coffee, Cacao, Coconut Industries Regional Investment Forum on Nov. 16 to 17, 2023 in Cauayan City, Isabela province.

DTI-Region 2 Assistant Regional Director Winston Singun said the two-day activity marked a significant step by the agency in fueling the thriving coconut industry in the region.

He said the forum's agenda included a variety of topics such as investment and business opportunities; regional assessments for coffee, cacao and coconut; exploration of the economic aspects of value-adding; and business-to-business matching.

During the event anchored on the theme "Coconut, Cacao and Coffee: Bringing Investment and Sustainable Livelihood to the Community," Singun, who represented DTI-Region 2 Director Leah Pulido Ocampo, said the forum's objective is "to promote the growth of coconut, cacao and coffee industries, attracting additional investments in the Cagayan Valley Region."

Encouraging the participants, Singun said they need to explore the region's priority sectors, especially coconut, which allows for compatibility in intercropping with coffee and cacao, and urged

them "to seek assistance from the implementing agencies offering various services under the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP)."

The CFIDP was developed following the signing of Republic Act 11524, or the "Coconut Farmers and Industry Fund Act," by then-President Rodrigo Duterte on Feb. 26, 2021, and approved through Executive Order 172 and signed on June 2, 2022.

Launched by the Department of Agriculture, the CFIDP aims to increase the income and productivity of the 2.5 million coconut farmers in the country; promote poverty alleviation and social equity; and rehabilitate and modernize the Philippine coconut industry.

Singun also noted that the Industry Cluster Enhancement program of the DTI and the agency's mandates under the CFIDP Plan all geared toward the development of the priority industries in the

region including coffee, cacao and coconut. The mandates include research, and marketing assistance and promotion.

Manilyn Ponce, DTI-Region 2 information officer, said the DTI and PCA also led the way in shaping a game-changing three-year Coconut Industry Action Plan (CIAP) for pilot local government units (LGUs) in the northwestern part of Cagayan province on November 14.

Ponce said the DTI-Region 2 office spearheaded the CoCaNut Congress Debriefing and Cluster Team meeting, bringing together four pilot LGUs, including Abulug, Pamplona, Claveria and Sanchez Mira, at the Palos-Verdes Restaurant in Sanchez Mira.

She explained that the CIAP for the pilot LGUs will be the strategic guide "to gradually overcome the challenges and unlock the full potential of economic growth and sustainability in the region's

coconut industry."

Manolito Leonardo, Sanchez Mira Coconut Tall Farmers Inc. president, who welcomed the participants in the meeting, said that there is a big potential for the coconut industry in the region, especially for the Sanchez Mira's tall coconut variety.

Also during the meeting, DTI-Region 2 Industry Development Division chief Randolph Cacacho shared the different initiatives of his office fueling the growth of the coconut industry in Cagayan Valley.

Cacacho noted that the three-year plan will serve as a road map for success, uniting stakeholders from input providers to farmers, processors, traders, consumers and policymakers.

"This collective effort is dedicated to fueling the growth of the flourishing coconut industry, both in the pilot LGUs and throughout the entire region," he said.



DA to expand to 50% use of 'AI' in livestock

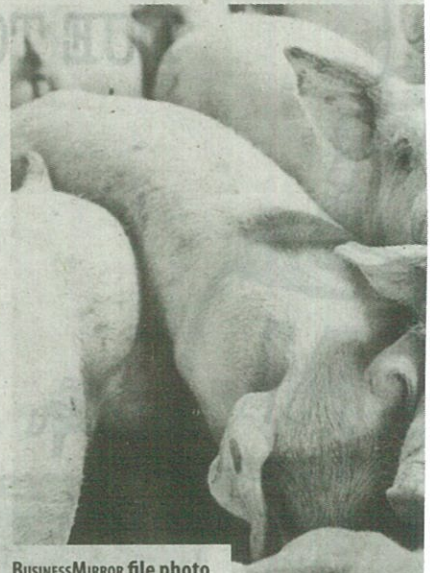
By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

[@jearcalas](#)

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) plans to expand the use of artificial insemination (AI) in livestock to 50 percent from the previous target of 30 percent to improve domestic meat and dairy productivity.

Agriculture Undersecretary for Livestock Deogracias Victor B. Savellano said the DA would ramp up its AI efforts to reduce the country's purchases of imported meat products.

"We are raising our target on the use of artificial insemination by 50 percent from the previous 30 percent. We are improving availability of high quality semen to farmers under



BUSINESSMIRROR file photo

our breeding program in order to raise our animal and meat production," Savellano said on Tuesday.

Savellano noted that the use



of AI would aid the local livestock sector in enhancing the genetic quality of animals, leading to better output.

