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CTALK CITO BELTRAN

'Teach a man how...'

"Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach him how to fish and he will eat for a lifetime."

There is some amount of disagreement as to who really came up with this adage but one thing that is certain, the statement has become institutionalized in the realm of agriculture, self-sufficiency and empowerment. Ironically, in the real world, much of the "teaching" has been done by a parent, brother or elder. The teaching is out of necessity, survival or the need for everyone in a family or community to be productive and contribute to daily food needs.



Many of us learned by doing chores such as feeding pigs, chickens or goats. Others by joining the "hunt," going out to fish or caring for sick animals. In Third World countries or less developed agriculture-based nations, the current trends have been on mechanization, genetic manipulation, corporate farming and digital technology or high tech such as drones for seed dispersal, fertilizer application or plotting. The obsession is with producing more instead of doing it right.

In the Philippines, it seems that we are utilizing the solutions of First and Second World agriculture in a Third World nation where available land is small and markets fractured. To make matters worse, the government and "experts" have been pushing for modernization and increased productivity but have been dismissive about the need to "teach a man how."

Ironically, in the pre-COVID/pre-ASF period, ordinary backyard Filipino hog raisers produced 60 to 65 percent of the total volume of hogs in the country. Many of them operated on sheer guts and winging it and not much from training or teaching.

While traveling to different provinces in the Philippines as volunteer trainer and product endorser of BMeg Animal Feeds, I was shocked to discover that there is only one international training center for pig husbandry and it is located in a city behind the SM Mall in Lipa City.

The International Training Center for Pig Husbandry is a Dutch-funded training center that gives various training programs related to raising pigs, breeding pigs, as well as the economics of pig production and management. I have enrolled in their 10-day hog raising course and pre-COVID I paid a little over P7,000. Most business people or serious backyard hog raisers would treat it as the cost of learning while saving time.

But ordinary Filipinos in provincial settings can't afford that. P7,000 can buy you one piglet and your first sack of hog feed. Given a choice, they will buy the pig and ask the barangay "know it all" or their "Maritess" what to do or nag the feed store owner.

This lack of available information is one reason why thousands have attended the many BMeg Fiestahan events before the COVID pandemic.

Unfortunately, we could only spend a day or two at the most for every venue and, given the costs to mount such an event, the schedules were limited. In spite of what people think, the University of Google or industry webinar programs don't reach the neediest and as a result, the poor but valiant backyard neophytes in hog raising end up losing thousands of pesos to disease, poor management and lack of support, making them even poorer or in debt.

In contrast to that, all LGUs have basketball gyms, multi-purpose gyms, plazas and the like that can host such events. From what I have seen and learned, most LGUs have provincial, city or municipal veterinarians who are certainly knowledgeable about basic animal husbandry, propagation and management. They can do the training or ask help from the local BMeg feeds distributor in the area.

A number of provinces even have agricultural colleges and universities whose junior or senior students could help as well as learn from such programs. Incidentally, these outreach programs are not limited to hog raising but also features separate events for raising poultry, game fowl, fish, dog care and animal health care products.

Ironically, LGUs gain much from agriculture-related activities and trade but are not equally active or supportive. They collect taxes from feed stores, they get revenues from market sales and agricultural trade but they are not actively hosting or conducting continuous trainings on how to raise pigs, chickens, ducks, goats, cows, etc. Aside from their failure to extend trainings, many LGUs don't hire technicians to do the much-needed field work. Some won't even let us use their venues for free.

I have been to very popular tourist destinations where the entire native chicken population has been wiped out because of the New Castle Disease or "peste." When I asked around, the residents told me that most of them did not practice proper vaccination, could not afford the vaccines (less than P500 for 500 to 1000 birds) and/or because the local government in the area no longer administered free vaccination, not even for dogs and cats versus rabies. Something is only done when there is a serious outbreak, or someone gets seriously sick.

Aside from such outbreaks there are the regular occurrences of fish kill in different provinces and LGUs. Those events are clear evidence that the LGUs are not active in their regulatory processes and monitoring of fishponds and fish farms. Fish kills cause pollution in the water or on the ground that are used as disposal areas of tons of dead fish. It also causes economic displacement as well as commercial disruption.

I am hoping that DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel and DILG Sec. Benhur Abalos get to read this article and would consider establishing a network, a system of cooperation to establish the long-term practice of teaching people "how to fish," how to farm and revive a once thriving domestic agriculture where WE produce our food.

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Looming crisis

Even before he took his oath, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. expressed doubts about available data on production and demand amid issues on agricultural products. "The problem right now is *medyo* incomplete 'yung data that is available. 'Yung data natin hindi ganun ka-accurate," Tiu Laurel said at a media briefing.

So, he said, he is planning to reactivate the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS).

That's basic. The President's octogenarian caretaker of DA had apparently been giving policy recommendations to Malacanang without the benefit of accurate and granular data? That explains the topsy turvy way of managing problems with sugar, onions, and rice. It took a hard-nosed businessman like Secretary Laurel to highlight the importance of having accurate data before making decisions.



BOO CHANCO

Then again, I didn't realize the BAS needs reactivation. That means, past agriculture secretaries didn't think they needed it. That explains why the sector is a mess, dragging down our national economic growth and causing the rise in food inflation rate.

Indeed, according to the Philippine Statistical Authority, the value of production in agriculture and fisheries decreased by 1.3 percent in the second quarter of this year.

Maybe, it is better for Laurel to funnel more resources to the PSA to gather up-to-date agricultural market data. The PSA is already staffed by competent statisticians and field data gatherers so that they don't have to start hiring and re-training BAS staff.

The PSA is already generating market data, including agricultural, required for timely monitoring of our inflation and GDP growth rates, among other macroeconomic numbers. Just enhance their capability to produce better and more timely statistics with additional resources.

The Agri Secretary should also ask for funds to modernize our current satellite system being used to monitor rice production. A former DA Usec said we need better satellite images to more accurately know in advance how good or bad the incoming harvest will be.

Secretary Laurel should be very worried about the rice crisis that we face. Everyone I talk to in the rice industry is telling me that they are expecting problems to start escalating next month. Right now, the buying price of dry palay (unhusked rice) has exceeded P30/kg. At the rule of thumb of two kilos of palay for every kilo of milled rice, that means we will have a retail price beyond P60/kg, plus logistics and marketing costs.

Yet, last week, a spokesman of DA was quoted by PhilStar as saying that the price of locally milled rice should not exceed P48/kg. That's silly, if not dishonest, because the same story also quotes the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura as saying that the farmgate price of palay is already at P31/kg.

In a briefing for the House Committee on Agriculture, DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said prices are expected to rise in December to P48/kilo for well-milled rice and P41 to P43/kilo for regular-milled variety. The PNA, the government news agency, also reports "according to the DA's current numbers (probably the same numbers the DA Sec said he isn't comfortable with), the country has a rice surplus of 2.98 million MT, which is enough to last 80 days."