For more than a decade now,

the agriculture department has been using AI to boost local meat production. **(Related story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/10/11/look-even-cows-and-carabaos-pigs-too-turning-to-ai/>)**

Dubbed the Unified National Artificial Insemination Program or UNAIP, the DA sees AI technology as one of the means to improve raisers' profit.

"DA is also embarking on long-term programs to raise local animal and meat production. Investment is being done in infrastructure development including farm-to-market roads and transportation networks, cold storage facilities, and meat processing plants that can help reduce post-harvest losses," he said.

Savellano said the DA is also keen on developing high-value

meat products with a huge upside potential, particularly in untapped global markets.

"Our mandate is to eliminate illegal meat importation, smuggling, hoarding, price manipulation, and anything that distorts prices in the market," he said.

"We will raise production by five times [in five years]. With enough volume we hope to make food affordable for Filipinos. We want producers, especially small scale farmers, to make money," he added.

Savellano noted that the country's meat importation in October declined by almost 19 percent year-on-year to 95.979 million kilograms. He attributed the double-digit drop to the department's "aggressive" fight against illegal trade coupled by increasing local production.



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With 1 MMT more approved, PHL rice imports near 3 MMT

THE Philippines's rice imports is close to touching the 3 million metric tons (MMT) territory as the state approved the entry of over 1 MMT of foreign supply via private traders and importers in the coming months.

Latest Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) data showed the country's total rice imports as of November 16 has reached 2.936 MMT.

To date, the Philippines has only recorded an import volume of at least 3 MMT twice in history: 2019 and 2022. The surge in rice imports to over 3.1 MMT in 2019 was brought about by the dire need of the National Food Authority (NFA) to meet its buffer stock mandate, coupled with the opening up of the local domestic rice market to foreign competition. Last year, the country posted its record-high import volume of over 3.8 MMT, driven by an election year and the growing demand of Filipinos for the staple.

Pundits have explained that the local rice

market has been slowly adjusting to the liberalized trade regime, with imports boosting domestic supply to meet the country's demand for the grain.

Earlier, agriculture officials had pointed out that, because of better domestic harvest, the country's total rice import volume this year would be below the 3.8-MMT projection of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Latest estimates by the local Department of Agriculture (DA) showed that it expects total rice production this year to reach a record-level of 13.11 MMT, slightly higher than last year's 12.921 MMT.

Oct-Nov approved SPSICs

LATEST BPI data also showed that it has approved over 1,400 of sanitary and phytosanitary

SEE "RICE," A2

import clearances (SPSICs) for rice imports with a corresponding total volume of 1.141 MMT in recent weeks.

In October alone, the BPI approved 809 SPSICs for the importation of 657,406.020 MT. From November 1 to November 16, the BPI issued 604 SPSICs with a corresponding volume of 484,379.79 MT. Under existing rules and regulations, a SPSIC for rice imports is valid for 60 days if the stocks are coming from Asean countries except Myanmar and 90 days for Myanmar and other non-Asean sources.

This means that the SPSICs issued in October can be used until next month while the SPSICs issued this month can be used until January next year. However, Agriculture Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. earlier this week warned that he will cancel all the rice import SPSICs if the importers would not bring in the stocks in the next 30 days or until next month.

The deadline given by Laurel is for the 1 MMT of rice issued with valid SPSICs to enter the country. (Related story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/11/21/da-importers-lose-spsic-if-rice-not-here-in-30-days/>)

"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 a House Committee on Monday, speaking partly in Filipino.

"I said if they will not import those within 30 days, if they will not give a [purchase order], I will cancel all the [SPSICs] because I do not want to be held hostage by permits that were issued to them upon their request," he added.

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

Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas



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Surigao del Sur town gets Kadiwa grant to shore up food supply

BUTUAN City—The P3.8-million grant to the local government unit (LGU) of Carmen, Surigao del Sur is expected to boost the logistical support of the government in the production and marketing of farm products in the municipality, an official said Tuesday.

"The Carmen LGU will directly identify farmers' cooperatives and associations in the town who will manage the delivery of farm products to the

local markets," Department of Agriculture-Caraga Region (DA-13) supervising agriculturist Marissa Garces said in a phone interview on Tuesday.

Garces said the aid, released on Monday under DA's Enhanced Kadiwa Financial Grant Assistant Program, will be specifically used in the procurement of two vehicles to transport farm and livestock products from the different farmers' associations.

"The Enhanced Kadiwa Program would like to accelerate the transport of farm and livestock products of our farmers to the market centers," Garces said, adding that the scheme would ensure the quality, safe, and affordable farm products and food to the markets.

As its contribution, the Carmen LGU is tasked with identifying a cooperative that will serve as a consolidator of all farm products from the farmers in the town.

Garces said the consolidator-cooperative will take charge of the marketing of the farm products to the different markets in the town at affordable prices.

"The concept of the Kadiwa Program is anchored on ensuring that the products of our farmers are given reasonable prices. At the same time, the public is also ensured that the products they buy, such as fruits, vegetables and livestock, are in good quality, safe and affordable," she said. *Philippine News Agency*

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NFA, HOUSEHOLD INVENTORY PULLS DOWN RICE STOCKS BY 2%

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

@jearcalas

THE country's rice stocks as of October dropped by nearly 2 percent year-on-year to a little above 2 million metric tons (MMT) as supplies held by households and National Food Authority (NFA) fell during the period.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said total nationwide rice inventory as of October 1 stood at 2.04 MMT, lower than the 2.081 MMT recorded volume in the same period of last year. However, the PSA noted that the volume of rice stocks inventory posted a 32.1-percent increase on a monthly basis from September's 1.55 MMT stockpile.

Historical PSA data showed the country's total rice inventory as of October was the highest in the past 10 months or since the start of the year.

"Of this month's total rice stocks, 52.9 percent were from the commercial sector, 44.9 percent were from the households, and 2.2 percent were from NFA depositories," the PSA said in its regular rice and corn inventory report.

Rice held by the commercial sector reached 1.08 MMT while those in households were estimated at 917,840 MT. Some 44,240 MT of rice were held by NFA depositories nationwide.

"This month's rice stocks inventories in the NFA depositories and household sector registered annual declines of 60.2 percent and 21.7 percent, respectively, relative to their corresponding levels in the same period of 2022. On the other hand, rice stocks in the

commercial sector rose by 35.4 percent during the month from its inventory in October 2022," the PSA said.

"In comparison to the September 2023 rice stocks levels, month-on-month increases were noted in rice stocks inventories in the household sector by 52.9 percent, commercial sector by 19.8 percent, and in the NFA depositories by 1.4 percent," it added.

In the same report, the PSA said the country's total corn inventory as of October 1 reached 974,800 MT, about 29.2 percent higher than last year's 754,710 MT. "Month-on-month, corn stocks inventory exhibited an increment of 21.5 percent relative to its previous month's inventory level of 802.57 thousand metric tons," it said.

The PSA said the bulk or about 87.1 percent of the corn inventory were from the commercial sector while the remaining 12.9 percent came from the households.

Corn stocks held by the commercial sector reached 849,190 MT, while those stored in households stood at 125,610 MT.

"From the same month of the previous year's level, corn stocks inventory in the commercial sector recorded an annual increase of 55.9 percent, while an annual decline of 40.2 percent was observed in the household sector," the PSA said.

"Relative to the inventory level in September 2023, the volume of corn stocks in the household sector registered a month-on-month increase of 98.0 percent. Likewise, corn stocks in the commercial sector grew by 14.9 percent," the PSA added.

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Hog, chicken egg output rise in 3rd quarter

HOG and chicken egg production rose in the third quarter, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

In a report, the PSA said hog output rose 3.3% year on year to 450.9 thousand metric tons (MT) on a live-weight basis.

The top-producing region during the period was the Central Visayas with 67.66 thousand MT, followed by Calabarzon (59.81 thousand MT), Northern Mindanao (54.5 thousand MT), Central Luzon (46.16 thousand MT), and the Davao Region (36.16 thousand MT).

Central Luzon also reported a top growth rate, doubling its year-earlier total for hog production.

These regions accounted for 58.6% of the hog production during the period, the PSA said.

The national hog inventory declined 2.1% during the period to 9.86 million head, as of Sept. 30, the PSA said.

About 67.5% of hogs are grown by smallhold farms, with the remaining



PHILIPPINE STAR/RUSSELL PALMA

29.2% and 3.3% accounted for by commercial and semi-commercial farms, respectively.

The average farmgate price of slaughtered hogs dropped 6.1% year on year to P163.34 per kilogram.

Meanwhile, the PSA also reported a 4.7% year-on-year increase in chicken egg output for the period to 185.26 thousand MT.

The top chicken egg-producing region was Calabarzon with 58.53 thousand MT, or 31.6% of national output.

This was followed by Central Luzon (34.11 thousand MT), Northern Mindanao (20.14 thousand MT), the Central Visayas (18.96 thousand MT), and the Western Visayas (10.55 thousand MT).

The leading regions accounted for 76.8% of the national chicken egg total.

As of Sept. 30, the layer flock was about 71.18 million birds, up 5.4% from a year earlier.