The new Agri Secretary must tell his people not to confuse the public and raise expectations the government cannot deliver. Credibility is important.

The DA must now start telling the public that El Niño is likely to give us problems and we have to stop wasting rice. PhilRice estimated that we waste P7.2 billion worth of rice yearly. The proposal to require restaurants to serve half the usual cup of rice and no more unli rice is a good way of demonstrating to the public we have a problem, and everyone must help mitigate the bad effects.

Pretty obvious is the reality that contrary to government claims, the current harvest produced much less than expected. Farmers used less fertilizer because they couldn't afford the higher price following the Ukraine war. Government fertilizer assistance came after the planting started. There were also

reported pest attacks. And, of course, the weather.

But the big problem that should worry Secretary Laurel is something I have been writing about... failure to make timely importations. Unlike Indonesia, which gave an order to import over a million tons at any price, our private importers were reported to have cancelled their orders when the prices went up. Perhaps, if the tariff was cut or removed, our traders may have taken some risk importing.

On importations, the hands of Secretary Laurel are tied because the government cannot import. His best bet is to talk to San Miguel, URC, and SM, among other conglomerates, and ask them to import enough to have a decent in-country stock to control the greed of local traders. SMC can import as bulk cargo, not in sacks, and its receiving and storage facilities are world-class... temperature and humidity controlled to keep rice fresh for months if not years.

Forget rice smugglers for the meantime. Going after them is just a distraction used as an excuse to explain failure. If there are, indeed, smugglers, they add to the in-country stock and help relieve shortage. They see a market need, and they see the profits that a rice shortage brings.

Secretary Laurel should convince the President to suspend the tariff once Congress goes on Christmas recess to provide an incentive for conglomerates and other traders to import. Without imports, a supply crisis may happen. That's politically dangerous.

Also, the tariff can be used to flush out hoarded inventory. By lowering tariffs at some point, traders will be forced to let go of inventory being held to speculate.

It is also good that Sec. Laurel is warning rice importers to import within 30 days or have their import permits cancelled. The government is entitled to know how much stock is arriving so contingency measures can be taken. The importers are probably waiting for the tariff to be lifted.

PNA reports "the total rice imports are projected at 2.86 million MT - barring additional imports in the coming weeks - down one million MT from 2022 levels."

Secretary Laurel must be decisive because a rice crisis can destroy his boss.

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Encouraging signs

THURSDAY last week, selected members of the Foundation for Economic Freedom Inc. had dinner with the newly appointed Agriculture secretary, Francis Tiu Laurel Jr., at his father's house in Makati. I came a few minutes late, and the conversation had already started with the secretary discuss-



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POINTS

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ing how he planned to better monitor farm production through

satellite technology.

I immediately thought it an encouraging sign because I attended the meeting with the intention of just listening to what he planned to do with the agricultural sector and the Department of Agriculture (DA). Honestly, I could not get a

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Encouraging signs

sense of direction from him based on media reports and press releases as most of the statements issued by the DA or the Presidential Communication Operations Office were too general or mostly motherhood statements.

Going back to the use of satellite technology to monitor agricultural production; and estimate damage and losses whenever typhoons and flooding strike our farms, I noted that the current ones in use had poor magnification and that the DA did not have enough experts to fully interpret the satellite data. Laurel agreed and said this was the reason why he was looking for a service provider that would address the goal of better monitoring what is going on in our farms.

I mentioned my idea of assigning a greater role to local government officials in ensuring food security in their respective constituencies. He responded that he was scheduled to meet 11 governors of major rice-producing areas so that their provinces and the DA could better plan palay (unmilled rice) production, harvesting, processing and marketing. He stressed that these 11 provinces produce nearly 80 percent of our palay and hence, if the DA is able to provide proper support, the local government units (LGUs) can contribute to meeting most of our rice requirements.

Besides increasing farm productivity, Laurel is also concerned with addressing rising food commodity prices. His deep knowledge of logistics will serve him well in taming food inflation. He noted that one of the major causes of high food prices in the country was high logistics costs and the existence of layers of traders due to poor infrastructure facilities.

He plans to regularly deploy container vans in strategic vegetable-producing areas like Benguet, Nueva Vizcaya, Sariaya, etc., to bring agricultural products from there to Metro Manila. He also announced that he was going to appoint a logistics official in the DA whose task would focus on bringing down the logistics costs of transporting agricultural products from production areas to key cities nationwide.

In line with this, he plans to transform fish ports operated by the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority into agricultural trading hubs. The idea is not just to have storage facilities for fish and fish products but other agricultural goods that are key ingredients for food processing. He cited countries like South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam where food factories are located near ports because of easy access to raw materials.

Laurel is keen on searching for new technologies and innovations that can dramatically boost productivity. He is scheduled to visit the International Rice Research Institute and the Science City in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, where a number of research institutions such as the Philippine Rice Research Institute, Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization, and the Crop Biotechnology

Center are located.

He also shared a plan to address rising prices of palay. However, I believe that it would be better if he is the one who reveals this to the public than me preempting the initiative.

There are two things working in favor of the new Agriculture secretary. Being a businessman throughout his life, he brings with him an entrepreneurial perspective tempered by pragmatism on what is likely or not likely to work given his knowledge of market operations. Second, he has the ears of the President. He can directly call the President who has full trust in him as they have been buddies since their younger years.

If Laurel can surround himself with technically competent individuals who have the interest of the country foremost, rather than generating profits for their businesses or social advocacy interests, the early signs of him doing the right things for the agricultural sector are encouraging. I do hope that he succeeds for the sake of our country and our people, particularly the poor.

On another issue, after publication of last week's column where I proposed downloading DA resources to local government units (LGUs), I was drowned by objections from esteemed friends in the business sector and those knowledgeable on how LGUs operate. They complained about rampant and widespread corruption, down to lowly barangay officials. They were victims of nefarious activities of corrupt local officials, such as overpricing of products, unnecessary tolls, exorbitant permit fees and outright extortion, etc. They argued that downloading funds to the LGUs would only worsen corruption.

It is obvious that our political system does not exact proper accountability from LGU officials. In Vietnam, for instance, the reason why devolution and decentralization works in improving agricultural production is that local officials are assigned production targets by the Central Committee based on the resources provided. If local officials do not meet the agreed targets, they are either demoted or no longer reappointed.

Undeniably, corruption is also rampant there as in neighboring Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries. But the attainment of production targets still ensure rising farm productivity. The ability of central authorities to impose sanctions on local officials also serves to moderate the latter's greed.

The problem in the Philippines is that the Local Government Code of 1991 also decentralized corruption. If one is an investor, it will be difficult to calculate one's final cost as extortion happens at every point in the supply and value chains. This is a major reason why foreign investors are skipping the Philippines in favor of neighboring Asian countries.

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DA CHIEF'S 30-DAY ULTIMATUM ON RICE IMPORTS SUPPORTED

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

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SHORTENING the deadline for the arrival of rice imports could deter price manipulation in the market, the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) said.