The average farmgate price for chicken egg rose 15.3% year on year to P7.45 each. — **Adrian H. Halili**

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■ Negros Farmers Fest

BACOLOD CITY — The five-day Negros Island Organic Farmers Festival here was able to earn a total of ₱2,752,506.83 in sales. This was revealed by Negros Occidental Governor Eugenio Jose Lacson, to the members of the media on Monday, Nov. 20. Based on the data obtained from the organizers, the first day of the festival, which kicked off at the North Capitol Road, earned ₱429,135.50, while the biggest sales were reported on the last day, amounting to ₱621,308.23. The festival, which is the longest-running organic festival in the Philippines and in Asia, started in 2006 hosted by the provinces of Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental. This year's theme, "Regeneration for Future Generations," highlighted the importance of eco-friendly farming practices, emphasizing the concept of sustainable regenerative farming, according to Dina Genzola, officer-in-charge of the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist. The 16th edition of the Negros Island Organic Farmers Festival was held on Nov. 15 to 19, alongside the 1st Terra Madre Visayas. (Glazyl Masculino)



Urban farm business blooms from container gardens at back of apartment

By BENJAMIN SARONDO

A garden, even a farm, can blossom anywhere, even from container gardens at the back of one's apartment.

Jess Muñoz Paderna, 33, owner of Ssagel's Garden, started her gardening journey on containers in her rented apartment in Davao City.

Ssagel's Garden, a herb and vegetable garden, started in 2021. What encouraged Jess to pursue growing a garden was the scarcity of lettuce supplies in her area. "In 2020, at a church

where we always visit, they sold lettuce. But one time, there was no lettuce because there was no harvest. I realized that we could grow lettuce in our own garden."

Jess recalled that the unavailability of garden space in her rented apartment did not stop her from gardening; she started growing vegetables, such as spinach, tomatoes, cabbages, and many more, in a container with the help of her husband.

"Our main goal is to grow vegetables we can enjoy in our meals. We want a garden that can provide us with fresh produce."

She now owns garden space with a greenhouse where she grows lettuce, onions, radish, string beans, basil, chives, rosemary, sweet corn, strawberries, cucumber, tomatoes, lemon, and many more.

Her journey as gardener

Jess was not familiar with gardening when she started. "I learned from watching videos about gardening online," she said.

Before she established her garden, Jess said that she first assessed all the resources available near her area, which helped her minimize her expenses. "I asked myself if the lot would be enough and effective to grow vegetables, and if there was sun exposure and water supply, especially since I planned to use a hydroponic system."

The knowledge led her to buy garden soil because the soil in her area was not good for growing vegetables. Her garden started with vegetables that were easy to grow and which her family enjoyed eating.

Diverse gardening

"What is unique about our garden is our diverse approach to growing food. We do hydroponics, raised beds, and container gardening." She explained that she invested much on the hydroponics setup since she decided to have a greenhouse.

The method she applies is the in-ground gardening approach, where seeds are directly planted in the soil. This method provides versatility and allows her to maximize her garden space.

Jess added that the seeds and soil she uses in her garden can be purchased at hardware stores and grocery stores. "Each pack of seeds can cost around P60 to P80, while the garden soil per sack is P100." Also, she said that she spent P500 to buy African night crawlers for a constant supply of vermicast.

Growing together

To ensure that the seeds they plant will grow, she uses different planting techniques.

One is intensive planting, a method where she plants two different kinds of vegetables that have different growing seasons and durations of growth near each other. This method can minimize



JESS MUÑOZ PADERNA, 33, is the owner of Ssagel's Garden, a herb and vegetable garden that started in 2021. She started her gardening journey in her rented apartment in Davao City. (Jess Muñoz Paderna)

wasted space.

Also, she does companion planting, where she plants vegetables that grow in the same season and work together in terms of size and duration. Jess said that she does this planting technique with cucumber and lettuce, cabbage and radish, onion leaves, okra, and many more.

Lastly, there is planting by batch. "For example, if we have a pack of radish seeds, we do not plant the seeds simultaneously. At first, we only plant 10 seeds, and when we harvest them, we wait for two to three weeks until we plant another batch of seeds," Jess stated.

"Gardening is beautiful and rewarding."

Jess hopes that more people will be interested in gardening since it will benefit not only one's physical health but also their mental health. "For me, gardening is very important, and it is my break from the busy city life. In a garden, you can find time to slow down and be at peace."

She also considers it a good business because, aside from making money from planting fruits and vegetables, she can also serve nutritious meals to her family. "I love cooking, and it is very helpful that the ingredients I need are just in my garden."