PCAFI President Danilo V. Fausto said the 30-day ultimatum given by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. to rice importers to bring in their approved import volume is a step in the right direction.

"If you make it longer, the imports can be subject to price manipulation. Because 60 days is too long. The normal arrival of rice importers is only about 20 days. If they want to look for higher prices, then they will delay the delivery of the shipments," Fausto told the BUSINESSMIRROR.

Earlier this week, Laurel told rice traders and importers that they face a cancellation of all of their sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSICs) if their approved import volumes would not enter the country in the next 30 days. **(Related story: <https://BUSINESSMIRROR.com.ph/2023/11/21/da-importers-lose-spsic-if-rice-not-here-in-30-days/>)**

Fausto said the Department of Agriculture (DA) may explore requiring rice importers to post a bond to ensure that the imports would arrive in the country.

"If you are really determined

to import rice, then at the onset you should post a bond," he said.

Under the present rules and regulations, the agriculture department mandates that rice imports from Asean states except Myanmar must arrive in the country within 60 days from the issuance of the SPSIC. Meanwhile, rice shipments from Myanmar and countries outside Asean must enter the Philippines within 90 days.

Meanwhile, Monetary Board member V. Bruce J. Tolentino said it is important that imported commodities enter the country within a specified time of validity for their respective issued SPSICs. This, he pointed out, ensures that the imported food items are still safe for human consumption and do not pose any harm to human health.

"The assumption behind the issuance of the SPSIC is that the shipment has been inspected and found to meet the required sanitary and phytosanitary standards and thus safe for human consumption. Rice is a perishable good, and if it is stored for too long or under unsanitary conditions it deteriorates and may cease to meet the SPS conditions," he told the BUSINESSMIRROR.

"So it is appropriate to set a deadline for the usage of an SPSIC. However, I do not know the scientific (SPS) basis for the one-month deadline mentioned," he added.

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DA nagbukas ng exhibit sa magsasaka, mangingisda

Binuksan nina Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. at Kat Pimentel ang exhibit ng Kagawaran ng Pagsasaka na may temang "AMIA Isang DekaDA Stories of Resilience".

Ang exhibit ay bahagi ng pagdiriwang ng ika-10 anibersaryo ng Adaptation and Mitigation Initiative in Agriculture (AMIA), na isang proyektong inilunsad ng Kagawaran ng Pagsasaka na nagbibigay-diin sa lakas at determinasyon ng mga magsasaka at mangingisda ng Pilipinas sa harap ng pagbabago ng klima.

Iginiit ni Pimentel na maybahay ni Senate Minority Leader Koko Pimentel III, ang kahala-gahan ng programa ng AMIA sa konteksto ng pagbabago ng klima.

Bukod dito pinuri rin ni Kat Pimentel ang Programa ng AMIA sa pagtutulongan ng mga komunidad, lalo na ang mga umaasa sa agrikultura at pangingisda, upang maging matatag sa mga

negatibong epekto ng pagbabago ng klima.

Binanggit din niya ang isang espesyal na probisyon sa inihang badyet para sa taong 2024 ng DA na layong mapalakas ang kaligtasan ng mga komunidad sa agrikultura sa pamamagitan ng mga proyektong may matibay na imprastruktura laban sa sakuna at ang

pag-develop ng mga binhi na may kakayahang mag-angkop sa mga kondisyon ng klima.

May pag-asa rin umano sa naturang programa kapag magkakasama bilang isang komunidad ay magiging mas matatag at handa sa mga hamon ng pagbabago ng klima. (Gemma Garcia)



How PH can win with its agri exports

In view of the dismal performance of our exports, the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** must take immediate action.

It should at once create an export unit—a key takeaway from the praiseworthy national conference of the Philippine Council of Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF) held in Baguio last November 21 to 23. The PCAF is “an advisory body to the [DA] to ensure the success of [its] programs and projects. It initiates the development of a private sector-led nationwide network of Agriculture and Fisheries Councils (AFCs) and sectoral committees.”

Sixteen regional councils and 13 sectoral committees met during the conference to discuss agriculture development, where poor export performance was identified.

The years 2018 to 2022 saw the number of exporters decrease from 8,575 to 4,619. Based on the product diversification (as measured by the Inverse Herfindahl-Hirschman index) in terms of successful exports, we ranked eighth out of 10 Asean nations, just ahead of Laos and Myanmar.

Limited market

The agriculture export picture is bleak. Last year, our agriculture trade deposit worsened by 33 percent to \$11.8 billion. Our agriculture export of only P7.1 billion was the lowest compared to our Asean neighbors: Indonesia (\$51.5 billion), Thailand (\$42.3 billion), Malaysia (33.4 billion), Vietnam (\$29.1 billion), and Singapore (\$14.7 billion).

Our export markets are also very limited. The top five are: United States (\$1.30 billion), Netherlands (\$0.94 billion), China (\$0.87 billion),

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

Japan (\$0.85 billion), and Republic of Korea (\$0.44 billion).

In the four quarters from July 2022 to June 2023, instead of meeting our government target growth of 6.4 percent, exports decreased by 12.5 percent.

A main reason for this poor performance is that the value chain approach necessary in business is not being sufficiently used for agriculture exports. The DA works on production, while the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) concentrates on marketing. The two should work more closely together.

It is also absolutely necessary to supplement this by creating a unit especially for exports. The job begins by giving significant marketing support to our winning export products and promising new entries.

Even an excellent export marketing initiative will only be successful if there is a parallel effort to strengthen and develop the products so they will be superior and truly globally competitive. We can start with our major exports such as coconut, pineapple, banana, tuna, selected seafood, fruits and vegetables.

Delegates at the conference also pitched a total export approach. Identified here are three conditionalities of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) the Senate approved last Feb. 21, 2023, which have yet to be adequately implemented.

The first is the agriculture market information and intelligence network mandated

under the 1977 Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act. Our neighboring countries have had one for a long time, which is largely why they have left us so far behind.

The second is an effective plan and adequate budget for the consolidation and clustering of our small farm sizes, which today averages 1.29 hectares each. How can we succeed if we have no economies of scale?

The third is very important. Agriculture must get a budget to enable our farmers and fisherfolk to export and be globally competitive.

This can be achieved via private sector monitoring of the DA budget. The department's allocation has increased to 3 percent of our total budget, but it is still a far cry from Vietnam's 7-percent share.

To add to the disappointment, one-third of the DA's expenses in the last three years remained unliquidated and unexplained. Until now, a complete list of the DA-funded projects has not been turned over to the private-led regional agriculture and fisheries councils for monitoring.

If one-third of the limited DA budget is wasted, how can we successfully export?

It is time that we turn our exports from losers to winners, the way our neighboring countries have successfully done through good agriculture governance. INQ



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



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Agri damage due to magnitude 6.8 quake reaches P7.25 M

The magnitude 6.8 earthquake that struck parts of Soccsksargen on Nov. 17 has caused damage to agriculture amounting to P7.25 million.

Latest data from the Department of Agriculture (DA) said 120 farmers and fisherfolk in the region were affected by the quake.

Production losses were placed at 168 metric tons, with 81 hectares of agricultural land affected.

The DA said damage to corn reached P1.12 million; high-value crops, P4.02 million; fisher-

ies, P2.06 million, and livestock and poultry, P36,500.

"With some highways being reopened by local government units (LGUs), transport of food and agricultural commodities is unhampered," the department said.

The DA gave assurance that it is coordinating with concerned LGUs to determine the impact of the quake.

It gave assurance that resources are available to provide assistance to affected communities.

An aftershock of the strong quake with a

magnitude of 4.6 hit off Balut Island yesterday, according to the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs).

The quake was felt at Intensity 3 in General Santos City, Polomolok and Lake Sebu in South Cotabato as well as Malapatan, Sarangani and Koronadal City. The same intensity was felt in Matanao, Malalag, Sulop, Kiblawan, Magsaysay and Bansalan in Davao del Sur.

Phivolcs said 120 aftershocks have been recorded since the quake struck.

— Bella Cariaso, Romina Cabrera



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DAR bridge project okayed by NEDA

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE Department of Agrarian Reform's (DAR) bridge project worth P28.2 billion has been approved by the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA).

Called "Pang-Agraryong Tulay para sa Bagong Bayanihan ng mga Magsasaka," DAR said the project will reduce logistic costs and enhance market access for agrarian reform communities (ARCs). "[It also] aims to push countryside progress with the bridge infrastructure that will increase the productivity and income of at

least 350,000 households," DAR said on Thursday.

There are 354 identified and validated sites for the bridges, said Agrarian Reform Secretary Conrado Estrella 3rd.

The project is being coordinated with the Department of Agriculture Bureau of Agricultural and Fisheries Engineering (DA-BAFE), the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), and local government units.

Estrella said that the project will also streamline the agricultural supply chain and boost market connectivity.

"The modular steel bridges aim to enhance mobility for ARCs, providing better logistics support, increased income opportunities, and better access to social services," said DAR.

Furthermore, the project is part of the socioeconomic agenda of the current administration, de-

tailed in the Philippine Development Plan for 2023-2028.

It also aligns with the government's thrust for increased agricultural productivity, economic growth, and a better quality of life for the agriculture sector and the nation at large.

Meanwhile, DAR's proposed P9.3-B budget for 2024 has been approved by the Senate.

Sen. Cynthia Villar, chairman of the Committee on Food, Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, said that

DAR's 2024 proposed budget will ensure acceleration of the implementation of the department's three program thrusts.

These are land distribution, primarily the parcelization of lands covered by collective Certificate of Land Ownership Award and facilitation of the issuance of individual land titles; agrarian justice delivery; and the systematic provision of support services to agrarian reform beneficiaries.



Magnitude 6.8 earthquake in Mindanao triggers 120 aftershocks

A MAGNITUDE 6.8 earthquake that struck the southern Philippine Island of Mindanao last week has set off at least 120 aftershocks, the local volcanology institute said on Thursday.

Only six of the aftershocks were felt, Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) Director Teresito Bacolcol told ABS-CBN News TeleRadyo.

"It would probably take several days to several weeks before it dissipates," he said in mixed English and Filipino. "The number of quakes goes down and the magnitude weakens as the days go by."

The earthquake struck off Southern Mindanao on Friday and killed at least

nine people and hurt 17 others, the local disaster agency said.

The Philippines lies along the typhoon belt in the Pacific and experiences about 20 storms each year. It also lies in the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire, a belt of volcanoes around the Pacific Ocean where most of the world's earthquakes strike.

Agricultural damage from the earthquake that hit Sarangani, Davao Occidental has reached P7.25 million, the **Department of Agriculture** said.

In a bulletin, the agency said more than a hundred farmers and fishermen had reported damage to crops, with volume loss of 168 metric tons (MT) spanning 81 hectares of farmland.

The affected commodities included corn, high-value crops, livestock and poultry, and fisheries, it said.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. visited General Santos City on Thursday, where he promised aid to quake victims.

He said rebuilding had yet to start due to aftershocks.

Mr. Marcos also ordered agencies to fast-track the repair of damaged infrastructure in Samar in central Philippines to ensure unhampered relief operations for flood victims. Many areas were still flooded due to incessant rains caused by the so-called shear line — the convergence of cold and warm winds that cause heavy rains and thunderstorms.

He was initially set to land in Catarman town in northern Samar but bad weather prompted him to stay in Tacloban City where he was briefed by local officials.

The country's disaster agency said about 721,000 people from 180,788 families have been affected by the combined effects of shear line and low pressure area. It said 139 areas in Eastern Visayas and 41 areas in Western Visayas remained flooded. A total of 80,358 people have been displaced in the two regions, 40,454 of whom were staying in 170 evacuation centers.

More than 100 houses have been damaged.

Also on Thursday, the Budget department said P12.21 billion or 52.6% of the government's P23.21-billion calamity fund had been released as of end-October.

National Government agencies received most of it at P10.74 billion.

The Public Works department received the biggest allocation of P6.01 billion, followed by the Social Welfare department (P3.15 billion), Agriculture department (P1 billion), Transportation department (P342.47 million), Defense department (P207.64 million) and Department of Science and Technology (P35.18 million). — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza, Adrian H. Halili and Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

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Marcos vows swift delivery of govt aid to disaster areas

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

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PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. assured the government would fast-track the delivery of aid in flood-hit Samar and in Mindanao, which is still reeling from effects of an earthquake.

This was the chief executive's message via video-conference with local officials of Catarman, Samar last Thursday from Tacloban City. The President's trip to the flood-hit southern Philippine municipality was aborted after inclement weather forced his flight to the Leyte city, some 237 kilometers away.

Northern Samar is currently under a

state of calamity due to the heavy flooding from the incessant rains caused by a low-pressure area and shear line.

Marcos said the sewers in the affected areas were unable to cope with sheer volume floodwater from the extreme rainfall.

"We have not experienced this kind of heavy rain over such a long period of time. Considering there was no typhoon, considering that this is the new normal; this is the new weather that we have to adjust to," the chief executive said.

List of beneficiaries

THE President has ordered the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) to prioritize the repair and clearing of roads in Northern and Eastern Samar to allow the faster delivery of relief goods in those areas.

"We are doing everything that we can. But let's work with those who are in the evacuation centers—and those in their homes," Marcos said partly in Filipino during the briefing with officials. "We have to go and make sure that they get the food packs, they get sufficient water supply."

Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Rexlon T. Gatchalian said they will distribute 100,000 food packs in Northern and Eastern Samar as soon as they finalize the list of their beneficiaries.

He said the list will also serve as the basis for the distribution of cash to help flood victims in rebuilding their homes.