SOME OF THE HARVESTED herbs and vegetables from Ssagel's Garden. (Jess Muñoz Paderna)



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Bioactive compound facility to rise in Nueva Ecija

THE Department of Science and Technology-Central Luzon (DoST-3) and Bauertek Corp., a manufacturer of high-quality food supplements, will establish a facility for the manufacture of high-purity curcumin, piperine, allicin, jamun and other bioactive compounds for the food and agriculture industry.

The facility will be estab-

lished under the DoST's Business Innovation through Science and Technology program, and will be located in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija.

DoST-3 Regional Director Julius Caesar Sicat said on Tuesday the project is timely and would be of great help to the department's goal of making Muñoz the first and model smart city not

just in Central Luzon but in the Philippines.

"We will have high-end laboratory equipment that can be used not only by Bauertek Corp. but also our researchers in Central Luzon so that they can conduct higher level research. This is one of the great opportunities that I see which will be a game changer to push our Indigenous plant

materials into something that our farmers could make money from," Sicat said in a radio interview in Filipino.

He encouraged everyone, especially the academe, private partners and innovators, to develop relevant and innovative technologies ready for commercialization.

"Because through these efforts, we are not just helping the

community, we are also helping them believe that science works," he added.

To be put up in a 16-hectare lot inside the Central Luzon State University (CLSU) compound, the facility will have a herbal processing center, plantation, research and visitor's center, among others.

Bauertek and the CLSU

forged an agreement for the establishment of the facility last November 13.

The collaboration will provide CLSU faculty and staff researchers, and students exposure to high-end laboratories and will generate jobs in Muñoz. The construction of the facility will start this month and is expected to finish within two years. **PNA**



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Digitalization, AI and regenerative agriculture

THERE is a belief among some quarters that regenerative agriculture is more about going back to the traditional way of farming where "natural" methods were employed to cultivate crops. This type of thinking is rather flawed, as the rapid development of digital tools, and technology and artificial intelligence (AI) can help propagate and scale up the adoption of regenerative agriculture.

This was emphasized by Bayer during this year's Agri-technica, an international event for the agricultural machine industry held on Nov. 12 to 18, 2023 in Hanover, Germany.

Frank Terhorst, head of Strategy and Sustainability of Bayer's Crop Science division, said ahead of the event that agriculture today benefits much from technology ranging from seed breeding to crop protection, and that regenerative agriculture can produce more with digitalization and AI.

"A regenerative agricultural system that produces more with less while restoring more is only possible with advanced digital technologies that use artificial intelligence and data science in every phase of the farming cycle. Agriculture today is infused with technology, whether in seed breeding and crop protection discovery, during planning, planting and harvesting on the farm, or in virtually all interactions with value chain partners," he said.

Jeremy Williams, head of Climate LLC and Digital Farming at Bayer, also said that digitalization is the backbone of "innovative new precision application technologies that serves as the recommendation



MOVING
FORWARD

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engine" for the company's carbon-reduction efforts. Williams added that the company is well-positioned to lead in advancing regenerative agriculture with their emphasis on digital transformation.

Climate LLC has also introduced FieldView, which the company calls "the premier digital platform for regenerative agriculture." Specifically, it utilizes AI to collect at least 250 layers of high-definition data that farmers can utilize to make more informed decisions so they can optimize yields and maximize efficiency.

Fieldview is now applied in 220 million acres or 89 million hectares in at least 20 countries.

The new paradigm

There are other companies that have digital solutions for farming, among them Syngenta, which is offering its Digital Data Capture technology to propagate and upscale regenerative agriculture.

"The technology starts with a drone equipped with high-resolution cameras and multispectral sensors. The drones scan crop fields to create ultra-high-definition images yielding incredible data insights. Digital data also includes environmental sensors to get a deep understanding of the weather, soil, pests and disease at our field trial sites, so we can leverage that data for the grower's benefit," Syngenta said

in its website.

With at least two giant crop technology companies pushing digitalization and AI to upscale regenerative agriculture, I can strongly state that agriculture that also nurtures the environment and reverses the damage caused by modern farming systems is the new paradigm for growing crops globally.

A blog posted at the IDH website <https://www.idhsustainabletrade.com/> in June 2022 titled "Six Ways Digital Tech Can Aid the Transition to Regenerative Agriculture" by Shreejit Borthakur, senior innovation manager for technology, and Tessa Meulenstein, senior program manager for coffee, said that digital tools can be used for smallholder farmers to smoothly transition to regenerative practices for growing crops.

They even said that while regenerative agriculture and digital agriculture may appear not to be natural partners at first, "there are several synergies that can support the scaling up of both."

The blog identified how digital tools can upscale regenerative agriculture, and let me quote them: Using communication channels to standardize production principles; applying data-driven prescriptive and predictive advisory to mitigate production risk; introducing digital aggregation and market linkages to improve the economics of sourcing; building economic resilience through data-backed finance and payment; leveraging end-to-end traceability for price-premiums; and using remote monitoring for course-

correction and learning.