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture (DA) announced it will provide seedlings and other farm implements to

the affected farmers in Samar.

Marcos also said they will also be deploying water purification equipment in the flooded areas to provide potable water to the 14,260 families in the 37 affected municipalities.

MMDA to Samar

MEANWHILE, the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) announced last Thursday it has sent a 40-man contingent to Northern and Eastern Samar in Visayas.

According to MMDA Acting Chairman Romando S. Artes, the contingent is composed of personnel from the Public Safety Division and Road Emergency Group and divided into two groups; one for each province.

Both groups are tasked to conduct humanitarian and relief operations to

affected residents.

Artes said that each group will bring with them 30 units of solar-powered water purification systems. Each unit can filter 180 gallons of water per hour.

"With the lack of potable water supply in the area, our team's main task is to set up water filtration systems in communities with limited to zero supply of clean water to drink," he said. Artes said one group of humanitarian contingent can produce 21,600 liters of water per hour.

He added that the two teams will stay in the said provinces as needed to fully address the needs and concerns in the area.

Pending reconstruction

THE President also went to General Santos City to assure those affected by the

magnitude 6.8 earthquake, which jolted Sarangani last Friday, will get help from the government.

The quake was blamed for the death of nine and affected 16,000 people in the Soccsksargen and Davao regions.

"All of the assistance and the needs of the affected and lost their homes, including the fishermen and the injured will get assistance from the DSWD," Marcos said in Filipino in an interview with the media.

However, the President said, reconstruction efforts in the quake-hit areas will be temporarily deferred due to the ongoing aftershocks.

"We cannot start rebuilding because of the aftershocks. The problem is we don't have a forecast [for earthquakes]; so we don't know what will happen," the Marcos said.



MARCOS: SPEED UP AID TO SAMAR FLOOD VICTIMS

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Thursday ordered all government agencies to fast-track the relief operations and other assistance to flood victims in Northern and Eastern Samar as he met the officials to personally oversee the government's preparations.

He was initially set to land in Catarman but the inclement weather prevented him from going to the area, prompting him to conduct a situational briefing with Samar officials via Zoom in Tacloban City instead.

In a situational briefing, President Marcos said the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) should ensure that all roads are passable to allow faster distribution of food packs and relief goods to flood victims.

"The public works – as soon as the public works is able to enter, do the necessary repairs so that bigger vehicles can enter – as soon as it's passable all efforts can go in and do the repairs necessary," President Marcos said in a briefing situation in Tacloban City on Thursday morning.

"We are doing everything that we can. But let's work with



THE flooded Jipapad town in Eastern Samar on Tuesday.

those who are in the evacuation centers – pati na'yung mg nasa bahay pa... we have to go and make sure that they get the food packs, they get sufficient water supply," the President added.

Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Rex Gatchalian said they have already prepared over

100,000 food packs for distribution to the affected families in Eastern and Northern Samar.

Gatchalian added they are also finalizing the list of the affected families and individuals whose houses were either totally or partially damaged. This will be the basis of the financial assistance they will receive

from the government to start rebuilding their houses.

Before concluding the meeting, President Marcos said the Department of Agriculture (DA) will provide the necessary assistance to the affected families and will distribute seedlings and other agricultural products.

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PSA: Price of special rice up in early November

By XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS

The costs of several agricultural commodities, including special rice, went up in the first days of November, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported.

In a data released by PSA, a kilogram of special rice posted an average retail price of ₱61.40 between Nov. 1 and 5, up by 1.3 percent from ₱60.52 per kilogram in the second phase of October.

Of the regions, Central Visayas had the highest price of special rice at ₱70.83 per kilogram, while the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) posted the lowest at ₱55.12 per kilogram during the first phase of November.

Likewise, pure beef meat experienced an increment at a

price of ₱417.61 per kilogram. This translates to an increase of 1.3 percent from the ₱412.33 per kilogram of beef in the second phase of October.

Central Luzon registered the highest price of beef at ₱461.61 while the lowest average retail price was noted in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) at ₱350 per kilogram during the first period.

Galunggong also saw an increase of 3.2 percent to its average retail price of ₱207.94 per kilogram during the first days of November, slightly higher than the ₱201.58 per kilogram in the second phase of October.

National Capital Region (NCR) recorded the highest price of ₱262.27 per kilogram, while the lowest was reported in BARMM at ₱130.83.



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This actor is also an agripreneur

Most people know Thou Reyes as an actor who's appeared on TV, in film, and onstage. What not a lot of people know is that this Metro Manila Film Festival New Wave Best Supporting Actor winner is also an entrepreneur.

Reyes is the proud owner of Rice and Shine, a rice retail shop along N. Domingo St. in San Juan City, Metro Manila. The shop offers different types of rice from all over the country and overseas, as well as other sundry products like farm-fresh eggs.

The business was launched in 2021. Aside from being in the middle of the pandemic, Reyes was apprehensive about having to split his time between two jobs. "I grew up with the belief that you chose one job and focused only on that," the actor said in Taglish. "I beg to differ because that's the beauty of time and free will."

He gained inspiration from his late grandmother on his father's side who used to run a rice retail business from her home. "When I was younger, I remember that my cousin and I used to play on top of the cavans of rice in the kitchen back then. I was told that my Lola Ninay [also] had piggery in the basement but this was before I was born," he said. "It is safe to say that I inherited entrepreneurship from her."

A first time businessman, Reyes admits that running a rice retail business can be challenging, especially at first. Aside from being a new player in the industry, the nature of his job as an actor means long hours and an unstable schedule, which is totally different from that of his goal of being a hands-on entrepreneur.



AVANT GARDENER
YVETTE TAN

"Rice and Shine is my baby, I've never had a business this serious and I'm hands-on, too. I think some of the biggest challenges were how to work around my schedule and educating myself on the different types of rice," he said.

Being practical about his weaknesses meant that he was able to strengthen them. He also prioritized customer service, which sets Rice and Shine apart from many similar businesses. This has helped foster good relations with both suppliers and customers. "I made sure that I tasted all my products so I experienced it firsthand and can explain to my customers and prospects. To add, another would be the rice crisis this year and price inflation. It's continuous learning and I'm so grateful for the support of my suppliers," he said.

Reyes is hands-on on every aspect of his business, though he admitted that that wasn't the plan at first—until he realized, with guidance from his father, that being present was essential to the success of his small business.

"I don't think a business will survive if the owner is not hands-on," he said. "Initially, I thought one could just finance and assign people to work under you, but that's not the case. My father let me put up my idea, kickstart it, and learn the basics before they stepped in. Fortunately, that molded me to be

more responsible, which is my same mantra as an actor. I always do my assignments."

Two years in, Reyes is thoroughly enjoying his role as a small business owner, saying that it gives him a sense of fulfillment, as well as the opportunity to reconnect with the community and bond with his family.