From what I have discussed, it is very clear that digitalization and AI can go hand in hand to promote, propagate and upscale regenerative agriculture.

Policy support needed

Moving forward, I urge policymakers, including those in Congress, to support the mainstreaming of regenerative agriculture, and utilizing digital tools, and technology and AI in the country's farming sector.

As private crop technology companies make advances on how digitalization and AI can propagate, upscale and level up regenerative agriculture, the Philippines can never be left behind in this massive paradigm shift. And this is not just a trend.

The good news is the adoption of sustainable practices to cultivate crops is being adopted gradually by farmers, including the balanced fertilization strategy. Also, digitalization and AI are not alien concepts in the Philippines as the government and the private sector are strongly pushing for wider adoption of both.

But then, a strong pronouncement from the government that digitalization and AI will also be harnessed to cultivate crops in a more sustainable manner through regenerative agriculture will create more awareness of this paradigm shift.

And let me state again — the Philippines cannot be left behind in that paradigm shift, as our agriculture sector still has the potential to become an engine for more wealth generation.



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Searca orients regional institutions

THE Philippine-hosted Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) introduced its mandate, programs and offerings to officers and members of the International Society for Southeast Asian Agricultural Sciences (ISSAAS)-Malaysian Chapter and the Agricultural Institute of Malaysia (AIM) who paid a courtesy visit to the center on November 11.

Searca Director Glenn Gregorio said the delegation from the ISSAAS Malaysian Chapter and the AIM were particularly oriented on the Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources grants, activities and research initiatives such as the Consortium for Agricultural Development, Research and Extension.

The ISSAAS delegation was led by its treasurer, associate professor Norida Mazlan of the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), while the AIM delegation was led by its president, professor Abdul Shukor Juraimi, also from UPM.

Program specialist Bernice Anne de Torres of Searca Research and Thought Leadership shared Caddre's vision "to build a regional network of high-caliber, like-minded institutions that will collaborate in delivering research and extension

support to the most pressing issues and challenges faced by the Southeast Asian agriculture sector."

De Torres also discussed Searca's Carbon Farming Project, which intends to support efforts in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the agriculture sector while providing farmers with alternative income through profitable carbon agribusiness models.

She said this project will focus on the carbon farming practices of high-value crop production in eight of the 11 Southeast Asian countries, namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

The visitors were welcomed by Nur Azura Adam, Searca deputy director for programs, who also serves as ISSAAS-Malaysian Chapter vice president, and associate professor Joselito Florendo, Searca deputy director for administration.

Also with the delegates in the meeting were Sharon Malaiba, Searca Partnership Unit head; Ma. Victoria Bravo, Office of the Deputy Director for Programs executive assistant; and the Partnerships Unit staff.

They were also given a tour of the Searca Hub for Agriculture and Rural Innovation for the Next Generation, also called Sharing.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO

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'Bamboo can enhance disaster resilience, boost income via carbon credits'

GROWING bamboo is a viable strategy for climate change adaptation and achieving sustainability, according to a recent disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) forum.

The DRRM forum led by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) was attended by 65 participants representing 20 local government units and organizations coming from various parts of the country.

The forum served as a venue to inform and build networking for local bamboo stakeholders in Mindanao. It was also designed to spread awareness on the benefits of bamboo in DRR efforts and how communities with large resources of bamboo could take part in the Carbon Crediting initiatives.

The first set of speakers consisted of Atty. Burt Estrada, CEO of Bukidnon Tagoloanon Mula-hay Ha Kabukalagan Agriculture

Cooperative (BUKTAMACO), and Christopher Ua-o, Head of Manufacturing at Rizome Philippines.

They emphasized bamboo's transformative impact in Indigenous People Areas through the Bamboo Value Chain Development Program.

"The program increased the family income of people involved in the program," Estrada added while mentioning the program's effect on enhancing community resilience in disaster-prone areas.

He also said bamboo is a sustainable solution in disaster-prone regions, offering economic opportunities and enhancing resilience.

Moreover, Ua-o stressed the importance of collaborative efforts between community-based organizations, businesses, and policymakers. He underscored the significance of these alliances in championing bamboo's role in DRR.

"When we use more bamboo then we avoid using wood, steel

and concrete which are responsible for 25 percent of our carbon dioxide emission," he said.

The second panel delved into government and policy support for carbon crediting bamboo, featuring insights from Director Romulo Aggangan of DOST-Forest Products Research and Development Institute, Dr. Florentino Tesoro of Bamboo Professionals, Inc. and Rene "Butch" Madarang, Executive Director of the Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council.