"My first staff are my retired parents. To keep them active, I let them engage in my business. It keeps them both occupied. I remind them from time to time to let me be the owner, let me decide, let me commit mistakes, and let me learn from them. It made the family closer, he said.

Reyes' plans go beyond purely retail. Rice and Shine had also expanded from purely retail to supplying restaurants. "...it is a good feeling that they trust the business, which I am always grateful for," he said.

There are other plans in the pipeline, but Reyes said he's "learned to go at it one day at a time. Everything is in His (God's) timing."

Running a rice retail store was a complete departure from this actor's comfort zone, but it's an endeavor that continues to bring him joy and growth. He continues to be excited about the venture, even after two years as an agripreneur, "I still get kilig (giddy) when friends introduce me as a businessman."



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Let's act together to cushion impact of strong El Niño

A strong El Niño now prevails. Thus, declared the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Services Administration (PAGASA) on Wednesday, Nov. 22.

Strong El Niño is a weather phenomenon in which the average sea surface temperature in the equatorial Pacific is at least 1.5°C.

PAGASA said El Niño increases the likelihood of below-normal rainfall conditions. This could bring negative impacts, such as dry spells and droughts in some areas of the country that will adversely affect key climate-sensitive sectors—water resources, agriculture, energy, health, public safety, among others.

The state weather bureau had earlier forecast that El Niño may well extend to the second quarter of 2024. It said the peak intensity of El Niño may be experienced between November 2023 and January 2024.

In anticipation of the El Niño, President Marcos convened in April 2023 government agencies which have stakes in the weather phenomenon to come up with a national action plan. His two specific instructions were: one, to adopt a whole-of-government or whole-of-nation approach, and two, to put up protocol-based and scientific long-term processes that could be adopted by the country.

Last September, a draft of the El Niño National Action Plan (NAP) was released. Under the draft NAP, it was recognized that El Niño—which may bring about dry spells, dry conditions, and droughts—poses threats to water supply, agriculture, electricity, health,

and public safety. Key interventions and cross-cutting concerns were also identified so these could be pursued by several agencies working through a whole-of-nation approach.

We express hope that by this time, the NAP has already been finalized so it could now be immediately set into motion to cushion the impact of the strong El Niño that is now prevailing.

Immediate intervention is necessary to mitigate the impact of this weather phenomenon. A delayed reaction may result in adverse consequences.

While the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) had earlier assured that the current El Niño episode will not have a major impact on inflation as the government is well prepared for it, the lingering effect of this type of weather phenomenon pushed up inflation in June 2016.

In the 1990-1992 episode of El Niño, the estimated damage to fisheries alone was ₱4.1 billion (based on ₱24=US\$1 exchange rate). In the 1997-1998 El Niño episode, estimated loss in the fisheries sector was ₱7.248 (based on ₱40=US\$1).

But everyone should keep in mind that cushioning the impact of the El Niño phenomenon is not the sole responsibility of the government. This is a shared responsibility of every citizen of this country. Each one should play his or her role in mitigating its impact. A whole-of-nation approach is necessary.

We have to work together, we have to stay together to help cushion the impact of this weather phenomenon.



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Mobile food processor launched in Iloilo City

ILOILO CITY: A mobile modular food processing facility (MMFPF) has been launched to help the agri-fishery sector in the province of Capiz.

Teny Chan-See, MMFPF project leader, said the mobile facility will initially process commodities such as "kamote" or sweet potatoes and "tahong" or mussels.

"There is seasonality and overproduction, and the excess often goes to waste as it easily spoils. Therefore, when these commodities are harvested, we will fry them, add value to them, and extend their shelf life," Chan-See told *The Manila Times*.

The 32-footer customized truck is equipped with space for raw material receiving and preparation, main processing, which includes conventional frying and vacuum frying, and packaging technologies to ensure the extended shelf life of processed foods.

Chan-See emphasized that the sections of the facility are also compliant with the minimum sanitary and processing requirements for producing processed food.

The mobile facility is a project of the Department of Science and Technology-Industrial Technology Development Institute (DoST-ITDI), currently in Iloilo City for the

2023 National Science, Technology and Innovation Week.

It will be transferred to Capiz State University-Dayao Satellite College next week, where the academic institution will assist in managing the facility.

"We also want to extend the reach of innovation in food processing to our regions because we know that if it's only stationed in one area, there's a limit to our reach," Chan-See added.



MOBILE FOOD PROCESSOR

The food processing facility on wheels of the Department of Science and Technology seeks to extend the reach of science, technology and innovation-based value-adding interventions for the agri-fishery sector. PHOTO BY RJAY ZURIAGA CASTOR

The MMFPF was conceptualized during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"During the pandemic, we could not bring the commodities to the processing facility, so we thought of bringing the facility to the commodities. This led to the birth of the mobility feature of food innovation centers," Chan-See noted.

The MMFPF has five modules namely frying, drying, retort, spray drying, and aseptic.

RJAY ZURIAGA CASTOR



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Some of the KSK farmers in Manila harvest the vegetables in SM City San Lazaro's urban garden.



Mheryll Ignacio completes SMFI's KSK training

Hope in farming takes root in urban communities

THE once niche practice of urban gardening is now gaining ground in various cities across the country through SM Foundation's Kabalikatan sa Kabuhayan (KSK) on Sustainable Agriculture Program.

Through the program, SM Foundation has successfully trained 27 farmers in SM City Urdaneta Central and 19 others in SM City San Lazaro on Urban Gardening. For weeks, the farmers cultivated vegetables in the midst of city spaces—from SM Supermalls' own rooftops to community plots.

In addition to the comprehensive lectures on farming in an urban landscape, SM foundation and its partner schools included topics on the basics of entrepreneurship and principles of SM group founder Henry Sy, Sr. These were done to empower them to take control of their livelihoods, generate more income, and contribute to economic development.

Mheryll Ignacio, one of the KSK graduates in SM City San Lazaro, had a new-found power after finishing the program.

"Gusto ko po talagang matuto ng iba't ibang paraan para kumita. Ang asawa ko po ay isang mekaniko, pero nakadepende po ang kita niya sa dami ng nagpapagawa ng sasakyan sa araw-araw," she shared why she was always looking for ways to earn and support her family. Excited and happy, she joined the KSK without hesitation as soon as she was learned about it from their barangay leaders.

She was confident that she could always provide healthy meals for her family despite rising food prices, as she could rely on the urban garden she cultivated with her community.

"Katulad ngayon, napaka mahal ng bilihan. Kung may alam ka sa pagtatanim, meron at meron kang pagkukunan. Pag tumataas ang bilihan, hindi ka masyadong mag aalala dahil kampante ka't alam mong meron kang pananim na masasandalan," she said.

"Maganda pa dahil masustansya ang maipapakain mo para sa pamilya mo," she added.

Mheryll also said that the training served as the bedrock of her goals. Beyond enhancing her role as a more informed mother, KSK empowered her to embrace entrepreneurship, enabling her to stand as an additional provider for her family.