Tesoro discussed the history and concept of carbon crediting and its relation to the global push against climate change.

Aggangan stressed the need for research and development to optimize bamboo's growth and carbon sequestration capabilities, emphasizing the importance of science and innovation.

Meanwhile, Madarang reaffirmed support from NGOs to bamboo initiatives and its future

role in carbon crediting, "by recognizing [Bamboo's] versatile properties, its role in disaster resilience, its soil stabilization capabilities, and its potential to earn carbon credits, we are poised to harness bamboo's full potential."

In the Open Forum and Press Conference led by PIA 10 Regional Director Franklin Gumapon, they explored bamboo processing challenges in Mindanao and the necessary government support for processors.

Myrna Decipulo, recognized as one of the pillars of the bamboo industry in Mindanao, underscored the forum's significance in advancing crucial conversations for the region's bamboo sector.

The forum is part of the activities of HANDA Pilipinas: Innovations in Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Exposition Mindanao leg. This nationwide event is the first DRRM exposition in Mindanao.



SINDIKATO SA AGRI SMUGGLING TUMBOK NA

HAWAK na ng gobyerno ang pangalan ng mga taong bumubuo ng sindikato sa agricultural smuggling sa bansa.

Ito ang kinumpirma ng National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) sa mga miyembro ng Senado.

Ang impormasyon ay ibinato ng NICA kay Senador Sonny Angara, chairman ng Senate committee on finance.

Hiningi ni Senate Minority Leader Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III ang listahan upang magamit sa binabalangkas na panukala para masusugan ang anti-smuggling law.

Gayunman, wala pang balak ang mga senador na isiwalat ang pangalan ng mga miyembro ng sindikato habang hindi na naikakasa ang imbestigasyon sa isyung ito.

"Since we are going to prioritize the finalization of this anti-smuggling bill, may bagong approach kasi ang ating author so maybe we can, in con-

fidence get the names of the suspected personalities behind or involved in agricultural smuggling," wika ni Pimentel patungkol kay Senador Cynthia Villar na siyang chairman ng Senate committee on agriculture.

"Ang purpose lang natin, hindi natin binabanggit kasi baka mapahiya or whatever. Hindi pa naman ito judgment of guilt," dagdag ng senador.

Kamakailan lamang, isiniwalat ni Villar na naaresto ang umano'y big-time sibuyas smuggler na si Jayson de Roxas Taculog dahil sa tangkang pagpuslit ng P78.9 milyong halaga ng illegally imported agricultural goods.

Si Taculog ay naaresto sa bisa ng arrest warrant na ipinalabas ni Manila Regional Trial Court Branch 26 Judge Edilu Hayag kaugnay ng pagkakakumpiska ng malaking shipment ng sibuyas na naka-consigned sa Taculog J International Consumer Goods Trading.



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Wheat jumps; soybeans slide

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat rose 1 percent on Wednesday, with the market climbing to its highest in nearly two weeks on renewed concerns over Ukrainian supplies after Russian attacks on grain infrastructure.

Soybeans slid for the first time in three sessions, although worries over Brazilian dryness kept a floor under the market. Corn edged higher.

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board

of Trade (CBOT) climbed 1 percent to \$5.88-1/2 a bushel, after rising to its highest since Nov. 9 at \$5.88-3/4 a bushel earlier.

Soybeans fell 0.1 percent to \$13.76-1/2 a bushel and corn gained 0.2 percent to \$4.70-3/4 a bushel.

Russian forces hit port infrastructure in Ukraine's southern city of Odesa on Tuesday evening, the regional governor said. - *Reuters*

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Flooded fields delay European sugar harvest and risk beet losses

EUROPE'S flooded fields are delaying sugar harvesting and threatening to wipe out 15 percent of beet crops still to be collected in France, one of the region's biggest growers of the sweetener.

Factories in Europe typically start processing beets for several months starting in September, but the harvest has been hampered by heavy rains across northwest Europe. France recently received 32 straight days of rainfall, the longest stretch since 1998, according to Meteo France.

Almost half of the country's beets are still in the ground because of the delays and some plants have curbed production because they're not receiving enough to process, growers' group CGB said at a conference

in London. Some French farmers are worried they'll lose 15 percent of unharvested beets due to flooding, it said. Other European sugar growers at the conference also voiced output concerns.

The setback risks curbing production in Europe, further tightening the global market. Sugar futures are trading near the highest in more than a decade in New York following consecutive years of deficits and threats to supplies in key growers from India to Thailand.

Dutch farmers still have about 50 percent of beets in fields, meaning it's unlikely that the harvest will be wrapped up by December 1, according to Arwis Bos, a representative of co-operative Royal Cosun. He said conditions are the wettest in a

century—halting harvesting—and any cold snap would further threaten beets.