"Higit sa lahat, puwedeng pwede mo rin ibenta 'yung mga inani mo," she started, sharing that she was already able to sell their harvest to their neighbors.

"Dahil dito, nagkaroon ako ng power na tumayo sa sarili ko dahil meron akong alam na alternatibong pangkabuhayan ng aming pamilya. Bilang isang ina, nagkaroon ako ng kakayahang makapagtaguyod sa aming pamilya"

As she reaps the fruits of KSK, Mheryll hopes to pass on her urban gardening knowledge to other mothers in their community: "Gusto ko rin pong yakagin sila at sabihin na masayang magtanim lalo na pag nalaman niyo kung paano ito gawing pangkabuhayan."



Gaps in the halal industry in the Philippines: Call for legislating Philippine Halal Authority

By Potre Dirampatan Diampuan

ARE YOU a consumer or producer of halal food products? While Muslims are known to be the most concerned about consuming halal products, it is a fact that there is global socio-economic interest and competition for multi-billion halal food production worldwide — even in ASEAN countries where there are minority Muslims like in Thailand and Singapore.

The Philippine government eyes attracting investments and bolstering the halal food industry both for domestic and export-oriented trade, yet there are serious gaps that need legislative action. In a nutshell, the solution is the crafting of a new law that shall establish a halal agency that will exclusively be mandated with the regulation and promotion of halal food production in the country.

I am writing about the topic as part of Alliance for Halal Integrity in the Philippines (AHIP), which is a Halal Certifying Body (HCB) in the country. AHIP had joined the hearing held by the Senate Committee on Cultural Communities and Muslim Affairs, chaired by Senator Robinhood Padilla, on Sept. 11, that tackled the situation of the halal food industry, particularly concerns of the Muslim community's halal dietary guidelines. I break down here key ideas that I raised during the committee hearing and conveyed to Sen. Padilla and Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian.

1.) What is halal? The life of a Muslim revolves around the concepts of halal (lawful, permissible) and haram (forbidden, unlawful). To live in halal and avoid everything that is haram is the aspiration of every Muslim who seeks the pleasure of Allah. The laws are quite comprehensive because they apply not only to eating and drinking, but also to earning one's living, dress code, and dealing with others. Thus, halal is a broad matter for discussion. But, halal food occupies the widest discussion in the halal ecosystem.

2.) What is the present landscape of the halal industry in the Philippines? Relevant laws that evolved over time include Executive Order No. 46 series of 2001; Memorandum Order No. 201 in 2005; R.A. No. 9997 in 2010 that created the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF); and R.A. No. 10817 in 2016 which also known as Philippine Halal Export Development and Promotion Program Act of 2016.

3.) What is the problem in the regulation of the halal industry in the Philippines? The two laws, R.A. No. 9997 and R.A. No. 10817, are both mandated to accredit halal-certifying bodies (HCBs), the former for the local or Muslim Filipino

consumers of halal, while the latter for halal-certified products for export. In this sense, both NCMF and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) are Halal Accreditation Bodies (HABs). This is where confusion arises.

4.) How should HABs function? HABs should have competent Muslim personnel equipped with the education, training, technical knowledge, skills, and experience in view of Islam's halal requirements and compliance. This is because they assess the competence of HCBs to audit halal compliance of companies or food producers applying for a "halal" seal in their packaging.

5.) What is the significance of a product being halal certified? Halal certification is "the action or process of providing a product, process, services, and system with an official document attesting as being Halal. Before a product is marked with halal, there should be an independent, reliable, and morally sound audit/inspection by organized and registered non-profit Muslim Filipino People's Organization (MFPOs) and non-government organization (MFNGOs) membered by Muslim scholars and professional called Halal Certifying Bodies or HCBs in complete conformity with the requirements of Halal. Inevitably, it means conforming to requirements as decreed by Allah in the Holy Qur'an and elucidated and explained crystal clear by the revered Ahadith of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a major source of Shari'ah law and moral guidance."

Halal certification — the stamp of the halal logo on a product, service, or system of production — simply means that such is in conformity and is aligned with all the characteristics of halal. The overall aim of certification is to foster public trust in halal products and services through an effective system of halal integrity.

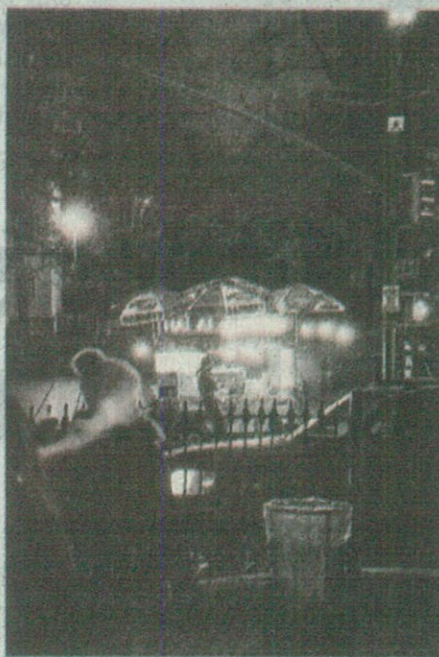
6.) What is essentially the problem in Philippine halal industry? There is no regulatory body in the Philippines specifically in charge of halal. Thus, the halal industry in the Philippines may be seen as a very loose industry with many disconnects. The effects of such disconnects are damaging to the safeguarding of the "halalness" of the various products and services that are halal certified.

To seek accreditation from the NCMF and/or the Philippine Halal Board, chaired by the Secretary of DTI, is voluntary from the side of an HCB because there is no regulation or sanction regarding being with or without accreditation. Halal certifiers are positioned to operate according to their own set rules and guidelines.

There is no unified halal standard. A company that applies for halal certification of its products may be rejected



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TIM HUFNER-UNSPASH

by an HCB due to non-compliance with its set standard. However, another HCB may agree to certify the same product as halal, also based on their standards. No overarching standard is adhered to by the HCBs; "to each, his own" is the way. An HCB can certify and stamp its logo on a product or service following its procedure and formulated policies regardless of what school of thought in Islam they adhere to. Worse, when they deviate from all schools of thought. The absence of regulations gives HCBs a wide latitude of freedom in certification without fear of regulation or sanction.

There is no uniformity in the auditing or inspection process, be it from start to finish and in-between the processors/producers' entire operations.

The consumers, the Muslims, are confused. Our random studies conducted on the matter indicate that some Muslims claim they do not know whether to trust HCBs' halal certifications or not. However, they are left with no choice but to "trust" the halal logo stamped on a product. This attitude of not trusting is not healthy for the HCBs, especially those who care about credibility and integrity.

There is no problem for an HCB doing its own business of certification locally; but they are subjected to regulations when they venture to bring their halal-certified products overseas because they must comply with an import-receiving country's regulations on halal-certified imports. For both the HCBs and the consumers, the situation may be labeled as convoluted or messy.