Harvest delays will probably prolong Germany's beet campaign until February, increasing the risk of crop losses to frost, said Ulf Wegener, who spoke on behalf of the nation's growers.

In the United Kingdom, storms and flooding in some areas are making fieldwork harder, the National Farmers Union said.

Ghana's cocoa

GHANA secured its annual loan to pay for cocoa purchases at the highest interest rate on record, following this year's debt restructuring of the West African nation's obligations that ruined investor appeal.

International banks have pledged to lend industry regulator

... Ghana Cocoa Board \$800 million for cocoa purchase from farmers at almost 8 percent, according to two people familiar with the terms of the deal. It is the costliest syndicated facility the board has received since the annual loans started in 1992-93, the people said, asking not to be identified because the transaction isn't yet public.

The board also known as Cocobod, has previously obtained loans from investors at better rates than the government at an average rate of 2 percent. This year, the negotiations have been complicated by the West African nation's debt restructuring that was needed to unlock a \$3 billion government bailout from the International Monetary Fund.

Ghana is the world's second-biggest producer of the

chocolate ingredient and relies on funding from abroad to pay farmers for beans that are then exported. The central bank also relies on the foreign exchange as an important source of hard currency that is used to help stabilize the cedi.

Cocobod would normally conduct an investor roadshow between June and July each year and sign the syndicated facility in September before the new harvest begins in October.

For the first time ever the loan is expected to be signed at the end of this month, with eight participating banks, including Coöperatieve Rabobank UA as lead arranger, Standard Chartered Plc and Societe Generale SA, the people said.

Spokespeople at Coöperatieve Rabobank UA, Standard

Chartered Plc and Societe Generale SA declined to comment in emailed response to questions. Fiifi Boafo, a spokesman at Ghana Cocoa Board declined to comment when he was contacted by phone.

The amount is also the lowest in at least 16 years as the board struggled to raise funding, and falls short of the \$1.2 billion that is needed in all to buy the beans from growers in the current season. As a result Cocobod has made an arrangement to borrow \$400 million from cocoa traders, such as Olam Group Ltd. and Barry Callebaut AG to top up.

The board in addition plans to take advantage of higher cocoa prices this year to sell on the spot market to augment its liquidity requirements, the people said.

Bloomberg News



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FAO to launch global roadmap to end hunger, tackle climate crisis

THE Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said it will launch a global roadmap for the simultaneous achievement of a world free of hunger by 2030, while not breaching the 1.5 Celsius degree threshold at the upcoming COP28 meeting in the United Arab Emirates.

The United Nations agency said it is already using innovative applications, such as artificial intelligence, big data, and diverse high-quality data and information sources for digital solutions that benefit small-scale producers.

Digital tools developed by FAO are also being adopted to improve early warning, risk forecasting, biosecurity, and mitigation measures for health threats within the One Health approach.

All of these were highlighted at the recent FAO Science and Innovation Forum 2023. The forum noted that science, technology and innovation must be tailored to local conditions across national agrifood systems.

It also highlighted the critical need to embrace inclusivity and equitable partnerships and engage youth, women, and indigenous peoples in shaping the future of agrifood systems.

According to FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu, fighting global hunger requires greater and better investments in science, technology and innovation to ensure that agrifood systems are able to produce more with less while leaving no one behind.

Qu was invited to attend a panel discussion on "Harnessing science and technology for food security" by the government of the United Kingdom, together with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), as part of a global summit designed to galvanize action to

tackle hunger and malnutrition.

The Global Food Security Summit held in London last Monday focused on the best of science and innovation to prevent food insecurity and malnutrition.

Qu was invited to set the scene for the panel discussion, which focused on the unprecedented challenges facing global agrifood systems. These include ongoing conflicts, and the impacts of the climate crisis leading to extreme weather events that are reducing crop yields.

In this context, science and technology have the potential to unlock substantive growth in the Global South, reduce global food prices, tackle hunger and enable healthier diets by improving food availability, accessibility and affordability. It is also essential for tackling the climate crisis and biodiversity loss.

Qu noted that science and innovation are at the core of the FAO Strategic Framework for the next decade, and key accelerators for meeting the aspiration of the Four Betters: better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind.

Qu called for a "stable and consistent commitment from politicians" to deliver the benefits of science and technology to all, as well as the right investments at the right stages.

"Let's work together hand in hand."

The panel discussion was opened by the UK Minister for Science, Innovation and Technology Andrew Griffith, who talked about the hurdles facing the need to feed a growing population amid the climate crisis.

"There has never been a greater imperative to act," Griffith said, noting that his government was committed to delivering a "bold" transformation of agrifood systems.