To cite a prominent and critical issue to halal certification, since no law mandates the hiring of a halal assurance officer, a company that produces halal-certified

products cannot be forced to have one. It is their prerogative to hire or not to hire a halal assurance officer.

A company whose products have been certified halal may opt not to get halal recertification if the initial halal certification does not prove to increase income or profit to the business.

Regarding tourism, after several untoward experiences in which tourists unknowingly consumed products considered haram, foreign Muslims may never want to come again or at least will remove the Philippines as a future vacation destination.

In the absence of a unified standard for halal, HCBs are left on their own, adhering to their own accepted standard.

Aside from the abovementioned, there are problems regarding the lack of infrastructure exclusively for halal storage, slaughterhouses, and transportation which make halal products vulnerable to contamination. There are more issues as well in laboratory testing infrastructure.

7.) What is the way forward for the halal industry in the Philippines? On the part of AHIP, our proposal is that there must be new legislation to create a government agency which has primary jurisdiction as the regulatory body for halal. It shall be charged with the authority of accreditation that is presently mandated to both NCMF and DTI. In addition to accreditation, it shall be mandated with research, halal education and awareness/education, training for halal assurance officers, promotion and development, harmonization of standards and procedure, raw materials and ingredients, and attraction of investments in halal, among others. The proposed agency may be called by any indicative name such as the Philippine Halal Development Authority or simply, Philippine Halal Authority.

Addressing the gaps in the halal food industry in the Philippines shall be beneficial for all Filipinos in order make the country competitive in the global halal market; to attract more halal-conscious tourists to the country; to attract investments and employment in the halal industry; and to promote inclusive health development in our society. ■

DR. POTRE DIRAMPATAN DIAMPUAN came to the Global Council of the United Religions Initiative (URI) after having previously served as regional coordinator for Southeast Asia-Pacific (SEAPac) and as a senior interfaith representative for the Philippines. She has served in government in various capacities for over 40 years. She is an advocate, trainer, and lecturer on Understanding Halal and/or Halal Awareness both for Muslims and non-Muslims as part of championing inclusiveness. She works as CEO of a halal-certifying body called AHIP. Potre holds master's degrees in Cultural Anthropology and School Administration and a Ph.D. in Educational Management.



Ukraine's farmers pin hopes on export corridor as war cost mounts

KYIV/PARIS- Ukraine's efforts to revive sea exports in defiance of Russia's military blockade have given a glimmer of hope to a teetering farm sector in which loss-making producers are abandoning some land in one of the world's biggest grain belts.

With no end in sight to the war with Russia, access to the Black Sea is critical if Ukraine is to preserve an agricultural industry that was the fourth-largest grain supplier globally before the conflict and in value terms accounted for half of Ukraine's total exports last year.

While makeshift export routes and abundant supply elsewhere have tamed record global food prices since last year, the strain on Ukrainian agriculture has worsened as a UN-backed export deal collapsed and EU neighbors balked at land shipments.

Agriculture has suffered losses of over \$25 billion since the war began, Ukrainian grain trader association UGA estimates.

Ukraine's grain exports so far in

the 2023/24 season that started in July are running 28 percent below the year-earlier volume, according to agriculture ministry data.

The area planted with corn, its flagship grain export, has shrunk by a quarter since the start of the war and total crop planting could suffer a double-digit decline in 2024, producers say, as cash-strapped farms leave some land idle.

A new Black Sea shipping channel may offer a lifeline, like for Ukraine's depleted steel industry.

"The sea corridor is essential for Ukrainian farming to survive," Jean-Francois Lepy, head of grain trading at French agribusiness group InVivo, said.

"Without a corridor there is going to be a serious problem in 2024/2025," he said on the sidelines of this month's Global Grain conference in Geneva.

The "humanitarian corridor" established by Ukraine's military in late August has expanded steadily, with Kyiv estimating over 3 million

tons of grain shipped so far.

Its future remains clouded by military risks, with several vessels struck by mines or missiles, but Ukrainian producers are encouraged.

"It gives us breakeven because before the ports opened almost everyone was loss-making," Dmitry Skorniyakov, CEO of farm operator HarvEast.

Ukrainian producers see scope to reach 2-2.5 million tons of monthly grain exports through the corridor, which combined with volumes through land routes and transshipment via the Danube river could bring overall trade back towards a pre-war rhythm of 5-6 million tons per month.

Spike Brokers, which tracks exports in Ukraine, said on Nov. 1-17 Ukraine exported 404,000 tons of agricultural goods via the Danube and 352,000 tons from Black Sea ports. An additional 943,000 tons should leave from Black Sea ports and 464,000 tons from the Danube by the month-end. - Reuters



An agricultural worker operating a combine during a wheat harvesting Zaporizhzhia region. (Reuters Photo)



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Soybeans tumble

CHICAGO- Chicago soybean futures lost more than 1 percent on Wednesday as rain fell in Brazil, easing worries over the persistent dryness and heat that has plagued crops in the top exporting nation, analysts said.

Wheat rose on shipping concerns in the Black Sea after Russia's strike on port infrastructure, while corn moved lower.

Showers in Brazil this week were expected to give soybean growing areas "modest relief," before hot, crop-stressing conditions return next week, Commodity Weather Group said.

"You're really not going to en-

courage a lot of folks to come in and go long when you have rain falling across a lot of the crop area," said Angie Setzer, partner at Consus Ag Consulting.

Brazil's soybean crop is expected to reach a record 161.6 million metric tons in 2023/24, agribusiness consultancy Agroconsult said, despite weather issues.

CBOT soybeans fell 20-3/4 cents to close at \$13.56-1/2 per bushel.

The most-active wheat contract on the CBOT finished up 1-3/4 cents to \$5.84-1/2 a bushel and hit its highest price since Nov. 9. - Reuters



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New York cocoa futures slip from 45-year peak

NEW YORK — New York cocoa futures closed down on Wednesday, a day after hitting a 45-year high, while sugar prices were also lower.

Markets for arabica coffee, raw sugar and New York cocoa futures are closed on Thursday for the US Thanksgiving holiday.

COCOA: March New York cocoa settled down \$34 or 0.8% to \$4,084 a metric ton in a modest pullback from the prior session's 45-year high of \$4,148.

Dealers said adverse weather in West Africa had curbed production and was set to lead to a third successive global deficit in the current 2023/2024 season (October/September).

"We expect weather concerns to continue tightening the market throughout the coming season, particularly due to El Niño-related worries," analysts BMI said in a note.

Dealers noted December's premium to March had widened further in the run-up to Friday's first notice day.

March London cocoa fell 0.3% to £3,447 a metric ton.

Ghana's cocoa marketing board COCOBOD plans to finalize a \$800 million syndicated loan with banks by the end of the month, a board executive said on Tuesday.

COFFEE: March arabica coffee settled up 0.5 cent or 0.3% at \$1.6905 per pound.

Dealers said rains in Brazil were set to lessen crop concerns following recent hot, dry conditions. — **Reuters**